**Jews in the Times of the Gentiles**

(Acts 25:1-12)

By Pastor Ricky Kurth

 A man who lay dying in a hospital said to his wife, “Sarah, we’ve been through so many difficult times together. When I lost my job, you were right there by my side. When I lost my parents in that car accident, you were right there by my side. And now that I’m on my deathbed, you’re here, right by my side. And—I’m starting to think you’re bad luck!”

 Well, speaking of going through difficult times, we’re living in what Luke 21:24 calls “the times of the Gentiles,” and they are difficult times to live in for unsaved Jews. And here in our text in Acts 25, we have a picture of how unsaved Jews *feel* about living in the times of the Gentiles. The picture begins in the first verse of Acts 25, where we read:

 **“Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem” (Acts 25:1).**

Now first of all, *Festus* was the name of the new Roman governor of Israel. The nation Israel had been governed by the Romans ever since Rome *conquered* Israel, along with all the othernations in the known world at that time. And Festus was *made* the new governor of Israel because the oldgovernor Felix was so *corrupt,* Rome had to replace him. In the last two verses of Acts 24, we saw an example of his corruption when he left Paul in prison *for two years* just on the off chance that Paul might bribe him to secure his release. I’d call that corrupt, wouldn’t you?

 Once Festus took office, it only took him three days to uncover Felix’s dirty little secret, and learn that he had an innocent man in custody. And at that point, Festus wasted no time in going to Jerusalem to ask the Jews what their beef was with Paul.

 But you’ll notice that it says that Festus “ascended” to Jerusalem. That’s because the city of Jerusalem has an elevation of 2,500 feet, or about half the height of the mile-high city of Denver. So the Bible always talks about going *up to* Jerusalem, and *down from* Jerusalem, no matter where you were in relation to north and south. And that made Jerusalem the city that the Lord talked about when He told the Jews,

 **“Ye are the light of the world. *A city that is set on an hill* cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, *but on a candlestick;* and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. *Let your light so shine before men,* that they may see your good works, *and glorify your Father which is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14-16).**

When God chose Israel to be His chosen people back in the Old Testament, He picked Jerusalem—a city on a hill—to be their capital city, to symbolize how He wanted Jerusalem to be His spiritual light to the “house” of the rest of the world. As I’m sure you’d agree, a mountain of 2,500 feet makes for a pretty good candlestick! God was hoping to use the light of the Jews to draw the Gentiles to Himself, and someday that will happen, as the prophet Isaiah predicted when he wrote,

 **“...the Gentiles *shall come to thy light...”* (Isaiah 60:3).**

But for that to have happened in the Old Testament, the people of Israel would have had to do the kind of good works that the Lord talked about in Matthew 5, to let their light shine before men. And Isaiah tried to get them to do that when he reminded them,

 **“...many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us *go up* to the *mountain* of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; *and He will teach us of His ways....*O house of Jacob, come *ye*,and let *us* walk in the light of the LORD” (Isaiah 2:3,5).**

If the Jews wanted to draw the Gentiles to God’s light, they were going to have to *walk* in God’s light. And that’s pretty good advice for you and I as well. Don’t expect God to be able to draw people to His light through you if *you’re* not walking in His light.

 But instead of being the shining light God wanted the Jews to be to the rest of the world, they did *bad* works instead, works that failed to draw the Gentiles to the light of their God. And when that happened, God allowed the Babylonians to *conquer* them, and that was *the beginning* of the times of the Gentiles.

 They’re *called* the times of the Gentiles because they are the times when the Gentiles rule the world instead of Israel, as God always intended. God always intended for Israel to be the *political* leader of the world as well as their *spiritual* leader. That explains why someday they’ll say,

 **“Christ...hath made us *kings and priests* unto...His Father” (Revelation 1:5,6).**

The times of the Gentiles *began* when Babylon began to rule the world, and they’ll *end* when the Lord comes to establish the kingdom of heaven on earth, as He said when He declared,

 **“Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, *until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled....*and then shall they see the Son of man coming in...power” (Luke 21:24,27).**

When the Lord comes *in power* (seven years after His coming to rapture us to heaven), He’ll establish the kingdom of heaven, and saved Jews will rule the world as kings, as the *pollical* leaders of the planet, and *teach* the world as priests, as the *spiritual* leaders of the world.

