

Paul on Trial in Caesarea (Acts 24-26)

Introduction:

1. After the unsuccessful attempt by the Jews to kill Paul; he now finds himself in Caesarea awaiting trial for allegedly committing a crime or crimes that up to this point have been unsubstantiated and improvable.
 - The Jewish leaders (the Sanhedrin) were unsuccessful in proving that Paul violated any of their laws.
 - The Roman military leader (Lysias) could not determine that Paul was an enemy of Rome, nor did Paul violate Roman law.
 - The best thing that Lysias could do was to bring Paul to Caesarea to be tried in a Roman court (which was his right as a Roman citizen) and if exonerated he would be a free man.
2. In Acts 23 we learned that the Jews plotted to assassinate Paul on his trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea.
 - Lysias took extra precaution to see to it that the plot was not carried out and he was successful in delivering Paul to the Roman Governor at the time whose name was Felix.
 - All of these events were divinely orchestrated by God to protect Paul's life and see to it that he went to Rome as God intended.
3. Paul will spend some 2-3 years in Caesarea and during that time he will appear before three important and influential people; however his impact on them and the others who witness these three trials is enormous!

Paul Appears Before Governor Felix (Acts 24:1-27)

1. The prosecution presents its case (Acts 24:1-9)
 - The Sanhedrin engage an attorney to represent them:
 - 1) The attorney's name is **Tertullus** and he may have been either a Roman or a Hellenistic Jew (although we are not completely sure) – whatever the case he appeared to be well versed in Roman law.
 - 2) The attorney (Tertullus) seems to spend more time on his introduction and flattery of Governor Felix than he does on the actual charges against Paul.
 - A little background on Governor Felix
 - 1) He ruled Judea from about 52-59 AD
 - 2) He obtained the position because his brother (Pallas) had an in-road with Emperor Claudius due to some sort of favored status.
 - 3) He was actually a former slave
 - 4) He was not well thought of by his peers as the Roman historian Tacitus says this about him; "He exercises royal power with the mind of a slave".
 - Tertullus brought three charges against Paul:
 - 1) _____ - Paul was a worldwide troublemaker
 - 2) He promotes _____ by being a leader of the sect known as the Nazarenes.
 - 3) He attempted to _____ the temple.

2. Paul's defense against the charges (Acts 24:10-21)

- Paul represents himself and spends a lot less time on flattery words about Governor Felix.
 - 1) Paul does acknowledge that Felix had served long enough in the Judean region to know and understand Jewish beliefs and customs.
 - 2) **In doing this, Paul was making it clear that Felix was obligated to render a fair and impartial decision.**
- Paul's response to the charge of rebellion or sedition:
 - 1) He had not been in Jerusalem long enough to put together any form of a formal rebellion.
 - 2) He was not involved in any formal debates while there.
 - 3) His purpose in being in Jerusalem was to deliver an offering for the poor from the Gentile churches of Macedonia....he was on a mercy mission.
 - 4) While on trial before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem – they were incapable of proving he was stirring up rebellion.
- Paul's response to the charges of heresy:
 - 1) He shouldn't have even had to defend this charge before Felix since this was a religious matter and not a civil matter...but Paul probably could not resist!
 - 2) He identifies the beliefs of the so called sect known as "the Way" to be in agreement with and devoted to the teachings of their forefathers contained in the Old Testament. He declares; "I do serve the God of our fathers". (Acts 24:14)

- 3) The real heretics were the members of the Sanhedrin who rejected Jesus to begin with and called for Him to be crucified.
 - 4) Paul was more “**orthodox**” than those accusing him of being un-orthodox; because he believed in the entire Old Testament and not just the Pentateuch (The first five Books of the Bible) as the Sadducees held to.
 - 5) It was that belief in the entirety of Scripture that led the Jews (other than the Sadducees) to the hope of a resurrection. This belief (clearly in the mainstream of Jewish theology) was clearly taught by the Pharisees and was the significant division between them and the Sadducees.
 - 6) *It was this hope in the resurrection* that Paul understands to be at the core of belief of those of the “Way” and it *was in clear agreement with the orthodox teaching of the Jews* – thus no heresy existed in what Paul taught and this charge was also without merit!
- Paul’s final rebuttal was his defense against the charge of desecrating the temple. Acts 24:17-21)
 - 1) After Paul had delivered the offering to the Jerusalem church he agreed to sponsor four “Jewish Christians” (Acts 21:23-26) who were taking a Nazirite vow.
 - 2) Paul submitted to the purification ritual before entering the temple and was in complete compliance with Jewish law.
 - 3) It was actually the “Jews from Asia” who came and stirred up trouble....not Paul. *Also, their suspicious absence at the trial in Caesarea was in Paul’s favor leaving a huge hole in the Sanhedrin’s case.*

