

BIB204 NT2 Early Church

Unit 6c

Paul's Appeal to Caesar and His Journey to Rome

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In this segment now, we begin in chapter 25 of Acts. So Paul has been in Caesarea for two years. After two years, Felix is deposed and replaced by Porcius Festus. Again, it's not Porcius Minucius Felix. It's simply Minucius Felix. Porcius Festus is his successor, and Porcius Festus has a different take on Paul because Paul has been there for two years. And sometime between AD 58 and 60, as I said in the last segment, some scholars feel that Paul wrote at least three letters: the one to Philemon and the one to the Colossians and then the one to the Ephesians. So 25:1, three days after Festus arrived in the province to take on his duties, he went to Jerusalem from Caesarea. When you look at verses 2 through 5, the chief priests, the principal men, the elders of the Jews laid out their case against Paul and they urged him, asking as a favor that Porcius Festus summon Paul to Jerusalem because they were planning an ambush to kill him. Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea and that he intended to go there. So Festus invites men of authority to go down to Caesarea with him so that they can bring charges against Paul.

Verses 6 to 12 basically give us the spectacle of Porcius Festus staying with the Jews about eight or ten days. He goes back down to Caesarea. He takes his seat on the tribunal, the bema. He orders Paul to be brought. When Paul arrives, the Jews from Jerusalem bring serious charges against him that they cannot prove. That's verse 7. Paul argued in his defense. It's worth listening to what he said. He said, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense." But Festus wants to do the Jews a favor, so he says to Paul, "Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried on these charges before me?" in response to the request by the Jews from Jerusalem. "Let us let Paul come down and be tried." Their intent is not to try him. They want him dead. And we could see that from prior context. Paul knows this. He knows that going back to Jerusalem is basically a death sentence for him. And he is focused on Rome now, so what he does in verse 10, he says, "I am standing before Caesar's tribunal (this is Caesar's court), where I ought to be tried. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourself know very well. If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. (I'm not trying to outrun any consequences for anything that I have done.) But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. (Why?) I appeal to Caesar." Once Paul said those words, in Roman law, Festus no longer had any jurisdiction over him. So Paul has basically undercut the attempt of the Jews. Their attempts to kill him is done away with, and now they are to be forced to present their case at Rome. And so now you have Festus saying in verse 12, when he had conferred with his council, he says to Paul, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go."

Verses 13 to 17, we have Herod Agrippa II and his wife Bernice or Berenice. They arrive at Caesarea. They greet Festus. They're welcoming him to his new duties. They stay there for many days and Festus talks about Paul and basically gives a description. Look at verse 14. "There is a man left prisoner by Felix, and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews laid out their case against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him. I answered them that it was not the custom of the Romans to give up anyone before the accused met the accusers face to face and had opportunity to make his defense concerning the charge laid against him. So when they came together here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they brought no charge in his case of such evils as I supposed." In other words, there was no there, there. "Rather they had certain points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who was dead, but whom Paul asserted to be alive. Being at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wanted to go to Jerusalem and be tried there regarding

them. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of the emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar. Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I would like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ said he, ‘you will hear him.’” So Festus is having a conversation with Agrippa. Paul’s case comes up and Agrippa expresses an interest in hearing what Paul has to say. And Festus says, “Tomorrow.”

So the next few verses, verses 23 all the way to 27, Agrippa and Berenice, they come in. There’s a great deal of circumstance, great pomp and circumstance. They enter the audience hall with the military tribunes, the prominent men of the city. This is a prominent gathering. It’s quite significant. And Paul is going to have an opportunity to share his story about the Gospel and to talk about Jesus Christ, to talk about his conversion to Christ, and to talk about the implications of the Gospel. Festus commands that Paul be brought in (verse 23). Festus introduces Paul. He says in verse 24, “King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death.” So Festus is speaking for effect. Festus already knows this, Agrippa knows this, but he has to address everyone else, all of the prominent individuals, the men of note, the women of note who are there at Caesarea to hear what Paul has to say. “And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore, I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa.” This is formal speech. “So that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him.”