 And God offered Israel the chance to make that happen when Peter told the Jews,

 **“Repent ye therefore, and be converted...*and He shall send Jesus Christ*...whom the heaven must receive *until the times of restitution of all things*...in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed” (Acts 3:19-21,25).**

 At Pentecost, in the early chapters of Acts, God filled the Jews with His Holy Spirit so they could be the *spiritual* leaders of the world. And if the nation had just repented, they could have been the world’s *political* leaders as well, and in their seed all kindreds of the earth would have been blessed by their teaching. But instead, the times of the Gentiles continued, and *Rome* continued to rule the world.

 And we’re seeing that pictured here when the Roman ruler Festus ascended to Jerusalem; because by this time in the Book of Acts, *the Lord Jesus Christ* should have returned and ascended to Jerusalem to rule the nations.

 Now if you’re thinking I’m reading too much into Festus’ ascension to Jerusalem, did you notice that verse 1 says that he ascended *three days after* he took office. That’s when *the Lord* was supposed to ascend to rule the nations! Paul says He “rose again the third day” (ICor.15:4), and the Lord Himself had predicted,

 **“...the Son of man must...be killed, and *after* three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).**

After the Lord rose from the dead on the third day, He was supposed to ascend to Jerusalem and be a king and a priest to the world, just as the prophet Zechariah predicted when he wrote of Him:

 **“He shall...sit *and* *rule upon His throne...*a priest *upon His throne”* (Zechariah 6:13).**

If you know your Bible, you know that *Old Testament* priests didn’t sit on thrones. But the Lord will! He’ll be the political leader of the world as their king, and the spiritual leader of the world as their high priest. And saved Jews will be right there with Him, as kings and priests themselves.

 But right now, Israel is spiritually dead, and in need of the spiritual resurrection that the prophet Hosea predicted they’ll experience in Hosea 6 when he wrote,

 **“Come, *and let us return unto the LORD:* for He...will heal us...He will bind us up...*in the third day He will raise us up,* and we shall live in His sight” (Hosea 6:1,2).**

If you’re wondering what specifically that “third day” business is all about, compare what Hosea said to what Peter wrote in II Peter 3:8, where he said,

 **“...one day is with the Lord *as a thousand years...”***

It’s been 2,000 years—or two days—since the Lord rose from the dead, and Israel is going to rise from their *spiritual* death in the *third* thousandth year after that, and be identified with the Lord in His resurrection. Then they’ll ascend with Him to Jerusalem, where they’ll be identified with Him as the kings and priests of the world.

 And that would have happened in Acts 3 if the nation of Israel had just repented and turned to the Lord when Peter invited them to. When they didn’t, the Gentile Romans continued to rule the world, and we’re seeing that pictured here as Festus ascended to Jerusalem—the city that *the Jews* should have been reigning from by that time!

 Next, after Festus arrived in Jerusalem, verse 2 of our text reads:

 **“Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him” (Acts 25:2).**

Now here we see the leaders of Israel doing what they have *been* doing in the times of the Gentiles since Paul’s day; acting like *enemies* to Paul and the gospel of grace that he preached. But that doesn’t mean that unsaved Jews have been *God’s* enemies since Paul’s day, as Paul makes very clear when he spoke to the Romans about Israel and said:

 ***“As concerning the gospel,* they are enemies*...but*...*they are beloved* for the fathers’ sakes” (Romans 11:28).**

 Unbelievers in Israel may have crucified God’s Son, but they are still *beloved of God* for the sake of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They’re the fathers God promised the kingdom to, and someday they’ll get it, because God always keeps His promises. But in the meantime, unsaved Jews are the enemies of Paul’s gospel. If you want to know what God thinks of unsaved Jews, even the unsaved Jews who live in the current state of Israel, He thinks of them as *beloved enemies.* And he wants *us* to think of them that way as well.

 That begs the question of whose side God is on in Israel’s present war with Hamas. The answer is, they were attacked, and God is in favor of *any* nation defending their sovereignty and their people. He established nations in Genesis 10, and is nationalistic in His world view. It’s the antichrist who will favor internationalism.

 But there’s something I want you to understand about Israel’s claim that *God* gave them their land. God told Abraham,

 **“...all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, *and to thy seed for ever”* (Genesis 13:15).**

 *But,* Galatians 3:16 says,

 **“...to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, *And to seeds,* as of many; *but as of one,* And to thy seed, *which is Christ”***

That means when God promised that land to Abraham and his seed, He was promising it to *Christ,* and all the Jews who are *in* Christ. In other words, as far as God is concerned, that land belongs to *saved* Jews, not unsaved Jews.