- Since believing in the resurrection was not a crime (neither in Jewish law or Roman law); Paul successfully refuted all charges against him and showed this case did not belong in a Roman court.
 - Unfortunately there were political ramifications at stake and Felix had to maintain peace in Judea in order to protect his job....thus his verdict or lack thereof, leaves Paul in a Caesarean prison for two more years.
4. The verdict rendered by Governor Felix (Acts 24:22-23)
- Felix faced a huge dilemma:
 - 1) Paul was a _____ citizen who held the basic right that to be found guilty of a crime required proof. Since no eyewitnesses could be provided that Paul had committed a crime then he should have been immediately released.
 - 2) The inept _____ (the Jewish high court) was incapable of finding Paul guilty of any crime.
 - 3) Even Felix himself was aware (probably learned from his wife Drusilla) that those identified as “**The Way**”; were not political revolutionaries but peaceful and law abiding citizens. The true rebels were the Jewish Zealots.
 - Felix did what most politicians do when they fear losing power and control – **he simply avoids making a decision!**
 - 1) He justifies his actions by stating that he needed more information from Lysias (the commander in Jerusalem at the time of the alleged crime).
 - 2) At the end of the day this was his attempt to stall things in the hopes that the problem would just go away....but it really doesn't and Felix must wrestle with his own spiritual weaknesses as he is confronted with The Truth!

5. An opportunity wasted! (Acts 24:24-26)

- At some point (while Paul was still in custody of a Roman guard); Felix and Drusilla will summon Paul, for the purpose of hearing him speak about faith in Jesus Christ. Paul will use this opportunity to address three important areas that every person must face:
 - 1) _____; which is the absolute standard that is demanded by God's holy nature. (Matthew 5:48, I Peter 1:15-16)
 - 2) _____; which is mankind's response that brings him into conformity to God's Law.
 - 3) _____; which is what occurs when mankind fails to live up to God's standard.
- Since mankind cannot live up to those standards – Jesus Christ came to die on the cross to satisfy those requirements (since we could not) and redeem us (pay the price) so that we can be declared holy.
- Felix was faced with a double whammy!
 - 1) He was confronted with the fact that he was a sinner who faced judgment (I am pretty sure he already knew this).
 - 2) His only way of escape was to repent, believe and have faith in Jesus Christ.
- Felix failed to acknowledge his sin and equally failed to embrace Jesus Christ as Savior! He wasted a glorious opportunity to altar his present life and his future by not turning to God. To the best of our knowledge we have no record of him becoming a follower of Christ.

- Felix shows his true colors by revealing that he was motivated by greed and not the pursuit of righteousness. (Acts 24:25)
 - 1) He let some time pass and even met with Paul on what may have been several occasions.....but to our knowledge he showed no signs of true repentance or faith.
 - 2) We witness his wasted opportunity as Luke records these words; “At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him”.
 - This is a sad reminder that “man’s heart is desperately wicked and who can know it”; which show that even when someone such as Paul cannot bring a guy like Felix to a point of repentance and faith – we too will witness those who stubbornly reject the Truth and waste an opportunity to be reconciled to God.
6. Paul remains in prison (though guilty of no crime) in Caesarea and will be heard by another Governor who succeeds Felix and his name is Porcius Festus.