So everything is set. Chapter 26, Agrippa speaks to Paul and tells him effectively, “You can speak for yourself now. You have permission.” Paul stretched out his hand and he begins his defense using the conventions of what we now call Greco-Roman rhetoric. “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.” And then Paul gives a run through of his early life, his conversion. And so we see in verses 4 to 11, he talks about his manner of life from his youth, spent from the very beginning among his own nation and in Jerusalem. All the Jews know who Paul is. They’ve known that Paul was a strict Pharisee, that Paul’s section, Paul’s segment of Pharisees is the strictest. So Paul now stands on trial because of his hope in the promise made by God to the fathers. He says, “For this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! (verse 8) Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?”

And then he talks about himself. “I was convinced that I ought to go against Jesus of Nazareth with everything that I had. I did so in Jerusalem. I locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests. I cast my vote against them when they were put to death. I punished them in the synagogues. I tried to make them blaspheme. I raged against them, even to foreign cities.” Paul talks about this. And then he tells of his conversion, verses 12 to 18, where he is struck down to the ground at midday, brightest light he ever saw shining around him, Jesus speaking to him, “Why are you persecuting me, Saul? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” And we’ve treated Paul’s conversion in an earlier unit, chapters 9, 22, and 26. So here we are in chapter 26 and Paul is giving this history to Agrippa II and to everyone that is there: the military personages, the prominent people of the city of Caesarea.

So he says in verse 19 of Acts 26, “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. For this reason, the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.’ And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind.’”

Festus may have been overcome with the detail and the depth of Paul’s testimony. It doesn’t make sense to Festus. That would probably explain why he says what he says here in verse 24. But based on Paul’s response, it looks as though Paul meets the outburst on the part of Festus. Festus is trying to rattle him, it seems. And Paul responds calmly, it seems. The words seem to imply that this is a calm response. “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus,” he says, “but I am speaking true and rational words.” In other words, “I’m not a kook. I’m not crazy. I’m in my right mind.” Verse 26, “For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”

So he appeals in light of Festus’ outburst to try to knock him off his game, to rattle him, to make him slip up, to destroy his rhetorical expression. Festus cries in a loud voice. “You’re mad. You’re losing your mind.” And Paul replies calmly. He stays calm. He doesn’t flinch in the face of the outburst. And then he appeals to Agrippa II. And so Agrippa said to Paul in verse 28, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.” So the king gets up (verse 30), the governor too and Bernice and those who are sitting there. And they withdrew (verse 31) and they were discussing with one another. “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or punishment.” Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I agree with you. This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

So chapter 27, it was decided that they should go to Italy. They should go to Rome. So Paul and some other prisoners were delivered to a centurion by the name of Julius of the Augustan Cohort. And so we are treated to sort of an itinerary of Paul’s trip. Verse 2, they leave in a ship of Adramyttium, which was to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia. And they put to sea. Verse 3, they put in at Sidon. Julius treated Paul kindly, gave him leave to go to his friends and to be cared for. So he allows Paul to go to shore. They leave from there. They sail under the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against them. That’s the first inkling of trouble that we have. Again, this is going towards the winter of the year AD 60, and ships generally did not travel around this time. The winds were contrary, not so much because of the weather, but because of the wind patterns that tended to come about. To this very day, when you look at the run from Cyprus to Crete in the Mediterranean, those wind patterns are still there. Of course, we now have ships that are much more durable, seaworthy. But back then, basically people were taking their lives in their hands if they were caught in this particular wind pattern that is called Euroclydon.

Anyway, the winds are against them. Verse 5, they sail across the open sea of the Mediterranean, along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia. They arrive at Myra in Lycia. Then the centurion transitions everyone to a ship of Alexandria that is sailing for Italy. They sailed slowly for a number of days because the wind is picking up. They arrived off Cnidus with difficulty. That’s verse 7. The wind did not allow them to travel any further. They sailed under the lee of Crete. They coasted along Crete with difficulty. They came to a place called Fair Havens, where you had the city of Lasea. The voyage was now dangerous (verse 9). Then Paul advised them. “Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” But the centurion was convinced (verse 11) by the pilot of the ship that they could make it. The harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, so the majority decided to keep going, put out to sea, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, and spend the winter there.