 But *not* saved Jews living *today,* in the dispensation of grace. *They* are members of the *Body* of Christ. Their hope is not to rule the earth from Jerusalem in the kingdom someday. Their blessed hope is the same as ours, to be raptured to the kingdom of God in heaven, where they’ll rule angels (ICor.6:3).

 So saved Jews have no God-given right to that land today, and *unsaved* Jews never had *any* God-given right to that land. I know the United Nations gave that land to them in 1948, but Israel’s enemies could *nuke* that land, and God Almighty would have no trouble keeping His promise to give that land to saved Jews in the kingdom.

 Well, after these unsaved Jewish leaders acted like Paul’s enemies in verse 2 by informing Festus against Paul, they asked him for a favor:

 **“And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him” (Acts 25:3).**

Those unsaved rulers of Israel asked Festus to send for Paul in Caesarea—where Paul was out of their reach—and have him brought to Jerusalem, where they could lie in wait and *ambush him.*

 Now I’m sure they didn’t *say* to Festus, “Bring Paul here so we can kill him!” You can’t say that to the guy in charge of keeping the peace! They asked that he be brought to Jerusalem to ostensibly stand trial before them. It’s *Luke,* who wrote the Book of Acts, who’s telling us about this plot on the apostle’s life.

 So how’d Luke know about something that they didn’t dare mention aloud to Festus? The answer is, this is just another example of how Luke wrote *by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.* Luke knew their dirty little secret in the same way the prophets knew the future. The Spirit *told* them the future, and He told Luke about the ambush.

 But I think Festus smelled a rat. I think he suspected what they were up to, because he didn’t agree to bring Paul to Jerusalem.

 **“But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither” (Acts 25:4).**

I think Festus had heard about the 40 men who plotted to kill Paul earlier, and he figured they’d hatched another plot to kill him. And he was not about to go to the trouble and expense of gathering another 470 soldiers to protect Paul, like the Romans did in Acts 23. So he said in verse 5,

 **“Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him” (Acts 25:5).**

Now there’s a reason why Festus told those rulers to go testify against Paul if they were *“able”* to go. You see, by this time in the Book of Acts, Paul has been preaching for 30 years, and the unsaved rulers who wanted to *kill* him were getting older, and weren’t as able to *war* against Paul as they used to be.

 And that kind of *murderous* opposition to Paul’s gospel *continued* to decline in the Book of Acts, until Paul got to Rome at the *end* of Acts. Then, look what the Jews in Rome told Paul when he got there:

 **“We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came *shewed or spake* *any harm of thee”* (Acts 28:21).**

By the end of the Book of Acts, unsaved Jews had stopped trying to kill Paul. Now, they still opposed Paul *doctrinally,* as we’ll see when we get to Acts 28 in our studies. But they didn’t oppose him *murderously,* and they still don’t today.

 And the Book of Acts records that transition. That means the role of unsaved Jews in the times of the Gentiles *today* is that of *doctrinal* enemies of the gospel, and not as murderous enemies, as they were in the past. I should add that in saying this, I’m not vilifying unsaved Jews above unsaved Gentiles. They too are enemies of Paul’s gospel when they espouse and promote the heresies found among the cults, and even the doctrinal errors found in Roman Catholicism.

 Well, once Festus saw that these Jewish killers were getting so old that the candles on their birthday cakes contributed to global warming, he figured he’d better give them plenty of time to pack for their trip to Caesarea to testify against Paul, as we see when verse 6 of our text says,

 **“And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought” (Acts 25:6).**

There’s actually a symbolic reason why Festus tarried in Jerusalem that long. I mean, not even old geezers like me take *ten days* to pack for a trip!

 Did you notice that it doesn’t say that Festus tarried *11* days, or 12 or 13—like you’d think it would with Luke being the careful historian that he was. Instead, the Bible calls attention to the number *10* there because 10 is the number of *Gentile government* in the Bible. We know that 12 is the number of *Jewish* government, because the Lord told the 12 apostles,

 **“ye...shall sit upon *twelve thrones,* judging *the twelve tribes”* (Matthew 19:28).**

But 200 years before there *was* such a thing as a Jew, God instituted *Gentile* government with the man who was the *10th* man from Adam. God told Noah,

 **“Whoso sheddeth man's blood, *by man shall his blood be shed...”* (Genesis 9:6).**

That was the establishment of human government, and it came a hundred years before the time of the Jews began with the call of Abraham. God was giving men the right to make laws and punish each other if they didn’t obey those laws.

