



[Acts 25:13-22](#)

Festus the procurator consults King Agrippa II

Date: 70 CE to 130 CE

Language: Greek

Category: New Testament

Title of work: The Acts of the Apostles

Reference:

25:13-22

Commentary:

In this passage the Jewish client king, Herod Agrippa II (55-100 CE), and his sister Berenice (who would later become lover to the future emperor Titus, but be dismissed by him before his ascension to the throne due to her unpopularity amongst the Romans) make a courtesy call to Porcius Festus, the procurator of Judea (between 59 and 62 CE). The episode is interesting both in light of the relationship between the Roman procurator and the Jewish king, and for what it reveals about the Lukan author's attitude to Judaism and Roman law. Josephus narrates that Agrippa II was unpopular particularly amongst the Jewish chief priests in Jerusalem because he built an elaborate dining hall in the palace which overlooked the Temple, violating the custom that Temple activities not been seen from the outside. Agrippa maintained a good relationship with Festus, however, and according to Josephus, when the chief priests built a wall to obscure the view of the Temple from Agrippa's dining room, Festus sided with the king, and ordered the chief priests to take it down (incidentally, the chief priests then appealed to the emperor Nero, who gave them permission for the wall to remain) (*Jewish Antiquities* XX.8.11).

Festus consults Agrippa over Paul's legal case, who after being mobbed in the Jerusalem Temple by a crowd provoked by some Jews from Asia (claiming he has defiled the Temple by taking a Greek into it, and incited rebellion amongst the Jewish community), has been questioned by the Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, the Jewish Sanhedrin, and the former procurator of Judea, Antonius Felix, who eventually imprisoned him (see [Acts 21:27-40:22:22-29](#); 23:1-11; [24:10-26](#); [25:1-12](#)). It becomes clear that in Festus's opinion, the Jewish authorities have no substantive charges against Paul – from his perspective, it is a religious dispute. However, Paul (a Roman citizen, see Acts 22:22-29) has appealed to the emperor to judge his case, which presents Festus with a problem, as he does not want to send Paul to the emperor without any clear criminal charges and risk looking incompetent before Caesar (Ulpian's *Digest* 49.6.1, albeit much later than the period of Paul's trial, states that when an appeal was made, records were needed from the authority to whom the appeal had been made in order to assist the person now required to adjudicate). Festus hopes that Agrippa, who has knowledge of the Jewish faith, will be able to help him understand Paul's case, and prepare some charges against him. Firstly, Festus's speech is clearly intended to fit with the wider Lukan apologetic that seeks to portray Paul as innocent in a Roman legal setting (see Joseph Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 748). The Roman legal system is portrayed as seeking fairness and justice, and with its authority figures taking pains to ensure that the proper processes are followed and that all the required evidence has been gathered. This contrasts completely with the Jewish authorities, whom Festus clearly views as having no real evidence for the accusations that they are making against Paul. It is also important to note that having appeared previously before the synagogue and governors (procurators), Paul will now appear before a king, thus fulfilling Jesus's words about the fate of those who follow him in Luke 21:12. That Paul is now scheduled to appear before Agrippa also serves to parallel the Lukan passion narrative, in which Jesus also appears before a member of the Herodian royal family (Herod Antipas, see [Luke 23:8-12](#)).

Festus's insistence on upholding Roman customs, and rightly questioning what he believes to be dubious accusations against Paul, further highlight the difference between the value the Lukan author places on the Jewish and Roman justice systems. In the eyes of Roman law the "anonymous denunciations" from now absent Asian Jews (Joseph Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 750) are simply unacceptable, and will not hold up – the plaintiffs needed to confront the defendant before a judge (see Appian, *Civil Wars* 3.54; Pliny, *Epistles* 10.97). The fact that Festus is prompt, making "no delay" (verse 17) in requesting that Paul be brought to him, emphasises that he acts with appropriate timeliness, again suggesting that his handling of the situation is professional and fitting. Luke makes sure to make the legal context of the situation clear, using technical legal terms (????????, "accuse,"



?????????, “accuser,” ????????, “defence,” and ????????, “accusation/charge”) (see Jacques Dupont, “Aequitas romana”). The political innocence of Paul is therefore made explicit, as the authority in this context declares he cannot find him guilty of anything. Festus’s assertion of Paul’s innocence in verse 25 joins Acts 18:15; 23:29; 25:18, and the numerous statements of Jesus’s innocence by Pontius Pilate in the Gospel of Luke ([23:4](#), [14-15](#), [22](#)). Placing these statements in the mouths of the Roman authorities serves Luke’s aim of highlighting that the Jewish complaints against Jesus and Paul are completely false, and when examined by a stringent and fair legal system, are found wanting.

Keywords in the original language:

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Thematic keywords in English:

- [Caesarea Maritima](#)
- [chief priests](#)
- [client king](#)
- [Herod Agrippa II](#)
- [Jerusalem](#)
- [Jewish authorities](#)
- [Jewish Law](#)
- [Porcius Festus](#)
- [procurator](#)
- [Roman emperor](#)
- [Roman law](#)
- [tribunal](#)

Bibliographical references: Fitzmyer, Joseph A., [The Acts of the Apostles: A New Commentary with Introduction and Commentary](#) (London: Doubleday, 1998)

Dupont, Jacques, [“Aequitas romana: Notes sur Actes, 25,16”](#), *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 49 (1961) : 354-385



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