So the south wind was blowing gently (verse 13), and so they figured they could sail along Crete, close to the shore, and have a nice trip of it. But soon a tempestuous wind called the northeaster (the name was Euroclydon), it struck down from the land. So Crete, because of its position and because of the mountains and the way they are positioned on the island, you have winds that rush down the mountain and push out towards the sea, and we have a boat of the type that were made 2000 years ago, two millennia ago. That’s devastating. So this northeaster struck down from the land. The ship was caught, couldn’t face into the wind. That’s verse 15. So they gave up and they were driven along. They ran under the lee of a small island called Cauda and they managed to secure the ship’s boat. They hoisted it up. They undergirded the ship, but they were afraid to run aground on the Syrtis. This is still around the island of Crete. They lowered the gear because they were afraid of being run aground, which means that they couldn’t put to port. They couldn’t park the ship. And because of the wind, they were driven further out into the Mediterranean where there were no landmasses. So we could pick up the reading there. You can sort of get a sense of what’s happening here.

“Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo.” That was verse 18. “And on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.” Which means that they were afraid of being run aground, which is just as dangerous. They would have no way to travel, nowhere to travel. They’d lose everything. So they stayed on the sea and they were driven further out into the Mediterranean, far away from any land, and they couldn’t see the sun. So the northeaster was pretty severe. The weather pattern was pretty severe. They didn’t see stars. All they had were clouds and violent winds and being tossed all over the place and no land in sight for many days. So they gave up. They figured they were going to die.

Verse 21, they’ve been without food for a long time. Paul stood up and said, “You should have listened to me. But I urge you to take heart because God has told me that I’m going to stand before Caesar and God is going to spare the lives of all of those who are with you, Paul. So take heart, men,” he tells them in verse 25, “for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we are going to run aground on some island.” God has given him advanced knowledge. So the fourteenth night comes (27:27) and they’re being driven across the Adriatic Sea. And the sailors suspect that they are nearing land, and they are correct. They do soundings and they get closer to land, but the wind and the sea are still violent. Some sailors seek to escape from the ship and Paul warns a centurion not to let those men escape, otherwise other people will die because they need the skills of the sailors. You see this in verses 30 to 32. “As the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship’s boat into the

sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’ Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it go.”

Verses 33 to 38, Paul urged them to take food and he gives them an example. Verse 35, he said these things. He took bread, gave thanks, broke it in the presence of all, and ate. So he encouraged everyone else to eat, and so they did. There were about 276 persons in the ship. This is the first time we find out the population on the ship (verse 37 of chapter 27). When people had eaten enough, they lighten the ship. They threw the wheat out into the sea. They were basically trying to stay light. Verses 39 to the rest of the chapter. Verse 44, they saw land. They didn’t recognize it. They noticed a bay and they said, “Let’s run the ship ashore there.” So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. They loosen the ropes that tie the rudders. They made for the beach, but they struck a reef (verse 41). And they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck, remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by this violent surf. The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners (verse 42) so that they could prevent any escape, but the centurion kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered everyone to jump overboard and swim and make for land, and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. So all were brought safely to land. That ship was broken apart. But everyone was saved.

Which takes us to chapter 28. So they find out that the island is called Malta (28:1). The native people are kind. As it turns out, all of these people are going to spend the winter on the island of Malta. So they’re going to be there about three or four months. The first night where they are having a meal, a viper comes out of the fire, fastens on Paul’s hand. He shakes off the creature into the fire and suffers no harm. This is verses 3 through 8. They waited for him to die. He didn’t die. So they figured he was a god. They get to know the people of the island. Paul prays over an individual’s father, the chief man of the island. He is named Publius. His father has a fever and has dysentery. Paul visits him, prays, heals him. And the people of the land who had diseases came and Paul healed them. That’s verse 9. And they honored them greatly because of what Paul did. So when it was time for them to leave, they gave them all the supplies that they needed.