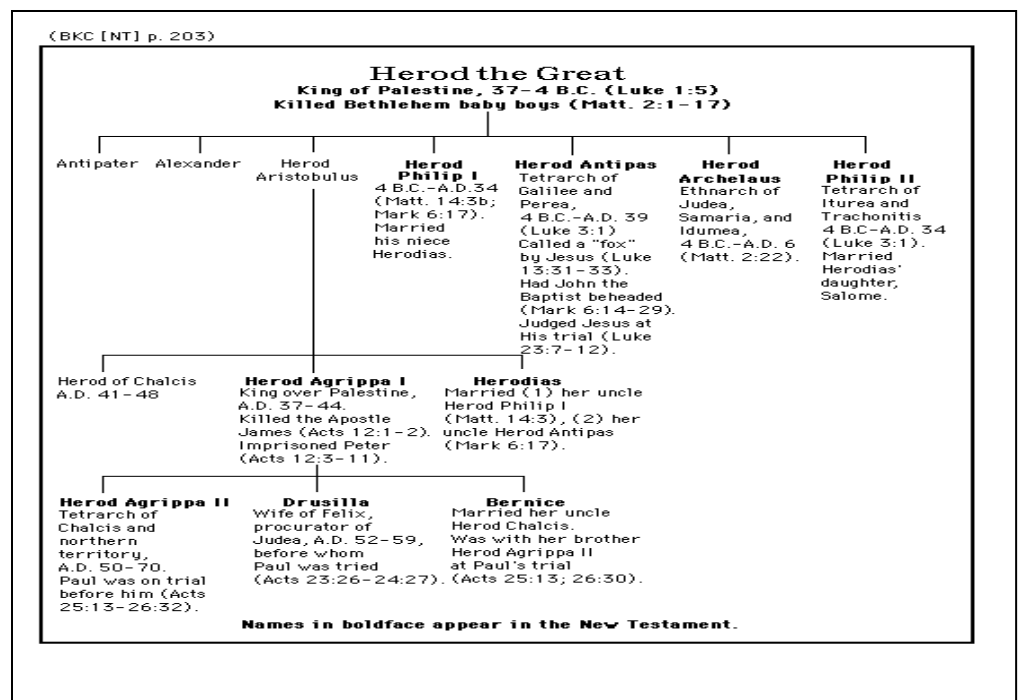
Paul Appears Before Governor Festus (Acts 25:1-12)

1. How many times does Paul have to prove he is innocent?
 - The highest court in Israel (the Sanhedrin) failed to convict him
 - The first trial in Caesarea (overseen by Felix) revealed that Paul was innocent.
 - Paul will now stand before a new Governor named Festus and once again show he has committed no crime worthy of punishment.
 - 1) Festus replaced Felix at some point due to the failure of Felix to maintain control in the Judean region.
 - 2) Festus was a member of the Roman nobility and he was thought of as a good leader by the Roman hierarchy (more so than Felix). He ruled from about 58-62 AD.
2. The case against Paul was the hot topic of the day – so Festus agreed to reopen the case and hear the charges against Paul. (Acts 25:1-7)
 - The chief priests and Jewish leaders wanted Festus to order Paul back to Jerusalem to stand trial. (Vs 3)
 - 1) They knew that their case was weak (they failed twice and did so miserably), and their best option was to carry out the assassination plot by killing Paul on his way back to Jerusalem.
 - 2) Festus concludes that the “influential men” of Jerusalem should go with him to Caesarea to once again bring their charges against Paul and he would try their case there in Caesarea where Paul was held as a prisoner.
 - The results of the trial are probably the same; as Luke provides little detail other than to state their case remained weak.

3. After hearing Paul's defense; Festus attempts a compromise (more in the favor of the Jewish leaders) that would bring Paul back to Jerusalem where Festus would hear the case. (Acts 25:9-10)
 - It was the job of Festus to restore order to the region of Judea (that is why Emperor Nero sent him there in the first place), so he didn't want to have a revolt on his hands – thus he stood a greater chance by not infuriating the Jews which made the trial in Jerusalem his best option.
 - The Jews had no desire to re-try Paul but having him return to Jerusalem provided the best opportunity for an ambush that would see Paul killed.
4. Paul was a Roman citizen and he had every right to expect justice from a Roman court. (Acts 25:10-12)
 - Paul was a law abiding citizen and he was under no obligation to allow himself to be placed back under control of the Jewish authorities.
 - Paul knew that had he been returned back to Jerusalem, it would mean almost certain death.
 - Paul chose a rather bold course of action and appealed his case to Caesar which was his right as a Roman citizen.
 - 1) There is some debate as to whether Festus was legally bound to grant Paul's request but it certainly released Festus from the repercussions of a bad decision.
 - 2) After a little mini-conference; Festus granted Paul his request to go to Rome and have his case heard by Nero.
5. Prior to his voyage to Rome an influential man named Herod Agrippa II will choose to hear Paul's case and Paul will be given an opportunity to give his testimony and one of his greatest defenses of the Gospel.

