

Acts 25

Read Acts 25:1-5: Normally, historic background and political influences are a very secondary aspects to biblical interpretation. In this chapter, you should know what the driving forces are. Otherwise, you are left with too many questions.

We have now (AD 58-60) transitioned from Paul being under house arrest under Governor Antonius Felix, to a continued arrest by his replacement, Porcius Festus. At the same time King Herod Agrippa II is still in power nearby. How does this leadership dynamic play into the biblical narrative? Here are their territories:

Herod Agrippa II's Territories

Herod Agrippa II ruled as a Roman client king over territories **northeast of Judea**, but notably not over Judea itself. His realm expanded over time:

Territory	Period Acquired	Details
Chalcis (Tetrarchy)	48-53 AD	A small Syrian kingdom; also gave him authority over temple affairs and high priest appointments in Jerusalem
Iturea	53 AD onward	Formerly governed by Philip
Trachonitis	53 AD onward	Formerly governed by Philip
Batanea	53 AD onward	Formerly governed by Philip
Gaulanitis	53 AD onward	Formerly governed by Philip
Auranitis	53 AD onward	Formerly governed by Philip
Paneas	53 AD onward	Formerly governed by Philip
Kingdom of Lysanias in Abila	53 AD onward	Also called Abilene
Tiberias and Taricheae	55 AD onward	Cities in Galilee, added by Emperor Nero
Livias (Iulias) with 14 villages	55 AD onward	In Peraea, added by Emperor Nero

His kingdom was geographically **to the northeast and east of the Roman province of Judea**, primarily encompassing parts of what we would call the Golan Heights, Syria, and northeastern Galilee. Importantly, he **did not rule over Judea proper** — that was under direct Roman procuratorial control.

Porcius Festus's Territory

Porcius Festus governed the Roman Province of Judea from approximately 59–62 AD. His jurisdiction included:

- Judea (the core southern territory)
- Samaria
- Idumea
- Peraea (the trans-Jordan region)
- Galilee (after 44 AD, incorporated into the province)
- The coastal regions

His administrative capital was **Caesarea Maritima**, located on the Mediterranean coast.

Unfortunately, I cannot directly provide you with a visual map, as I cannot generate or display images. However, I can describe what such a map would show: **Festus's province of Judea would occupy the central and southern Levantine territory, while Agrippa II's kingdom would be a horseshoe-shaped territory to the north and northeast**, particularly around the Sea of Galilee and extending into what is now Syria. Their territories were **adjacent but distinct**, with Agrippa's lands surrounding parts of Galilee and Peraea but excluding the core Judean heartland.

We have been comparing the **spiritual lawfare** in biblical times with Jesus and Paul, as compared to President Trump. As was mentioned previously, Rome ruled the world with two main systems. They had *client kings* and they had Roman *Procurator/Governors*. King Herod was not a Roman or a Jew. He was an Edomite and Nabatean who ruled the area northeast of the area controlled by Porcius Festus like an independent contractor. He would exact tax revenue and send those funds to Rome. His main job was to keep things under control.

Insurrection was Rome's main fear; and the main causation for changes in regional governance. Client kings could keep the excess tax revenue he collected for their selves. Client kings were much more tuned into the local scene and used all kinds of techniques to prevent uprisings. All of the Herrods tried to befriend the Jews and build public projects to restore their national pride under Roman rule. At the same time, the Herrods were full of corruption. The Roman Procurators were more brutal and likely to enforce a heavy-handed approach.

Governor Antonius Festus had Paul under house arrest in Caesarea. The Jews incited a riot at the temple when they saw him at the temple in Jerusalem. He was minding his own business; but they *saw red* when they saw him. Paul was opening the Kingdom to many who had been shut out (Gentiles and common people).

Paul was also exposing how they were misrepresenting God. That was a stake at their national identity. Specifically, Paul was including Gentiles into the Kingdom of God. That enraged the Jews. The Jews considered themselves sons of Moses and sons of Abraham...so to speak. He also was revealing that they knew nothing about what Moses and Abraham were advocating. Even Jesus battled with the religious elites.

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ² “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ “Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶ they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others. ⁸ “But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. ¹³ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁴ “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when you have succeeded, you make them twice as much a child of hell as you are. ¹⁵ “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ ¹⁶ You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? ¹⁷ You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ ¹⁸ You blind men! Which is greater: the gift,

or the altar that makes the gift sacred? ²⁰ Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. ²¹ And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. ²² And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. ²³ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. ²⁴ You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. ²⁵ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. ²⁶ Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. ²⁷ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. ²⁸ In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. ²⁹ "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. ³⁰ And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Go ahead, then, and complete what your ancestors started! ³³ "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? ³⁴ Therefore I am sending you prophets and sages and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. ³⁵ And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. ³⁶ Truly I tell you, all this will come on this generation. ³⁷ "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. ³⁸ Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matthew 23)

They held themselves to be religious experts and *faith police*. In reality, they were barriers to enter the Kingdom. They misrepresented what God was even about. Paul was blowing holes in their righteousness façade. They literally chased him across Asia and Europe to try to kill him, pursuing leads from church to church. Obviously, the Pharisees and High Priests were not serving God. They were unknowingly serving Satan. Many of them had side deals where they made money off of the system. Either way, they all seemed to love the prestige of seemingly being in charge.