So verse 11 tells us that after three months, they left the island of Malta. And so again we have another itinerary, a short itinerary which runs from verse 11 to 16. They got on another ship of Alexandria. They put in at Syracuse, stayed there for three days, arrived at Rhegium, and then came to Puteoli, and then they arrived at Rome (verse 14). The brothers and sisters of Rome heard that Paul had arrived. They came as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet them. So they came at a good way from the city of Rome to meet them. When Paul saw them, he thanked God (verse 15). He took courage. He arrived at Rome (verse 16). Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier that guarded him. This is the spring of AD 61.

Verse 17, Paul calls all of the local leaders of the Jews. He tells them why he is there at Rome. He is accused. He is a prisoner from Jerusalem delivered into the hands of the Romans. He’s done nothing against the customs of the fathers. And so he wishes to speak to them about the hope that he has in himself. So they set a day for him (verse 23) and they come to him at his lodging, his house arrest. From morning until evening, he expounds to them from the Law of Moses and from the prophets, testifying to Jesus, about Jesus. Some are convinced (verse 24). Others disbelieve. But they do disagree among themselves. They can’t agree. Verse 25, Paul makes a statement. He says, “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people, and say, ‘You will indeed hear but

never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.’ For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’”

So Paul concludes that the Jewish nation is blind to the Gospel as a result of what God said to Isaiah the prophet. You actually do see this theme repeated in all four Gospels. You see it in Matthew 13. You see it in Mark 4. You see it in Luke 8, I believe, 8 or 9. You see it in John 12. It’s all over the place, this thing of Israel’s blindness to Messiah. So Paul concludes, “‘Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.’ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.”

So that means if he arrives at Rome in the early part of AD 61, then he is there from 61 to 63. From 61 to 63, Paul composes the letter to the Philippians. In 63 presumably, he stands before Caesar. The accusers from Jerusalem would have made the journey to Rome to accuse him before Caesar. At this point, that would be Nero Caesar because Nero takes over from Claudius in the year AD 54. So he stands before Nero Caesar’s court, not necessarily Nero Caesar himself. His case is heard and presumably is thrown out. Well, the following year, Paul has traveled at this point. He’s traveled to Macedonia. He’s traveled to Ephesus. He’s connected with Titus again. He has sent Titus to minister to the churches at Crete to establish them, establish a bulwark against the Judaizing tendency of diaspora Jewish Christians who want to combine law and Gospel. He has gone to the church of Ephesus and he’s had to leave Timothy there after deposing ruling elders for teaching things that they ought not instead of teaching the pure, unvarnished Gospel. So he composes 1 Timothy. Then he composes Titus. He does this sometime between AD 61 and 65. Some will say 66. Tradition says that Paul was martyred in AD 68. The chronology is a little problematic, but 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy, in that chronological order, are written after the end of the Book of Acts. After he is released sometime in AD 63, he travels for about a year, and then he is probably swept up within a year, year and a half of his release from this juncture at the end of the Book of Acts. So he’s composed Philippians. He’s composed 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy.

And then of course, at this time, you also have the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Luke, the two-volume work of Luke-Acts. So those are composed. What remains, of course, 1 Peter is composed around 64, 65. So is Jude. So is 2 Peter. Tradition says that Paul and Peter were martyred at about the same time. So you have much of the New Testament composed already. All that’s left of the Johannines, you’ve got 1, 2, and 3 John, arguably written at least 20 years after Paul and Peter are gone from the scene, so sometime between AD 85 and 95. You also have the Book of Revelation which was composed in AD 95, according to historical tradition, during the reign of Domitian. And then you have the Gospel of John which was also composed at around the same time. Some would say it was composed in AD 95 or 96. And that is arguably the bulk of the New Testament. So the chronological scheme that I’ve been discussing in Unit 5 as well as Unit 6 are basically a scaffolding that is comprised of the books, the documents, the letters and the books of the New Testament basically around the history of the church as depicted in the Book of Acts.