Paul Appears Before King Agrippa (Acts 25:13-26:32)

1. Since King Agrippa was in town to honor the appointment of Festus as governor of the region – it provides an opportunity for him to hear what all of this hoopla surrounding the Apostle Paul was about.
- A little background on King Agrippa II
 - 1) He was the son of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1) and the great-grandson of Herod the Great. (see the chart below)



- 2) He was probably about 30 years of age when this trial took place and the “official” territory that he “ruled as king” was northeast of Palestine. (See map)
- 3) The influence of his great grandfather (Herod the Great) within the Roman hierarchy (at the time) created a “favored status” among the “Herod’s” and due to their family lineage (Edomites – descendants of Esau) they had good knowledge of Jewish history, heritage and custom.

- 4) Some of the privileges and perks that came with the job as king of Judea were the appointment of the Jewish high priest and also the control of the temple treasury.
 - 5) Later, when the Jewish revolts intensify (A.D. 66), Agrippa will side with the Romans and become an enemy of the Jewish Zealots.
 - 6) It was his background in Jewish affairs that made him the most qualified to hear Paul.
- Since Bernice is mentioned here we should point out that she was both Agrippa's sister and mistress/consort. Their incestuous relationship was the topic of gossip within the Roman Empire.
2. Festus explains the issues surrounding Paul and his incarceration to King Agrippa (Acts 25:13-22)
 - First he explains that Governor Felix left him with a mess and it was only magnified by the fact that he himself was totally ignorant of issues and implications as to why the Jews were so outraged at Paul.
 - He further explains that he attempted to make a compromise that might lead to the matter being resolved, but Paul chose to appeal the case to Caesar (which was his right) and although that was what he was preparing to do, it did add further complications to an already confusing scenario.
 - What Festus needed from Agrippa (since he was well versed in Jewish matters) was an "official" or "valid" charge that could be brought against Paul so that he (Governor Festus) would not look foolish when Paul appeared before Emperor Nero.
 - The issue surrounding the resurrection was the clear sticking point and Festus had no knowledge or understanding of this matter, but King Agrippa did, and he chose to hear the matter for himself.

3. The events surrounding Paul's appearance before King Agrippa II (Acts 25:23-27)

- It seems that Agrippa used this opportunity to show case his royal stature for Luke writes; "So the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice and great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commander and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in" (Acts 25:23)
 - 1) Agrippa and Bernice were decked out in their royal attire and I get the sense that it was more of a pageant than a trial.
 - 2) It is a rather interesting contrast between the Paul (a lowly prisoner – yet rich in God's eyes) to that of Agrippa and Bernice (rich in the eyes of man – yet in the spiritual sense very desolate).
 - 3) Since there were 5 cohorts (5000 soldiers) present then there would also have been 5 prominent high ranking officers in attendance as well. This becomes significant as Paul's testimony will undoubtedly have a great impact on them as they hear the same things that Agrippa hears.
 - 4) I love how John MacArthur sums things up; "The contrast could not have been more striking. Into the midst of the assembly hall, crowded with the most important people in Caesarea, walked a Jew, who had been described as short, bald and unimposing. Murmurs of surprise must have greeted his appearance; many in the crowd probably found it hard to believe that a seemingly unimpressive man was the cause of so much controversy. But appearances can be deceiving. History has judged Paul to be one of the most noble and powerful men who ever lived – and the crowd to be a collection of pompous fools" (John MacArthur – Commentary on Acts, Volume 2, pg 330)

