

Porcius Festus dealings with Paul

We now find some more of what happened to Paul while in Caesarea in ACTS 25 & 26. As we get into these next two chapters of ACTS we find the Biblical narrative of Luke's history of the Apostle Paul once again picking up pace. Conybeare and Howson in their book "The Life and Epistles of St. Paul" spend three pages explaining how they determined the date of the recall of governor Felix, and the accession of Porcius Festus. Using several avenues of historical research they conclude that Festus became governor in the summer of 60 A.D. Sometime in the fall of 60 A.D. Paul was sent to Rome, which is recorded in ACTS 27:1. Thus we find that the events recorded in ACTS 25 & 26 occur within an approximate four month time span from late summer to early fall in 60 A.D.

Before we focus in on Porcius Festus dealings with Paul, let's examine some of what we know of him from history. The Romans had a common practice of taking names from brute creatures, and the name "Porcius" came from hogs, or swine, and is interrupted to mean "swinish." "Festus" on the other hand signifies joyful and cheerful, and by some renderings Festus means: "festival," or "festal," "festive and joyful." History records very little of Festus beyond what we know of him in scripture. This is probably due to the fact that he died within two years of becoming governor. The Emperor, Nero sent Festus to Caesarea to succeed governor Felix. He was sent to clean up the mess left behind by Felix in his dealings with the Jews, and the over all consensus of Festus is that he ruled in a fairer manner than did Felix before him. This will become more apparent when we get into the scriptural narrative of ACTS 25 & 26.

During his approximate two years as governor of Judaea one other historic event took place in Jerusalem concerning the Jews and Festus, which helped define Festus' leadership. Josephus records that King Agrippa built himself a rather large dining-room in the royal palace at Jerusalem, which had a great view of the city of Jerusalem, including what went on in the temple court. When the Jews of Jerusalem discovered that Agrippa, and his dinner guest could observe all that they did while in the temple grounds, they built a high wall to prevent his watching their activities, which they considered sacred, and private. This high wall also hindered the Roman guard from seeing the temple grounds from their observation post of Fort Antonia, which was important to them, especially during the time of the many great feasts the Jews held there. Of course both King Agrippa, and governor Festus were displeased at the construction of this wall, so Festus ordered them to take down that wall. The Jews refused to do so, and sent ambassadors to Rome to see the Emperor Nero about this matter, stating in part that they could no longer endure if any part of the temple should be demolished. Festus actually gave the Jews permission to go to Rome and petition Nero, for he wanted to resolve this issue peacefully if possible. This shows us that Festus wanted to maintain some what reasonable relationships with the Jews. The Caesar, Nero, when he finally heard what the Jews had to say concerning the wall they had built, forgave them for building the wall in the first place, and allowed them to let the wall stand. It is noted in history that this was done by Nero to gratify Poppea, Nero's wife, who was a Jewish proselyte, who persuaded Nero to let the wall stand. A short time after word got back to Festus of Nero's ruling, he died, having been in office only two years.

The rest of what we know about Porcius Festus is recorded in ACTS 25 & 26. As we get into our verse by verse studies of these chapters, we will quickly see a different attitude displayed by Festus than Felix showed in his dealings with the Apostle Paul. We will also see how that the Jews of Jerusalem had not swerved in their animosity against Paul.

ACTS 25:1 *Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.* Festus replaced Felix as governor of Judaea, and at that time the residence of the governor was in Caesarea. The seat of the Jewish Sanhedrin was in Jerusalem, so in a effort to make acquaintance with the Jews of Jerusalem, Festus traveled from Caesarea unto Jerusalem to find out the state of affairs there. This journey took place three days after Festus took the office of governor. Festus was quickly trying to determine the complexion, and nature of the government of the Jews for the purpose of administrating better justice in their affairs than governor Felix

had done. After all it was the Jews who were the most influential of all the people in Judaea, and their center of influence was Jerusalem.

