

Festus

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FESTUS fes tās, PORCIUS pôr shās [Gk. Porkios Phēstos]. The Roman governor or procurator who succeeded FELIX ANTONIUS in the province of Judea (Acts 24:27). The only sources of information concerning Festus are the NT and Josephus.

Josephus' writings picture Festus as a prudent and honorable governor. Felix's mal-administration bequeathed to Festus the impossible task of restoring order to a province embroiled in political strife and overrun by robbers. The Sicarii (ASSASSINS), as the robbers were called on account of the small swords they carried, would come upon a village, plunder it, set it on fire, and murder whomever they wished. Through the use of an impostor, Festus succeeded in ridding the province of many of these criminals (Josephus, Ant. xx.8.10 [185-88]). But his procuratorship was too short to undo the legacy of his predecessor, and under his successor, Albinus, the situation rapidly deteriorated once again (BJ ii.14.1 [271-76]).

One of the problems Festus inherited from Felix was the question of Paul's imprisonment. Attempting to exploit the new governor's inexperience, the Jews requested that Paul be sent to Jerusalem for trial, hoping to assassinate him on the way (Acts 25:3). Festus at first refused their request, and upon his return to Caesarea he himself examined Paul (v 6). On finding that the

evidence was conflicting, however, and desiring to please the Jews, he asked Paul if he were agreeable to making the journey to Jerusalem (vv 7-9). But Paul, who knew well the nefarious use that the Jews would make of the favor Festus was willing to grant them, made his appeal to Caesar (vv 10f.). To this request of a Roman citizen accused on a capital charge (cf. v 16), Festus had to give his consent (v 12).

When King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea a few days later, Festus sought Agrippa's advice on this difficult case. (See HEROD VIII.) At Agrippa's request, Paul was brought before him for a private hearing. Festus' reaction to Paul's testimony betrayed his Roman mind and his ignorance concerning the Jewish and Christian religions (vv 24-27). Festus' friendship with Agrippa is further illustrated by Josephus' account of a dispute between Agrippa and the Jewish priests (Ant. xx.8.11 [189-196]). When the priests discovered that Agrippa could observe the activities in the temple from his portico, they built a wall to obstruct his view. Agrippa objected to this, and Festus sided with him. The Jews therefore appealed to Rome, with the result that Nero permitted the wall to stand.

The exact dates of Festus' term in office are uncertain. Eusebius gives the date of his accession as A.D. 56, but this is too early. His term probably extended from 60 to 62.