

Acts 25a verses 1-13

1 Festus had taken Felix place at the appointment of Nero in 59 AD. Josephus describes him as a good man who tried to do what was right, but the problems he faced were insurmountable. The Sicarri were burning villages and looting them. There was a false messiah who attracted a following. A high wall was built to block the view from the Fortress of Antonia into the Temple. Festus went from the Roman capital of Judea to the Jewish capital of Judea. He is probably trying to learn what he can about the situation at hand.

2-3 There were a number of pressing issues including that high wall and the recent Jewish revolt in Caesarea that ended with the removal of the last procurator. The fact that they brought up Paul shows how much animosity they had toward him and the Christian community. The chief priests and the ruling elite had been at odds to the point of violence, but they came together on the get Festus' commitment in regards to Paul. They still want to carry out their plan to assassinate Paul, which would probably mean the death of some Roman soldiers. While they are demanding the trust of Festus, they are planning to betray that trust.

4-7 Festus may have been informed about the previous plot and insisted that they go to Caesarea and present their case. This time they apparently do so without the lawyer they used before. It was probably the same charges of defiling the Temple and turning people against the Jewish law, charges to which they could not bring any evidence.

8 Paul's defense also implies that they suggested he was treasonous toward Rome as well. See "troublemaker" in 24:15. That charge may have come from the riots that followed Pauls preaching in Roman provinces such as Thessalonica (17:6-7)

9 Any leader coming into the situation in Judea would want to get on the good side and try to find common ground with the Jewish leaders. The procurators were known to bend the law to try to get things done and compromise for political advantage. "Willing to do the Jews a favor" shows that politics has now entered the trial. Was Festus willing to sacrifice Paul by giving in to their request to try him in Jerusalem?

10-11 Paul assumed that Festus was informed enough to realize this was a religious witch hunt not insurrection. He also knew the Jews were intent on assassinating him. He had already been held for 2 years. As a Roman citizen he had a right to a fair trial in the Roman system, so he exercised that right. He may have not done so earlier hoping that the case would be dismissed. Then he

could have gone to Rome as a free man. (23:11) Now he will fulfill the Lord's words as a prisoner.

Nero would have been in office for 5 years and still under the tutelage of Seneca (a Stoic philosopher). It wasn't until Seneca died that Nero became so extreme. His greatest evils against Christians will take place five years later (64 AD) after the burning of Rome.

12 A procurator would have had a panel of 8 to 20 Roman citizens, military men, and civil servants that advised him. If there was some way around the appeal, he may have denied the request, but apparently there was no justifiable reason.

13 Marcus Julius Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II) and Bernice were great-grandchildren of Herod the Great. While Paul was waiting for the procurator to write a report, the king of the northern and eastern territories came to greet him. Agrippa was in charge of choosing the High Priest. He was more a king of the Jewish people than anyone else at the time.

Bernice had been married several times before, but both husbands (Marcus Julius Alexander and Herod of Chalcis, her uncle) had died. Her two children grew up with their uncle Agrippa. Widespread rumors suggested the two were in an incestuous relationship. To stop the gossip, she married King Polemon of Cilicia in 64 AD. The marriage didn't last long and she went back to Agrippa. She fell in love with General Titus during his campaign to squelch the Jewish rebellion and became his mistress. She and Agrippa did their best to try to negotiate between Rome and the Jews to no avail. She followed Titus to Rome and lived with him on the Palatine, but rumors again forced her to end the relationship.

Agrippa was rewarded for his loyalty to Rome by Vespasian with an increase in the area he ruled. He never married or fathered children and most likely lived to the 90s. The brother and sister had no legal input in Paul's trial, but merely wanted to assist Festus with his report. They may have been curious about the Christian movement.

Thoughts to consider:

Who is the richest person in the story?

How did Jesus' words come to pass? (23:11)

What would be your frame of mind after 2 years of incarceration?

Can we see the sovereignty of God in this history?

Do you see the emptiness of a worldly life in Bernice?