

32. Festus Succeeds Felix and Asks Agrippa to Hear Paul: Acts 25

Acts 24 closed in verse 27, telling of how Festus succeeded Felix: "27 When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison."

Even as he left office Felix was still seeking political gain by giving the Jews what they wanted which was to keep Paul in prison. This transferred the responsibility for Paul to Festus.

The chart—*Events during Paul's Imprisonment*—at the right covers the events in Paul's life as a prisoner, in

chronological order, during his time of imprisonments in Jerusalem and in Caesarea

Acts 25 will show how Festus handled Paul's case, prior to sending him to Caesar and how he sought an advantage by including King Agrippa. Paul's defense before Agrippa will come in Acts 26.

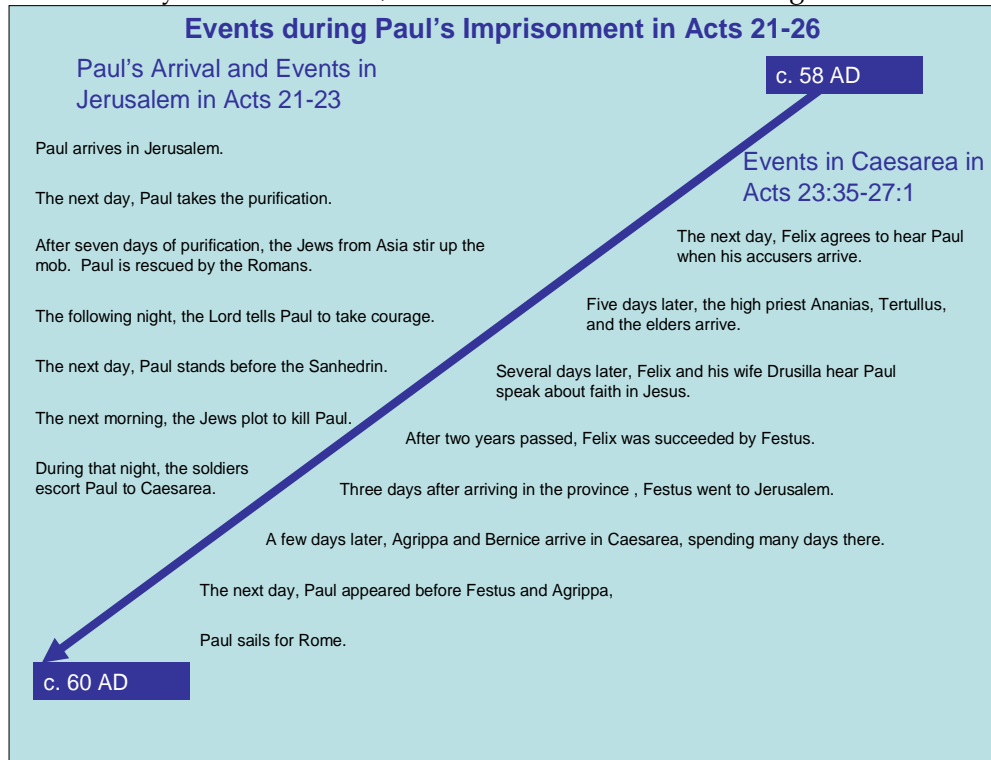
Jews Present Charges against Paul and Plot to Kill Him

Acts 25:1-5

25 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3 They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. 4 Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5 Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong."

The Jewish leaders immediately pressed Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem. Once again, the Jewish leaders plan to kill Paul. The first occasion was when the Jews seized Paul near the temple in Acts 21:31: "31 While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar." The second occasion was when forty men conspired to kill him in Acts 23:13-15:

13 More than forty men were involved in this plot. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. 15 Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him



before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here."

Drawing on their political influence, the Jewish leaders still plot to kill Paul by requesting that Festus move Paul, so that they can kill him along the way. Festus, as Felix before him, asks the Jewish leaders to press charges against Paul in Caesarea, thus saving Paul's life.

Paul Defends Himself before Festus and Appeals to Caesar

Acts 25:6-8

6 After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him. 7 When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.

8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

As it should have been, the burden of proof was on the Jewish leaders. However, when Festus convened the court, the Jewish leaders brought many serious charges, but they could not prove them.

Paul's defense was plain and straightforward: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."

Acts 25:9-12

9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?"

10 Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

Even though the Jews could not prove their charges, the politics of the day ruled. Festus, once again like Felix, sought the favor of the Jews, asking Paul to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul, perhaps knowing that the Jews would try once again to kill him, refused to be tried in Jerusalem. Paul's defense asserted that he had a right to be tried in Caesar's court, that he had done nothing wrong to the Jews, and that no one has a right to hand him over to the Jews. By saying to Festus, "As you yourself know very well," Paul placed the burden on Festus to go against the Jews, presenting Festus with the same dilemma as the one Felix had. How does one please the Jews and uphold Roman law at the same time?

Before Festus could respond, Paul appealed to Caesar. Even though Festus said that Paul would go to Caesar, he continued to seek a way to please the Jews.

Festus Discusses Paul's Case with King Agrippa

Acts 25:13-15

13 A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. 14 Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There

is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. 15 When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned.

King Agrippa here is actually Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, who was wicked in his persecution of the church. Herod Agrippa I died in 44 AD after having James put to death in Acts 12:1-3:

12 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

The Lord struck Herod Agrippa I with a horrible death in Acts 12:21-24:

21 On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. 22 They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." 23 Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died.

24 But the word of God continued to increase and spread.

Agrippa (II), who came to power in 48 AD, favored the Jewish people and espoused their causes. By 55 AD, the Romans extended the territory of his rule to restore the kingdom to the borders, as they had been in the time of Herod the great, shown on the map below.

Agrippa treated the Jews well and was indeed a Jew himself. His aunt was the Jewess Drusilla, the wife of Felix, who had also shown great interest in Paul. When Paul appears before Agrippa, Agrippa is influential with both Jews and Romans—an influence that will quickly wane in the coming decade, as the Jewish rebellion against Rome heightens and then climaxes with the destruction of Jerusalem just 10 years later in 70 AD. [Notes on this paragraph were taken from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.]

Festus brought the case of Paul up before King Agrippa, stating that the Jews had brought charges and wished that Paul be condemned.



Acts 25:16-17

16 "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. 17 When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. 18 When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. 19 Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. 20 I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21 When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar." 22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him."

Festus informed Agrippa of the events that had transpired concerning Paul. From Festus' point of view, the Jews had not charged Paul with any crimes as he had expected. The points of dispute were about their own religion and about the resurrection of Jesus (a dead man who lives). Although Festus had already decided to hold Paul until he could send him to Caesar, Agrippa chose to hear him for himself. They set the hearing for the next day.

Festus Has No Definite Charges against Paul to Report to Caesar

23 The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27 For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."

The respect and favor with which the Romans viewed Agrippa show in the way the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city came out for this audience with the king. Festus, caught between the figurative "rock and a hard place," sought only to find something that he could write about Paul to send on to the Roman court. By his own admission, Paul had done nothing wrong. All the efforts of Felix and Festus to placate the Jews had gone wrong. Even though these two governors sought the favor of the Jews by keeping the innocent Paul in prison, relations between Rome and Jerusalem will continue to degenerate over the next 10 years, culminating with the Jewish rebellion and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Finally, during that decade, Agrippa had to give up on the Jews and side with the Romans, who scattered the Jews everywhere because of the destructive war.

Acts 26:1

26 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

Acts 26 begins with Agrippa giving Paul permission to speak. His defense will follow.