 Now He didn’t take the time to make a long list of laws and punishments. That is, He didn’t say, “For speeding you’ll have to pay a fine, and for stealing you’ll have to go to jail.” When God gave man the right to inflict the *ultimate* punishment of death, the right to mete out all *lesser* punishments was included in that.

 And Noah was the 10th from Adam, making the number 10 associated with *Gentile* government. But when Noah got drunk and proved he was unworthy to govern the world, God raised up a Gentile named *Pharaoh* in Egypt, and made him the *new* ruler of the world. But when he too proved himself unworthy to govern the world, God made *Israel* the “head” of the world when they left Egypt, *and ascended to Jerusalem.* And even before they got there, God associated His new government in Israel with the number 12, saying while they were still in the wilderness,

 **“When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance... He set the bounds of the people *according to the number of the children of Israel”* (Deuteronomy 32:8).**

And the number of the children of Israel was 12, what with their 12 tribes having descended from the 12 sons of Jacob.

 But when *the Jews* proved unfit to rule the world, God allowed Babylon to conquer them, and he made the Gentile nation of Babylon head of the world. And the number 10 immediately became prominent again, as we see in Daniel 1:2,11,12,14,20:

 **“In the third year...came Nebuchadnezzar king of Bab-ylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the LORD gave...Judah into his hand... Then said Daniel...Prove thy servants...*ten days...*So he...proved them *ten days*...and in all matters...the king...found them *ten times better* than all the magicians...”**

All those tens there associate the number 10 with the rule of a Gentile government over Daniel and the rest of the known world. Of course, that rule got ten times *better* when they let the Jews help!

 And the number 10 will *again* be associated with Gentile government in the Tribulation, as we see in this description of the antichrist, where John says,

 **“I...saw a beast...having...*ten crowns...”* (Revelation 13:1).**

And guess how many kings will be wearing those ten crowns in antichrist’s kingdom? John went on to say,

 **“...the ten horns which thou sawest *are ten kings,* which have received no kingdom as yet; *but receive power as kings one hour with the beast”* (Revelation 17:12).**

 And here in our text, Festus and *his* 10 days are a picture of how Gentiles like Festus were *still* ruling the world at a time when Israel *should* have been! And it’s also a picture of how Gentiles would continue to rule the world throughout the dispensation of grace.

 Well, as we read on, we see that *some* of those old geezer murderous Jews *were* able to make the 80 mile trip to Caesarea to testify against Paul in verse 7, where it says,

 **“And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove” (Acts 25:7).**

Now Luke doesn’t tell us what they charged Paul with, but we know it was the same old false charges they were *always* charging him with, because Paul *answered* those complaints by saying,

 **“While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all” (Acts 25:8).**

Those unsaved rulers had evidently levied the same old litany of grievances against Paul, grievances that he was able to dismiss out of hand.

 But I want you to notice that Paul answered “for himself,” instead of hiring a slick-talking lawyer to represent him. I point that out to press home the fact that even *without* a polished orator defending him, Paul’s accusers were *still* not able to make any of their charges stick!

 So you’d think that Festus would say, “Case dismissed!” But that’s not what happened in verse 9, where we read:

 **“But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?” (Acts 25:9).**

Now here we have to say what Shakespeare said. Something is rotten in Denmark. That’s an expression that means that something’s not quite right here, because unproven charges *should* be dismissed. But Festus *didn’t* dismiss them, “to do the Jews a pleasure.”

 Now, we’re not told *why* he wanted to do them a pleasure, but we know he wasn’t the first Roman ruler to want to please them. Back in Acts 12:1-3, we saw that

 **“Herod...killed James...*and because...* *it pleased the Jews,* he proceeded further to take Peter also.”**

And we saw the same kind of thing in our last lesson, where

 **“...Felix, *willing to shew the Jews a pleasure,* left Paul bound” (Acts 24:27).**

So it seems that as the *spiritual* power of the Jews declined throughout the Book of Acts, they gained some kind of *political* clout that made rulers want to stay on their good side. And I don’t know enough about history to know if that’s yet another picture of Jews in the times of the Gentiles. I *do* know that 84 nations are currently trying to stay on Israel’s good side by standing with them in their war with Hamas.

 *And,* I saw a Jewish web site recently that said that when Jews weren’t being persecuted over the centuries that Gentile kings would often borrow *money* from Jews to build cathedrals, outfit their armies, etc. So perhaps they have some kind of *financial* clout in the times of the Gentiles that we see as early as when Herod and Felix and Festus were trying to please them.
 I mean, think it through. If Festus wasn’t hoping the Jews would bribe him, why else would he ask Paul if he wanted to go stand trial again in Jerusalem after the Jews failed to make their case against him in Caesarea? He must suspect the Jews had money, and he was pretty sure they were willing to part with it to get at Paul.

