

The Most Crucial Doctrine

Key Text:	Acts 25 & 26
Key Verse(s):	“Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” (Acts 25:17-19)

Background to the Study

In Chapter 25, Jewish leaders accused Paul before Porcius Festus, who had replaced Felix as governor. Verses 1-12 cover their charges and Paul's request to be tried before Caesar. Verses 13-22 describe Agrippa's arrival and Festus' explanation of Paul's case, which Festus knew was unjust. The chapter ends with Festus introducing Agrippa before Paul's defense in Chapter 26.

Festus took office around A.D. 58-59 after Felix was recalled to Rome for mishandling disturbances. Felix's failure to resolve Paul's case left Festus to deal with it. The Jews sought to have Paul sent to Jerusalem to ambush him, but Festus refused and kept Paul in Caesarea, inviting his accusers there. At the arraignment, the accusations against Paul were serious but unproven, as he had broken no laws. Festus, aiming to please the Jews, considered their request.

Paul asserted his right as a Roman citizen to be tried in Rome rather than Jerusalem. Festus consulted his advisors, not the Sanhedrin. Agrippa II, who ruled Judea from A.D. 53, was the last Herodian king and had influence over the Temple. He was reportedly in an incestuous relationship with his sister, Bernice. Festus told Agrippa that the real issue was Paul's teaching on the Resurrection.

Chapter 26 records Paul's defense, where he addressed Agrippa and others. The term “answered for himself” relates to defending one's beliefs. Paul's conversion story, recounted here for the third time, included the phrase “kicking against the pricks,” a Greek proverb about resisting one's own best interests. Verse 18 summarizes Paul's message on salvation and transformation.

Festus, lacking Jewish knowledge, viewed Paul's study as madness. He died after two years, being more honest than his predecessors and successors. Agrippa's comment in verse 28, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian,” is ambiguous; it might be sarcasm or a genuine moment of contemplation. The hearing ended with

Agrippa and Festus concluding Paul was innocent and could have been released if he hadn't appealed to Caesar, aligning with God's plan for Paul to testify in Rome (Acts 23:11).

Testimony from Our Day

Paul's defense before Agrippa skillfully combined personal testimony, doctrinal elements, and persuasive arguments, with a strong focus on his transformative encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road. This reflects the theme of the hymn "I Love to Tell the Story," which captures Paul's post-conversion zeal for sharing his experience.

The hymn's author, Katherine Hankey (1834-1911), grew up in a Christian home in London and was deeply influenced by her devout father. Despite her privileged background, she had a heart for the poor and actively engaged in missionary work. She organized Bible studies for factory girls and, inspired by her missionary brother's illness in South Africa, dedicated her writing career to supporting missions.

After contracting a serious illness at thirty, Katherine focused on writing rather than traveling. During her recovery, she wrote a 100-stanza poem, split into "The Story Wanted" and "The Story Told." In 1867, her poem was quoted at an international YMCA convention in Montreal, leading to William Doane composing the hymn "Tell Me the Old, Old Story." William Fischer later set the poem's second part to music, resulting in the beloved hymn "I Love to Tell the Story."

Both Katherine Hankey and Paul the Apostle were driven to share the story of Jesus. We, too, can and should share our personal experiences with Christ. While others might debate biblical evidence, they cannot dispute our personal testimony. Like Paul, let's seize every chance to share how Christ has transformed our lives.

A Closer Look

Question 1	In Acts 25:16, what Roman legal precedent did Festus state in his explanation to Agrippa? Why do you think Paul asserted his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar?
Question 2	Paul was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea. When Festus replaced Felix, Paul's accusers again brought charges against the Apostle and pressed for a trial to be held in Jerusalem. At that point, Paul requested a hearing before Caesar, which was the right of every Roman citizen. In Acts 25:14-21, Festus explained Paul's case to the visiting King Agrippa. What great doctrinal truth did Festus point to in his summary of the accusations against Paul? (Acts 25:18-19). Why did the Jewish religious leaders so vehemently resist this truth?
Question 3	Paul knew he was blameless of the charges against him. What are some of the benefits of having a clear conscience before God and man?
Question 4	In Acts 26:11, what three actions did Paul say he took against the saints prior to his conversion?
Question 5	Paul's defense before Agrippa is recorded in chapter 26. For the third time in the Book of Acts, the Apostle recounted how his life was turned around through his experience on the road to Damascus. Based on verses 19-20, what was the outcome of that experience?
Question 6	What are some of the spiritual characteristics of Paul revealed in this chapter that we could and should pattern after in our lives?

Take Home

Paul's preaching about the Resurrection of Jesus Christ created conflict between the Apostle and the Jewish religious leaders of his day. We, too, may face resistance from those who do not believe that Christ arose from the dead, but we must firmly uphold and teach that truth because it is the central doctrine of our Christian faith. Paul set an example for us by sharing his testimony at every given opportunity. Let us purpose to be among those who cherish and uphold this doctrine and like Paul, be faithful in proclaiming it!