After arriving in Jerusalem we read in ACTS 25:2 *Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, 3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.* The ...*high priest and the chief of the Jews...* were none other than the same Jewish Sanhedrin whom Paul had twice before appeared; once in ACTS 23:1-10 in Jerusalem, and once in ACTS 24:1-22 before governor Felix in Caesarea. As the new governor Festus inquired of the Sanhedrin their problems, and concerns, and how he could best help solve them, Paul's name quickly came up. Remember two years had passed since they had gone down to Caesarea to try and get custody of Paul, and they still wanted to get their hands on him, but their real purpose was to kill Paul. Our text above records their conversation to governor Festus like this: *...the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem...* . Without a doubt they again brought up their accusations against Paul, which in the least included their former complaints of: (1) accusing Paul of causing dissension and disturbances among all the Jews throughout all the Roman Empire; (2) charging Paul of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; and (3) accusing Paul of an attempt to profane the Temple in Jerusalem. They probably added to this list other unfounded charges in their discourse with Festus, heavily accusing Paul of so many things that Festus would feel obligated to grant their request, especially if Festus was truly interest in achieving any favour with the Jews. After all he was they new governor, and wished to achieve a positive impression upon the Jews, or so they thought. It is also suggested that some where along the way these very same Jews may have offered large sums of money to Festus if he only would have Paul tried in Jerusalem.

Luke interjects in verse 3 that the real motive for requesting Paul being moved from Caesarea unto Jerusalem was so the Jews could be *...laying wait in the way to kill him*. Some where early on in his administration governor Festus figured this out too, for ACTS 25:24 notes the following statement made between Festus and King Agrippa some days later in Caesarea: *And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.* We see in these verses the underlying hatred that the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem had for the Apostle Paul.

This kind of hatred Paul was familiar with, and had wrote of it before, stating in 1 THESSALONIANS 2:14 *For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: 15 Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: 16 Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.* Paul also wrote in ROMANS 12:14 *Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not...* thus we glimpse again the heart of a full overcomer.

Paul had no idea that all of the preceding was taking place while governor Festus introduced himself to the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. However as time went on Paul would become aware of the continued intensity with which the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem sought his demise.

In ACTS 25:4 & 5 we get a better picture of what kind of man; what kind of leader; what kind of governor Festus was. ACTS 25:4 *But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. 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.* We see here that Festus was rational, reasonable, firm with his decision, and didn't react quickly to popular opinion, nor did he really step on any toes here either. We must keep in mind that at this point in time Festus most likely had little idea who Paul was, or his importance, even though he was still being held prisoner in Festus' custody. If Festus did know anything of Paul it was to note that Felix had left him bound, and that he was also in the care of a centurion. Some where along the way Festus

must have been made aware that Paul was also a Roman citizen. In verse 3 the Jews requested a favour of Festus, and in verses 4 and 5 made it known that his administration wouldn't be giving up any uncondemned prisoner as a mere favour. Also implied here in verses 4 and 5 is that a fair trial would be in order. Thus we see here that after this visit to Jerusalem Festus now knew more of Paul, and his importance to the Jews of Jerusalem, yet he wanted to decide for himself what to do with Paul, and he would do so on his own terms, not theirs.

Festus appeased the Jews somewhat however when he requested that they come back down to Caesarea to have Paul's case heard again; to find out for himself *...if there be any wickedness in him*. So he said to them 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*. In other words here in verse 4 & 5 Festus was making known that he would be returning to Caesarea shortly, and invited the influential Jews, their leaders, those whom they considered to be in authority, to come with him and accuse Paul, in proper form, and in accordance to the rules of Roman law, with proof and evidences of his wrong doing. One rendering of verse 5 reads: "I suggest that your leaders accompany me, and if he has done anything wrong prosecute him there."

Meanwhile more than ten days pass before Festus returns again to Caesarea, as is noted in verse 6. *ACTS 25:6 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*. By now Festus has been the governor about two weeks. He had spent this amount of time in Jerusalem to better acquaint himself with the issues of the Jews in Jerusalem. Among the most pressing items on their agenda is the Apostle Paul, manifest by the fact that they did in fact travel to Caesarea as request by governor Festus, and we see that the very next day the Apostle Paul was commanded to be brought before Festus. This again emphasizes the fact that the Apostle Paul was still one of the biggest concerns of the Jerusalem Jews. Festus has heard their complaints for these ten days, and in that time many more varied accusations against Paul must have been brought to his attention. Festus must have been led to believe that the Apostle Paul was involved in some kind of political, or criminal movement against the government of Rome.

In *ACTS 25:7-12* we see further evidence of the kind of ruler Festus was. As we read these verses note how Festus pacifies the Jews, and at the same time honors Paul's request. Remember also that the Apostle Paul has now had two more years to think about his defense, knowing that he has already stated all that he need to say, having held nothing back.

