

THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF ACTS:
SUPPORT FROM EXTRA-BIBLICAL
PRIMARY SOURCES

By

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Is the biblical document – The Acts Of The Apostles – historically reliable? It claims to be a historical record of certain important events during the early spread of Christianity in the Jewish and Greco-Roman world. But is it actually *real* history?

We will be looking at certain events, people, places and other elements that are documented in Acts, of which are also documented and supported by ancient sources *outside the Bible*. Although many sources – such as inscriptions, statues, geographical locations, artifacts, etc. – support the accuracy of Acts, we will look at only one of these: written documents.

For the committed Christian, this provides greater assurance that Acts is reliable and trustworthy. For those who are not committed Christians: follow the evidence to where it leads!

I would also note that although this might be considered a fairly lengthy work, this is by no means an extensive work. The amount of references in this work do not represent all that I myself have found – this is a reduced compilation of selected references. That being said, I encourage all who find this interesting or encouraging to continue further research themselves!

Finally, all scripture quotations are taken from the New English Translation (NET Bible).

ACTS 4:1-3

“WHILE PETER AND JOHN WERE SPEAKING TO THE PEOPLE, THE PRIESTS AND THE COMMANDER OF THE TEMPLE GUARD AND THE SADDUCEES CAME UP TO THEM, ANGRY BECAUSE THEY WERE TEACHING THE PEOPLE AND ANNOUNCING IN JESUS THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD. SO THEY SEIZED THEM AND PUT THEM IN JAIL UNTIL THE NEXT DAY (FOR IT WAS ALREADY EVENING).”

Why were the (high) priests and Sadducees upset with the Christians? Sadducees thought that the resurrection was theologically incorrect and the proclamation of Jesus as not only being Messiah but as being *risen* was a direct blow to their core theology.

The Jewish historian Josephus (born only a few years after Jesus' death) gives us some additional insight:

Josephus, Antiquity Of The Jews 13.10.6; 18.1.3; and 18.1.4

“ . . . while the Sadducees are able to persuade none but the rich, and have not the populace obsequious to them, but the Pharisees have the multitude on their side.”

“[Pharisees] also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again; on account of which doctrines they are able greatly to persuade the body of the people . . .”

“But the doctrine of the Sadducees is this: That souls die with the bodies; nor do they regard the observation of any thing besides what the law enjoins them; for they think it an instance of virtue to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent: but this doctrine is received but by a few, yet by those still of the greatest dignity . . .”

Later on, Acts 6:7 mentions that a number of the priests were coming to believe Jesus was the Messiah. This would also cause unrest for the Sadducees!

Note: Above, Josephus mentions that the Sadducees always find it “*an instance of virtue*

to dispute with those teachers of philosophy whom they frequent.” In the Gospels, the Sadducees sometimes challenge Jesus in an attempt to corner Him. An interesting point of corroboration.

ACTS 4:6

“ANNAS THE HIGH PRIEST WAS THERE, AND CAIAPHAS, JOHN, ALEXANDER, AND OTHERS WHO WERE MEMBERS OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S FAMILY.”

This verse mentions Caiaphas and some other family members. Our first-century historian friend, Josephus, mentions Caiaphas (called Joseph) and also his father-in-law Annas (also called Ananus). Note that the end of the passage also mentions another well-known biblical character:

Josephus, Ant. 18.2.2

“This man deprived Ananus of the high priesthood . . . He also deprived him in a little time, and ordained Eleazar, the son of Ananus, who had been high priest before, to be high priest . . . and . . . Joseph Caiaphas was made [high priest]. When Gratus had done those things, he went back to Rome, after he had tarried in Judea eleven years, when Pontius Pilate came as his successor.”

ACTS 8:27

“SO HE GOT UP AND WENT. THERE HE MET AN ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH, A COURT OFFICIAL OF CANDACE, QUEEN OF THE ETHIOPIANS, WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF ALL HER TREASURY. HE HAD COME TO JERUSALEM TO WORSHIP . . .”

