

The Book of Trials

No, the title is not in reference to the Book of Job but the Book of Acts. In this book there are trials which are informal, some are more like a riot than we normally associate with the word "trial", and some are formal governmental trials. We want to view these in this article.

Trials usually have some common elements; a charge or charges brought upon an accused, presentation of evidence to convict, presentation of defense, and a jury or judge to render a verdict. Strangely, some are missing in the trials in Acts.

In Acts 3, Peter heals a lame man at the Beautiful Gate entering the temple. This creates quite a commotion, which leads to Peter preaching about Jesus to the crowd. Almost immediately those associated with the temple come out and arrest Peter, Acts 4.3. The next day they assemble with a question for Peter, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" (Acts 4:7b) To which Peter in essence ask what was the charge? Was it for healing a lame man, for doing a good work? One problem the enemies of the Gospel have is coming up with a coherent charge. They have the same problem with Jesus as they make up charges by false witnesses. In Acts 4, Peter answered their question, "let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole." (Acts 4:10) The "jury" in Acts 4, was pretty much the same people who had convicted Jesus just a little while earlier. One problem they faced is the miracle itself as the lame man could testify about him being healed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Acts 3.6.

In Acts 5, the location is still Jerusalem, and the participants are the Apostles and the Jewish authorities. Once again Peter and the other Apostles are teaching, baptizing people into the Lord, and performing miracles. The number of believers is increasing which angers the High Priest and those with him. Once again, the Apostles are arrested and threatened but no formal charge is leveled against them.

While not a formal trial; Acts 11 does contain a charge made against Peter. "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" Acts 11:3 This occurs at Jerusalem after Peter has preached to and baptizes the household of Cornelius, in Acts 10. To which Peter testifies about seeing a vision and being called to the household of Cornelius. His preaching to them and the Holy Spirit coming upon that Gentile household. "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" 18 When they heard these things, they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life." (Acts 11:17-18). At this time, we have a charge, evidence presented and a verdict.

Going on to Acts 21, Paul starts to enter the temple with an uprising occurs. Falsely they accuse Paul of defiling the temple, v. 28. Paul is arrested and questioned by the commander. Next Paul addresses those who are accusing him of wrong doing. Paul about his Jewish upbringing, His persecution of "the Way", and his conversion. Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus and about Ananias coming to him. 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' (Acts 22:16) This "trial" ends when the crowd erupts and the Roman commander taking Paul from the crowd. One could argue Acts 23 is simply a continuation of the previous day's trial as Paul answers the Jewish authorities and ends with the following events; "Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks." (Acts 23:10)

Acts 24 Paul appears before Felix but remains in prison. The reason Felix does not release Paul is stated. "Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore, he sent for him more often and conversed with him." (Acts 24:26)

The next Roman authority to hear Paul is Festus. While at Caesarea, Paul appears before the Jewish leaders. When he come, the Jews who came from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove, while he answered for himself, "Neither against the law

of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all." (Acts 25:7-8) Once again the charges are proven to be false but Paul remains in prison. Having appealed to Caesar, due to his Roman citizenship, Paul is out of Festus' hands.

The final trial is in Acts 26 as Paul appears before King Agrippa. As one reads the end of Acts 25, this has all the makings of a show trial. "So, the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus' command Paul was brought in." (Acts 25:23) This time Paul turns the table on the Roman King as he speaks of his conversion and ends speaking directly to the king. "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." (Acts 26:27) Agrippa ends with the words "almost you persuade me to be a Christian" verse 28. Both Festus and Agrippa acknowledge Paul's innocence. "When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; 31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." 32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Acts 26:30-32)

Throughout the Book of Acts we have numerous trials with the verdict being the same, Jesus is the Son of God as proven by the Scriptures, His death, burial, resurrection, the miracles of the Apostles, and their testimony. – Dennis Tucker