The Jews were politically savvy. They knew how to put pressure on Rome’s client kings and the Procurators. All they had to do was to send an envoy to Rome with a letter of complaint. Any threat of uprising would lead Rome to replace the local overseer. Governor Felix got bounced. He was replaced by Porcius Festus. Felix inherited all kinds of entanglements from his predecessor (Cumunas). The Jews had fenagled all kinds of arrangements and expectations. These were called *civic privileges*. The tensions rose over time. It was a lot more than shouting in the temple. It led to the Jewish-Roman Wars.

Major Jewish-Roman Wars

War	Dates	Key Events	Outcome
First Jewish-Roman War (Jewish War)	66–73 CE	Rebellion against Roman taxation and rule; destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem (70 CE); siege of Masada	Roman victory; Temple destroyed; Jewish diaspora intensified
Bar Kokhba Revolt	132–135 CE	Led by Simon bar Kokhba; attempted restoration of Jewish independence; Jewish insurrection against Emperor Hadrian	Roman victory; massive Jewish casualties; Jerusalem rebuilt as pagan city (Aelia Capitolina); Jews expelled from Jerusalem
Kitos War	115–117 CE	Widespread Jewish revolts in Cyrenaica, Egypt, Cyprus, and Mesopotamia during Trajan's reign	Roman suppression; significant Jewish population losses in diaspora regions

The First Jewish-Roman War (66–73 CE)

Causes

The rebellion arose from Roman oppression, heavy taxation, and disrespect for Jewish religious practices. Tensions had been building under procurators like Florus, who plundered the Temple treasury.

Key Events

- 66 CE – Open rebellion begins; Jews stop performing daily sacrifices for the Roman Emperor
- 70 CE – Roman general Titus besieges Jerusalem; the city falls after months of fighting; the Second Temple is destroyed, ending Jewish temple worship permanently
- 73 CE – Siege of Masada – the last Jewish stronghold falls; according to historical accounts, the besieged Jews chose mass suicide over surrender

Consequences

- Destruction of the Temple ended sacrificial worship; Judaism transformed into a religion centered on Torah study and rabbinic interpretation
- Massive loss of life and enslavement of survivors
- Heavy Roman taxation imposed on remaining Jews (the *fiscus Judaicus*)
- Acceleration of Jewish diaspora throughout the Mediterranean and beyond

The first Jewish-Roman war had occurred just a few years before; and it was a disaster for Israel and for Rome. Over a million Jews died. The second temple was destroyed. The infrastructure in Jerusalem was wiped out too. Rome had to deploy 100,000 troops. This recent event caused Rome to have a *hair trigger touch* on their Judean governors. Paul was stuck in the middle of these politics. The last thing that the Governor wanted to do was create another Jewish revolt. At the same time, Paul was a full-fledged Roman citizen with all kinds of rights. If he was mishandled, the governor could lose his job there as well.

Read Acts 25:6-12: A normal Jew, like Peter would not have a clue as to how to handle himself in this situation. Paul was specifically trained for this exact setting. The Jews wanted to transfer the inquisition to Jerusalem, so that they could ambush his military escort in route. Paul knew this, and he reminded the court that he was already in Cesear's courtroom; which was true. He was truly a *hot potato*. Paul was like *kryptonite* to the Governor, because he was a lightning rod to the religious Jews. He was also a very protected citizen of Rome. He was a *political*

football. Paul started to see that this trial would go nowhere; so he changed the venue on his terms. He appealed to Ceseas. If the Jews could not drag decent accusers to Caesarea, they would be even less likely to do so in Rome.

Read Acts 25:13-27: King Agrippa and his wife Bernice ruled the territories to the northeast of Porcius Festus. They stopped by for a visit. During the visit, Festus mentioned a leftover prisoner from Felix, named Paul. Festus mentioned that he was destined for Rome now, because of his appeal. Paul's case was qualified for appeal because it involved questions on legal procedures and accusations of capital crimes.

Festus told Herrod Agrippa II that Paul was surrounded by the entire Jewish community; and that the level of hate was undying. They kept petitioning him to appear in Jerusalem, which is not legal protocol. Festus was at a loss as to what cover letter to send with Paul, to explain things to Ceseas. Festus wanted Herrod's help in drafting a description for to Paul's case.