ACTS 25:7 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. 8 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. 9 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? 10 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. 11 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. 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

These verses give a quick overview of what took place when Paul is brought before the new Governor Festus, where we find Paul appealing unto Caesar. Verses 13-21 fill in some detail from Festus' perspective on what is missing in the above account, which will help us better understand the over all picture of what took place when Paul was initially brought before governor Festus.

ACTS 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. 14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: 15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against

him. 17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. 18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: 19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. 20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

(The words "Caesar," and "Augustus" were both used interchangeably to describe the Roman Emperor. Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus was the first Roman Emperor, ruling from 31 B.C. until he died in 14 A.D. His names "Augustus" and "Caesar" were adopted by every subsequent Roman Emperor. Also the month of August was named in his honor also.)

Before we go back up to verse 7 and explore in greater detail what was happening as Paul was brought before Festus, let's again note that the Apostle Paul had held prisoner at Caesarea for two years now, and during these two years he had no doubt spent some time pondering what he would do the next time he was called before the governor in a trial like setting. Paul knew that one of his rights as a Roman citizen would be an appeal unto a higher court, which would in his case be before Caesar. So Paul in verse 11, after determining that the governor wasn't going to release him, utters these words: *...I appeal unto Caesar.* Festus has no choice but to grant Paul's well thought out request, and replies in verse 12 *...Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

With the knowledge in mind that Paul has appealed unto Caesar, let's now go back and put the information we have now learned from verses 7-21 together in a manner that brings greater understanding to us as what took place here. As we get to the point where Paul is brought before governor Festus, let us keep in mind that the Jews of Jerusalem had been pestering Festus about having a judgment against Paul ever since Festus had gone up to Jerusalem. Festus himself told King Agrippa this about Paul in verses 14-17. *ACTS 25:14 ...There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: 15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. 17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.*

This takes us back to verse 7 where Paul was initially brought before Festus, his Jewish accusers being once again face to face with Paul. In verse 7 we see that the accusing Jews from Jerusalem *...stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.* We are not told if Tertullus the orator came with them or not. Perhaps he did, but if so the end result was that all the complaints against Paul could not be proven by them, as was the case when they initially brought charges against Paul before governor Felix some two years earlier. No doubt Festus demanded of them some proof of their many grievous complaints against Paul, but they couldn't prove any of their charges to be true. Festus wasn't easily going to be persuaded by these accusing Jews.

Festus then let Paul answer for himself in verse 8, where it is noted that Paul once again made it clear that *...Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.* Again the original charges against Paul were: (1) accusing Paul of causing dissension and disturbances among all the Jews throughout all the Roman Empire; (2) charged Paul of being a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes; and (3) accused Paul of an attempt to profane the Temple in Jerusalem. These really are the same charges made before, back in ACTS 24:5 & 6, where Tertullus stated: *For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: 6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.*

When these charges could be proved, the Jews of Jerusalem must have made some additional charges against Paul, which caught Festus off guard a little, and is explained

in ACTS 25:18 & 19, as Festus explains to King Agrippa what took place. ACTS 25:18 *Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: 19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

Obviously then some time elapses between verse 8 and verse 9 where once again Paul gets to tell more about Jesus, and His resurrection: this after being questioned by the Jews about Jesus, and the resurrection of the dead. Apparently Festus had never heard such things before, for he noted above (ACTS 25:18 & 19) to King Agrippa that *...they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.* How much time was spent by Festus in pondering both sides of what he had just heard we are not told. Comparing verse 9 with verse 20 we see that Festus gave Paul the option to go up to Jerusalem to answer these Jewish questions, which Festus termed *...of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.* However ACTS 25:20 informs us that Festus himself *...doubted of such manner of questions,...* leaving us to wonder at the conviction in his voice when he asked Paul in verse 9 *...Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?* ACTS 25:9 also gives a better perspective on the kind of politician that Festus was, for even though he doubted in his own mind that the accusations of the Jews against Paul contained any merit at all, Festus also showed that he was *...willing to do the Jews a pleasure...* . We also see in verse 9 that Festus was willing himself to go back up to Jerusalem to hear these very same charges against Paul before their whole Jewish Sanhedrin council. I think that all of the parties involved here knew that this was never going to happen.