- Luke records that Festus then opens the proceedings and introduces Paul.
 - 1) Festus had no real understanding of the religious issues that were at the center of this controversial matter but he did understand the volatility between Paul and his accusers. He knew full well that the Jews wanted Paul dead!
 - 2) Festus even admits that he could not find that Paul had committed a crime worthy of death and had it not been for his appeal to Caesar – he may have even released Paul.
 - 3) The sticking point for Festus is that he didn't want to send Paul to Emperor Nero without formal charges of wrongdoing so that Nero didn't feel that his time was being wasted on such a trivial matter.
 - 4) It was this attempt to determine what the “official” charge would be that led Festus to have King Agrippa hear the case.....in the hopes that his knowledge of Jewish affairs and also issues surrounding the followers of “The Way” would help to support why a “provincial governor” needed to move this case up the chain of command all the way to the Emperor.
- It is pretty obvious that God was orchestrating this whole thing as Paul (itching at the chance to give his testimony) would be the vehicle through which Agrippa, Bernice, the military commanders, the soldiers, and all others in attendance would hear a clear presentation of the Gospel!

4. Paul's defense (apologia) of his actions (Acts 26:1-23)
- The testimony of his background (Acts 26:1-11)
 - 1) Paul initially begins with the routine complimentary remarks toward the one hearing the case (in this instance it was Agrippa). Paul does not appear to be embellishing Agrippa's accomplishments but recognizes that of all people, Agrippa would have the best handle (at least from a secular viewpoint) on Jewish and Christian matters.
 - 2) I get the sense that Paul is not really appealing for his life to be spared as he knew that God intended to see that Paul made it to Rome (Acts 19:21, Acts 23:11). I think the real purpose here is that Paul wanted to give a strong witness of the saving power of Jesus Christ to Agrippa and the rest of the people in attendance.
 - 3) Paul states that his childhood and early life was spent following the teachings of Judaism. He received his education in Jerusalem, became a Pharisee and was later appointed as a "chief persecutor" of those of Christian belief. Those of "The Way" feared him!
 - 4) Paul established that the hope of Israel was the "promise" made to their fathers of a Messiah and to the resurrection. Luke records; "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers, the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews" Acts 26:6-7)
 - 5) It was this teaching about the resurrection of the dead that caused such uproar within the Sanhedrin. The Pharisees supported the idea of a resurrection (though they did not embrace Jesus as Messiah), but the Sadducees were vehemently opposed to it.

- 6) Paul was asserting that the facts were clear; Jesus rose from the dead (no one of that day disputed that fact) and in doing that it validated the Old Testament promise of a resurrection and further demonstrated that Jesus was the Messiah they were looking for.
 - 7) Paul himself initially did not realize this; for while he was a Pharisee and responsible for killing Christians he was given the opportunity on the road to Damascus to see the risen Savior (Jesus Christ). It was on this road to Damascus (through the providence of God) that Paul submitted to Jesus Christ in faith and realized (that day) He was truly the Messiah!
 - 8) It is important to note that the teaching of the resurrection was in complete agreement with the Old Testament. (Acts 24:14-15)
- The testimony of his conversion (Acts 26:12-18)
 - 1) It was that day (on the road to Damascus) when Paul met Jesus Christ (the risen Savior) that his life was forever transformed.
 - 2) The evidence of this “**bright light**” and a voice from heaven was Paul’s way of saying that this was no ordinary event.
 - 3) Jesus speaks to Paul and say; “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads”. Jesus is telling Paul that he is fighting against God and this fight is a losing battle just as an ox is wasting its time by kicking against a sharp rod (a tool used to herd them in a particular direction).

4) Jesus reveals Himself to Paul; “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But get up and stand on your feet, for this is the purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you, rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:15-18)

5) There is a lot to consider here but the most important thing to see is the fact that Jesus was supposed to be dead! Paul’s acknowledgement of Jesus speaking to Him is a bold declaration that Jesus not only rose from the dead but He was genuinely the Messiah as promised in the Old Testament!

6) The purpose of Paul’s conversion was that he become the chief minister and witness to the fact that Jesus is the risen Savior and Messiah. It was this mission and commissioning by God to be an apostle, which brought Paul to this point.

7) Paul will go on further to describe that he did not fail to live up to what God called him to do.

- The testimony of his work (Acts 26:19-21)

1) Paul did exactly as he was instructed and preached the Gospel everywhere that he went.

