

**Valley Bible Church**  
**Sermon Notes for November 17, 2019**

**Paul's Defense to Festus**  
**Acts 25:1-12**

Acts 25 begins with Paul held custody in Caesarea as Festus replaces Felix as governor of Judea. Paul defends himself against his accusers over the same charges as were made at his trial before Felix two years earlier (Acts 24). This is the third of four trials that Paul will endure in this final section of Acts (21:17-28:31).

**1. The deceitfulness of the Jews against Paul (25:1-5)**

Festus' rule over Judea began around 59 A.D. and lasted at most only three years before his untimely death. Little is known about him beyond Josephus who represented him as an honorable leader who faced a series of difficult circumstances. No longer was Paul held in the custody of a tyrant.

Luke noted the timeframe of three days in order to show the priority that the case against Paul had at this time. The Jewish accusers include the influential Ananias and elders (Acts 24:1) plus the recently appointed high priest, Ishmael, the son of Phabi. They had been opposing Paul for years (Acts 23).

The religious leaders met with Festus in Jerusalem under the guise of continuing the charges against Paul. This time it was these leaders that were not just supportive of the plan to kill Paul but were secretly plotting to kill him themselves (cf. Acts 23:14-15). Their self-righteousness led them to violate their own law under the belief that they knew the will of God based upon their own religious authority. This was the sixth time that Paul's life was in jeopardy since he returned from his third missionary journey (Acts 21:31; 22:22; 23:10; 23:12-15; 24:1-9).

Festus rejected their request for the trial to be held in Jerusalem because he was concerned about the continued Jewish pressure to control Judea.

**2. The defense by Paul (25:6-11)**

The timeline is provided by Luke to show the urgency of this matter for Festus and the Jews. The scene is more confrontational than the trial before Felix (Acts 24) with the Jewish leaders standing around Paul in intimidation.

Paul speaks clearly regarding his innocence (Acts 25:8), disavowing the charge of heresy (Acts 24:14-16), sacrilege (Acts 24:18-19), and even the most serious charge from a Roman perspective of sedition (Acts 24:12). His willingness to die justly stood in contrast to the religious leaders' willingness to kill unjustly. Paul's commitment to serve the Lord was in spite of what circumstances might befall him (Philippians 1:21).

Festus advocated for a trial in Jerusalem because of his surprise at the weakness of the case against Paul. Festus later recounted his perspective upon hearing this case in Acts 25:14-21 and 25:24-27. While Festus considered the issue to be of only a religious matter, he remained biased in favor of the Jews in seeking to appease them. His willingness to oppose the wishes of the Jews stood in contrast to Festus' willingness to pervert justice in order to appease the Jews.

### **3. The decision by Festus regarding Paul (25:12)**

The book of Acts ends before the conclusion of these charges but it sets the course for Rome (Romans 1:15; Acts 23:11). It is ironic that God's messenger had a better chance of justice with the Romans than with the Jews.

Festus was forced to accept Paul's appeal to a higher authority since that is his right as a citizen of Rome. God delivered Paul through the Roman justice system. We all have a higher authority than any government. Regardless of the injustice of our time, everyone has the same final, sovereign, righteous Judge. In our difficulties, may we always be thankful that our Lord deals justly (Genesis 18:25).