Who is this Eunuch of Candace, queen of Ethiopians? Pliny and Dio Cassius talk about this Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, giving us an insight into who this was:

Pliny, Nat. History 6.36

"They said that it is ruled by a woman, Candace, a name that has passed on through a succession of queens for many years..."

Dio Cassius, Roman History 54:5

"About this time the Ethiopians, who dwell beyond Egypt, advanced as far as the city called Elephantine, with Candace as their leader, ravaging everything they encountered."

Luke was correct in that he called Candace the queen of ancient Ethiopia! (Note: some Bible translations reflect the point of interest and thus read, "Eunuch of *the* Candace . . .")

ACTS 12:21-23

"ON A DAY DETERMINED IN ADVANCE, HEROD PUT ON HIS ROYAL ROBES, SAT DOWN ON THE JUDGMENT SEAT, AND MADE A SPEECH TO THEM. BUT THE CROWD BEGAN TO SHOUT, "THE VOICE OF A GOD, AND NOT OF A MAN!" IMMEDIATELY AN ANGEL OF THE LORD STRUCK HEROD DOWN BECAUSE HE DID NOT GIVE THE GLORY TO GOD, AND HE WAS EATEN BY WORMS AND DIED."

Herod Agrippa's death is documented in Acts. Agrippa is mentioned as (a) putting on his royal apparel; (b) being called a god and (c) being struck by God. This is spectacularly also recorded by Josephus, with all three points corroborated:

Josephus, Ant. 19.8.2

“At which festival, a great multitude was gotten together. . . On the second day of which shows he put on a garment made wholly of silver. . . the silver of his garment being illuminated by the fresh reflection of the sun’s rays upon it, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over those that looked intently upon him: and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, (though not for his good,) that he was a god: and they added, ‘Be thou merciful to us; for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.’ Upon this the king did neither rebuke them’ . . . he departed this life.”

Josephus also records the death of Herod The Great. Notice how similar Luke's language is to the account above and also to this account below (notably the usage of “worms” which both Luke and Josephus mention – perhaps an ancient Jewish idiom):

Josephus, Ant. 17.6.5

“But now Herod’s distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God’s judgment upon him for his sins. . . . His entrails were also ex-ulcerated, and the chief violence of his pain lay on his colon; an aqueous and transparent liquor also had settled itself about his feet, and a like matter afflicted him at the bottom of his belly. Nay, further, his privy-member was putrefied, and produced worms; and when he sat upright, he had a difficulty of breathing, which was very loathsome, on account of the stench of his breath, and the quickness of its returns; he had also convulsions in all parts of his body, which increased his strength to an insufferable degree. It was said by those who pretended to divine, and who were endued with wisdom to foretell such things, that God inflicted this punishment on the king on account of his great impiety. . . .”

Remembering that Luke was primarily writing the history of the early church, not of political events themselves (as Josephus did), there is a very similar tone and usage of terms when certain events (such as Agrippa's death) are compared in these two documents.

ACTS 16:13

“ON THE SABBATH DAY WE WENT OUTSIDE THE CITY GATE TO THE SIDE OF THE RIVER, WHERE WE THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE A PLACE OF PRAYER, AND WE SAT DOWN AND BEGAN TO SPEAK TO THE WOMEN WHO HAD ASSEMBLED THERE.”

Luke indicates that the Jewish women gathered by the river. Josephus confirms (a) that riversides or seashores were sometimes a meeting place for Jewish people in the Greek world (presumably when there was no local synagogue present) and (b) he discloses the origin of the custom (*Ant.* 14.10.23):

Josephus, Ant. 14.10.23

“The decree of those of Halicarnassus. . . . we have decreed, that as many men and women of the Jews as are willing so to do, may celebrate their Sabbaths, and perform their holy offices, according to Jewish laws; and may [have their meetings] at the sea-side, according to the customs of their forefathers; and if any one, whether he be a magistrate or private person, hindereth them from so doing, he shall be liable to a fine, to be applied to the uses of the city.”