2) His ministry took him from Damascus to Jerusalem, to Judea and to the Gentile regions of Macedonia. Paul was faithful to the task and it was this preaching of the Gospel that brought him to this point.

- Paul responds to the charges against him (Acts 26:22-23)
 - 1) The facts are clear; Christianity is not heretical (as the extremist Jewish religious leaders claimed), but it is in fact the fulfillment of Scripture.
 - 2) Paul establishes that the Old Testament states that Christ would suffer. (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53)
 - 3) Paul further claims that because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Acts 13:30-37) that all believers have hope (Psalm 22), and this hope, or this light, is the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is preached to all people (Jews and Gentiles).
 - 4) To proclaim such truth is not a crime and it in no way can be written off as a sect, cult or even a new religion because it is rooted in God's Word.
 - 5) There may be contradictions between Christianity and Judaism (for Judaism is a man made religion just like Islam, or Mormonism) – but there is no contradiction between Christianity and the Old Testament!

- 5. Governor Festus responds to Paul's claims (Acts 26:24-25)
 - Take note of how Governor Festus responds and **describe why you think he says**: "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."

 - Take note of Paul's response to Festus; "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth". **What can we learn from Paul's response?**

6. Paul gives witness about Christ and His resurrection to King Agrippa (Acts 26:26-29)
- There is much to learn from this exchange/apologetic from the Apostle Paul.
 - 1) Truth is true and it has only one meaning...in other words it cannot mean one thing to one person and something entirely different to another. If so then it ceases to be true.
 - 2) Paul refuses to separate the words of the Old Testament prophets from the words of Moses (The Law/Pentateuch) because they are inseparable. If one is false then the other is false.
 - 3) Paul further refuses to separate the Old Testament from the teachings of Jesus and he further refuses to accept the fact that Jesus is anything but the promised Messiah and the resurrection of Jesus proves that fact!
 - 4) Since Christianity cannot be separated from the teachings of the Old Testament and since the Old Testament is the Word of God – then the words of Jesus are true whether we believe them to be or not.
 - 5) It is Christianity that is the standard (not Judaism) we must compare all things for It is Truth and it is that Truth that will set us free. (John 8:31-32)
 - Paul knew full well that Agrippa knew of these matters and it was because he knew the teachings of not only the Old Testament but also the teachings of Jesus (The Way), that he was willing to hear Paul.
 - 1) Agrippa knew of the prophets
 - 2) Agrippa was under conviction by the Holy Spirit

7. The response of King Agrippa (Acts 26:30-32)

- The evidence of conviction by Agrippa is seen in his response; “In a short time you will persuade me to be a Christian”. (Acts 26:28 NASB)
 - It appears that Agrippa shows no sign of repentance nor does he show evidence of conversion to Christ (either from a Biblical account or a historical record), but he did hear a compelling account of the Gospel.
 - What Agrippa does do that is rather significant is:
 - 1) He declares Paul _____ and neither worthy of death or imprisonment. (Acts 26:31)
 - 2) He doesn’t succumb to the manipulations and wishes of the Jewish religious leaders and sends Paul on to Rome with the full protection of the military and thus securing Paul’s opportunity to continue the proclamation of the Gospel.
8. Although we do not have a record of Agrippa II or Bernice repenting of their sin and embracing Jesus Christ as Savior – we know that the opportunity was not wasted, for many others in that Assembly hall heard a clear presentation of the Gospel and it no doubt impacted their lives!
9. Paul will now set sail for Rome and while in route he will continue to preach and teach about Jesus Christ even in the midst of a dangerous storm.....stay tuned for the final chapters of the story that really has no end!

Concluding Remarks

1. Here are a few lessons we can learn from all of this:
 - Notice the immense _____ toward the gospel (John 15:18-25)
 - No religion or human philosophy is _____ when it comes to the gospel.
 - Notice the power of _____ and how it enslaves people and keeps them from being fair and just especially when things don't go their way. (John 8:34)
 - Notice the _____ of God in human affairs- even when we think we have the upper hand! (Daniel 4:17)
 - No matter how we are mistreated, our responsibility is to maintain a _____ relationship with those who rule us. (Romans 13:1-5)
2. What did you learn from seeing Paul go through such mistreatment? How would you respond?