 But Paul knew it would be dangerous to return to Jerusalem, so he turned Festus’ offer down in the next two verses of our text, saying:

 **“Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.**

 **“For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:10,11).**

Now that word “deliver” there is used many times in Scripture to talk about delivering a man *to death.* Perhaps the best known example is when the Lord said,

 **“...the Son of man shall be *delivered* unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall *deliver* Him to the Gentiles” (Mark 10:33).**

So Paul is saying to Festus, “If I’m innocent, no man can deliver me to die.” And he’s implying, “Not even you, Festus!” Paul knew that if Festus was suggesting he go be *retried* in Jerusalem, after being found not guilty in Caesarea, that Festus must have been hell-bent to *convict* him, just to please the Jews.

 So he invoked the right that *all* Roman citizens like himself had, the right of taking his case all the way to their version of the Supreme Court, with an appearance before the emperor of Rome. How sad was it that Paul knew he would get a fairer trial before the unsaved Gentile emperor of Rome than he’d get from God’s people in Israel! That’s just more evidence of the decline of the nation that we’re seeing throughout Acts.

 And then, in the last verse of our text, it says in verse 12:

 **“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go” (Acts 25:12).**

Now the “council” that the governor conferred with wasn’t the *Jewish* council. He already knew what *they* wanted. They wanted Paul brought to Jerusalem, where they could ambush him. So the context indicates that Festus conferred with his own Roman council of advisors. Luke actually used a different Greek word for “council” than the one he used in referring to the council of Jewish elders. In speaking of *them,* the Bible uses the Greek word *synedrion* or, as it is more commonly known as, the *sanhedrin.*

 But here, Festus conferred with his own Roman council before agreeing to let Paul appeal to Caesar, because he didn’t *want* to let Paul go to Rome to be tried by Caesar. He wanted to please the Jews by delivering Paul to them, so he gathered his advisors to search for a loophole in the Roman law that would *deny* a citizen’s right to appeal to Caesar.

 But the council couldn’t find one, so Festus said, “Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? *unto Caesar shalt thou go!”* And while we can’t tell the tone of his voice from what is written here, I believe you can hear the annoyance in his voice.

 You see, he not only wanted to please the Jews, the last thing he wanted to do was *displease* Caesar. This was his first trial, and if he had to bother the emperor of Rome with it, Caesar was bound to wonder whether the new governor of Israel had what it takes to govern well. But he has no choice, as his council had pointed out.

 In closing, I should add that there was *another* reason Paul wanted to go see Caesar. It’s because of something he said back in Acts 19:21, where

 **“Paul purposed in the spirit...to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, *I must also see Rome.”***

Now Paul didn’t want to go to Rome to take in the sights. He wanted to go to Rome *to testify for the Lord.* And that was something he knew *the Lord* wanted as well, for He later appeared to Paul and said,

 **“...as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, *so must thou...at Rome”* (Acts 23:11).**

So Paul didn’t say that he “must” see Rome because he was dying to see the Colosseum, or any of Rome’s other attractions. The same Lord who told him *not* to go to Jerusalem had given His okay on a ministry trip to Rome, and now that two years had passed since the Lord said that, Paul was champing at the bit to testify in Rome. And as a prisoner who didn’t seem to have any chance of being released, he figured the only way he was going to get there was by appealing to appear before Caesar in Rome.

 But this time as he traveled, he wasn’t going to have to pay his own expenses! *Rome* was going to pick up the tab for his meals, his ships, his mules, and any other expenses he might incur on a journey to the capital of the empire. Plus, he didn’t have to worry about any of the things he usually had to worry about when he traveled, things he listed when he told the Corinthians that he was

 **“In journeyings often...in perils *of robbers,* in perils *by mine own countrymen*, in perils *by the heathen*...in perils *among false brethren”* (II Corinthians 11:26).**

 Paul didn’t have to concern himself about *any* of those things, because Rome was again picking up the tab for his soldier bodyguards. He had the might of the Roman military protecting one of its citizens keeping him safe from any and all perils that might have otherwise come his way on a trip to Rome.

And you know what that is, don’t you? It’s yet another example of God being the God Paul described in Ephesians 3:19,20 when he wrote that

 **“God...is able to do exceeding abundantly *above all that we ask.”***

 And that’s the God who answers *your* prayer as well.