

Resurrection Life of Jesus Church

BACK TO THE BOOK OF ACTS (BBA)

RLJ-1186

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PART 46: PAUL'S PRISON MINISTRY

POLITICAL LEADERS DURING THIS TIME

The Roman emperor during this time was Nero, who ruled from 54 to 68 A.D. It was Nero who appointed Festus in 60 A.D. to replace Felix as governor of Judea. During his reign as emperor, Nero had his mother and wife murdered and gave the order to execute the apostle Paul. Nero was driven from his throne in 68 A.D. and the Roman Senate voted that he should be executed as a slave by crucifixion and whipping until he died. Nero fled from Rome and committed suicide by cutting his own throat with a knife.

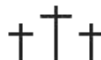
According to historical records, Festus Porcius died in 62 A.D. and only ruled Judea for two years. That is all the information I could find on him despite searching through several historical resources.

In chapter 25 of the Book of Acts we come across King Agrippa or Herod Agrippa II. He was the Roman vassal king over a portion of what today is Syria with Caesarea Philippi as his capitol. He was a descendant of Antipater, who was an Idumaeon (Edomite) and not a blood descendant of Abraham. Agrippa was born in 27 A.D. and was sent to Rome as a teenager to be educated. In 48 A.D., his uncle, Herod, who was King of Chalcis died and Agrippa was appointed by Emperor Claudius to become the next governor of this kingdom located further north in Syria.

It is interesting to note that while his kingdom was north of Palestine, Agrippa was also appointed as the superintendent of the temple in Jerusalem and the manager of its treasury. This gave him the power to remove the Jewish high priest at any time. Agrippa exercised this authority frequently and became very unpopular with the Jews in Judea.

Agrippa had three sisters, Bernice, Mariamne and Drusilla. There was much immorality and incest in the family. As a young woman, Bernice married her uncle Herod. When Herod died, Bernice was 20 years old and moved into the house of her unmarried brother Agrippa. It didn't take long for rumors to start that the siblings were living in incest, and in order to clear her name, Bernice married Polemo, King of Pontus, but divorced him after some time and returned to live with her brother. When King Agrippa traveled on public functions, Bernice always traveled with him and was addressed as "Queen Bernice."

These are some of the characters mentioned in chapter 25 of the Book of Acts and we can see that the apostle Paul had to again deal with evil men and women who were steeped in sin.



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FESTUS AS THE JUDGE OF PAUL

The Jewish leadership in Jerusalem was determined to have Paul killed, and as soon as they realized that there would be a new governor over Judah, they moved quickly. **Acts 25:1-3**

Most likely Festus knew about the assassination plan by the Jewish leadership and denied the request for Paul to be brought to Jerusalem. **verses 4-5**

Reading the account of events in the Book of Acts we can see that the case against Paul was a very sensitive political case and Festus realized he was walking in a minefield. Felix lost his governorship because the Jews put a lot of pressure on the political leaders in Rome and simultaneously kept up all kinds of resistance and trouble in Judea.

Festus was a politician and was concerned about keeping his job; therefore, he started the court proceedings as soon as he came back from Jerusalem. **verse 6**

It is interesting to note that the Jews from Jerusalem were not shy but presented all kinds of charges which could not be substantiated. The descendants of these Jews are doing the same thing today when set out to destroy a person whom they consider dangerous to the security of Israel and Jewish causes by initiating smear campaigns or filing lawsuits, which they know they cannot win, but are intended to bankrupt a person or organization defending itself. **verse 7**

This has been the tactic of Abraham H. Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and Morris Dees, founder of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). Over the years they have attacked all kind of organizations and individuals they do not like, filing lawsuits against them and “bleeding them to death financially” in court. Most of the lawsuits are tossed out but it still costs a fortune to defend against these Jewish guardians of “hatred, prejudice, bigotry and discrimination.”

Paul was able to defend himself against every accusation. **verse 8**

POLITICS

Festus didn't care for the welfare of Paul and thought that he could score some political points with the Jews if he allowed Paul to travel to Jerusalem to start the whole process over again. The Roman emperor and senate were not concerned about human rights or justice for individuals; they only wanted peace in the different conquered nations so that tax money would flow freely in to the Roman coffers. Thus, it would look good for Festus if he could get along with the Jewish leadership and keep the peace in Judea. Festus was willing to sacrifice Paul for political gain. **verse 9**

The Holy Spirit would not allow Paul to be taken back to Jerusalem and killed. He moved upon Paul to appeal to Rome and be judged by Caesar. **Verses 10-12**

ENTER AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

We get a rare insight into the social life of the political leaders of that day. Just like today, political leaders need friends in high places to help them if the political

climate turns sour. Agrippa and his sister Bernice paid an official state visit to the new governor of Judea. **verse 13**

Festus used this occasion to discuss the case of Paul with Agrippa since he was of the Jewish faith. **verses 14-21**

Once Agrippa heard the story of Paul, he decided to see and hear Paul speak. **verse 22**

The hearing was turned into an official ceremony in which all the political and military leaders of Caesarea were present, including “Queen Bernice.” **verse 23**

FESTUS DECLARATION OF PAUL’S INNOCENCE

In this sham of a trial, Governor Festus declared Paul to be innocent of all charges, but refused to set him free. When Paul appealed to Caesar, Festus didn’t know what kind of charges to write up and admitted his own failure as a judge. **verses 24-27**

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS CHAPTER?

1. No man could derail God’s purpose of making sure that the political scandal of the Jewish leadership trying to kill Paul would be known in this portion of the Roman Empire. God is in control; He watches kings (political leaders) and judges. **Psalm 2:1-12**
2. God extended His grace to Festus, Agrippa, Bernice and all the leadership in Caesarea to hear the Gospel and be saved. This type of people would normally never attend a Christian gathering, so God used Paul as a prisoner to preach to this “upper and out” crowd. **Acts 10:30-35**
3. God knew that Jesus’ return to this earth would be thousands of years later but Paul and the other apostles thought it was imminent. God wanted the Gospel to develop from a local movement among the Jewish people to a movement throughout the entire world. In order for this to happen, it had to begin in the Roman Empire. These court proceedings moved Paul’s case all the way to Rome and before the emperor himself. **Matthew 10:18**
4. When we look at Paul’s life and all that he had to go through, we more fully appreciate and understand his words. **Romans 8:28-31**
5. There isn’t anything in your life that God doesn’t know about; He knew everything about you before creation ever began. He has a plan for every human being, and if we trust in him and call upon Him, God will reveal His plans for us and make sure they take place. **Matthew 6:25-34**

Remember, it’s not so important how you begin your life after salvation, but how you finish it!

DO YOU HAVE AN EAR TO HEAR WITH?