ACTS 25:9 reads: *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 25:20 verifies again this question was asked of Paul, for Festus tells King Agrippa: *And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.* In ACTS 25:16 Festus had already informed Paul's accusing Jews that: *It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.* Paul had now answered these charges, again, this time before Festus and the Jews, face to face, but Festus has now asked one question himself of Paul: *Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?* Paul later wrote in COLOSSIANS 4:6 *Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.* It is with such a heart attitude that Paul gives answer to Festus' question in ACTS 25:10 & 11: *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. 11 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.* Let's look at this answer a little closer.

In verse 10 Paul begins his answer by making several points, noting that he should be standing where he is, before Caesar's' judgment seat, that Festus was now representing, and in charge of, not in Jerusalem where Festus was asking him to go. Paul admits to having done nothing wrong, facts that the previous governor Felix should have made Festus aware of first of all, and facts that this trial had already proved to be true. Implied in his answer is that governor Festus must have also known that Paul should now be released, immediately. In verse 11 Paul continues to admit no wrong doing, stating that if he was an offender, or having done something worthy of death, he wasn't afraid to die. Later Paul wrote in PHILIPPIANS 1:21 *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* Paul by this point in his life had all ready written in ROMANS 14:7 *For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. 8 For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.* Recall again his words found in ACTS 20:24 that express the heart attitude of a full overcomer: *But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.* So we see that Paul wasn't afraid to go home and meet the Lord, but it wasn't his time yet either. The

next part of Paul's answer to Festus informs him that no man can take it into their hands to deliver him into the hands of the Jews, whose only intent it is to kill him: *...no man may deliver me unto them.*

The last statement Paul make unto governor Festus is his final answer of Festus' question: *I appeal unto Caesar.* This answer of Paul's accomplishes several things. First it set's a new direction for Paul to go, that is to Rome to appear before the Roman Emperor. However back in ACTS 23:11 the Lord had already told Paul that he would be going to Rome! (ACTS 23:11 *And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*) Secondly Paul's answer to Festus of appealing unto Caesar immediately rules out his going up to Jerusalem again to appear before Festus and the Jewish Sanhedrin. So Paul's answer immediately accomplishes a third thing, and that being putting the Jerusalem Jews in a place where they could no longer get to Paul. Forth, Paul's appeal unto the higher court of Caesar gets governor Festus off the hook as what to do with Paul, though the governor himself didn't immediately recognize this fact, as evidenced by what we next read in verse 12. Fifth, Paul's answer essentially ends these proceedings, which also becomes evident next in verse 12.

ACTS 25:12 *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.* How long Festus *...conferred with the council...* isn't told us. The council Festus conferred with was not the Jewish Sanhedrin council who had been badgering him for the last ten days or so. Festus' council was composed of Roman lawyers, and associate judges, who were his counselors in the administration of Roman justice. This unknown group of associates probably consisted of both military and civilian members, all familiar with different aspects of Roman law. While all of this conferring was going on, we must assume that the Jewish lawyers were arguing an opposite cause, reasoning that Paul's case should be moved back to Jerusalem. The fact that Paul was a Roman citizen, with Roman rights, quickly changed the complexion of their argument. Thus in the end it was determined by Festus and his council that since Paul had appealed unto Caesar, his request should be granted. Consequently the opposing Jews from Jerusalem were given a decision that dashed their hopes of killing Paul. So by Festus stating to Paul *...Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go...* Festus was announcing to the Jews of Jerusalem that were before him, that he would have liked to deliver Paul unto them as a favour, as they had requested, but since Paul had a right to appeal unto Caesar, thus it was no longer in his power to deliver Paul unto them. To Paul, Festus was granting his request, stating loudly to him that since he had appealed unto Caesar, *...unto Caesar shalt thou go.*

Thus ended these proceedings, as Festus later explained to King Agrippa in verse 21: *...when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.* So we see that Festus still kept Paul in his care until such time as he could arrange to properly send him to the Emperor. It isn't until ACTS 28:17-21 some months later that we find the Jews of Jerusalem had lost interest in pursuing their case against Paul to the Emperor. ACTS 28:17 *And it came to pass, that after three days (of Paul's arrival in Rome) Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. 20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. 21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.* Obviously the Jews of Jerusalem weren't willing to carry their plot to assassinate Paul beyond the region of Judaea. This would have been nearly an impossible endeavor for them to pursue any further anyway, for they had no idea of when any of these travels of Paul were going to take place, nor did Festus himself at the time of ACTS 25. From what we just read in ACTS 28, Paul's dealings with the Jews of Jerusalem were now over.