ACTS 16:37, 38

“BUT PAUL SAID TO THE POLICE OFFICERS, “THEY HAD US BEATEN IN PUBLIC WITHOUT A PROPER TRIAL - EVEN THOUGH WE ARE ROMAN CITIZENS - AND THEY THREW US IN PRISON. AND NOW THEY WANT TO SEND US AWAY SECRETLY? ABSOLUTELY NOT! THEY THEMSELVES MUST COME AND ESCORT US OUT!” THE POLICE OFFICERS REPORTED THESE WORDS TO THE MAGISTRATES. THEY WERE FRIGHTENED WHEN THEY HEARD PAUL AND SILAS WERE ROMAN CITIZENS . . .”

This section in Acts (16:12-40) may seem bizarre – why did the magistrates of Philippi intentionally beat Paul and Silas, but were then frightened after they found out that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens?

Philippi, as a Roman colony, was under extremely strict laws that prevented the abuse and unfair treatment of, specifically, *Roman citizens*.

Greek historian Livy, in *History of Rome* (Book 10 section 9), tells us about one such Roman law:

Livy, Hist. Of Rome 10.9

“The Porcian law, however, seems to have been passed solely for the protection of the citizens in life and limb, for it imposed the severest penalties on any one who killed or scourged a Roman citizen.”

Thus, what happened (given this extra background information) is that the members of Philippi thought that Paul and Silas were solely Jewish. However, both were also Roman citizens!

ACTS 17:28

“FOR IN HIM WE LIVE AND MOVE ABOUT AND EXIST, AS EVEN SOME OF YOUR OWN POETS HAVE SAID, 'FOR WE TOO ARE HIS OFFSPRING.'”

Paul quotes Greek literature in this section. Some will know about the Greek poet Aratus being quoted in verse 28 (as is in the footnotes of some Bibles). However, there are actually two direct quotes in this verse:

Poem by Epimenides

*“They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one –
The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!”*

*But thou art not dead: thou livest and abidest for ever,
For in thee we live and move and have our being.*

(**Note:** Epimenides is also quoted by Paul in Titus 1:12, which is the 2nd line of the poem above.)

Aratus, Phainomena

“Let us begin with Zeus, whom we mortals never leave unspoken. For every street, every market-place is full of Zeus. Even the sea and the harbour are full of this deity. Everywhere everyone is indebted to Zeus. For we are indeed his offspring...”

ACTS 18:2

“THERE HE FOUND A JEW NAMED AQUILA, A NATIVE OF PONTUS, WHO HAD RECENTLY COME FROM ITALY WITH HIS WIFE PRISCILLA, BECAUSE CLAUDIUS HAD ORDERED ALL THE JEWS TO DEPART FROM ROME.”

The expulsion of Jewish people from Rome is also recorded by two ancient sources (notably Suetonius):

Suetonius, Life of Claudius 25

“Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome. . . . But these and other acts, and in fact almost the whole conduct of his reign, were dictated not so much by his own judgment as that of his wives and freedmen, since he nearly always acted in accordance with their interests and desires.”

Orosius, Historia Contra Paganus 7.6.15

"The ninth of the same year the Jews [were] driven out of the city by Joseph Claudius. . ."

ACTS 19:13

"BUT SOME ITINERANT JEWISH EXORCISTS TRIED TO INVOKE THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS OVER THOSE WHO WERE POSSESSED BY EVIL SPIRITS, SAYING, "I STERNLY WARN YOU BY JESUS WHOM PAUL PREACHES."

Itinerant Jewish exorcists and magicians / miracle workers were common in first century Israel. For example, Josephus tells us about a man he had himself encountered:

Josephus, Ant. 8.2.5

"... for I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers."

Another example, Honi, is mentioned by Josephus and the Jewish *Mishnah*:

Josephus, Ant. 14.2.1

"Now there was a certain man, Honi, who was righteous and beloved of God, who at one time during a rainless period prayed to end the drought; and hearing, God sent rain."

Mishnah Ta'anit 3.8¹

"Once they said to Honi the Circle-Drawer, "Pray that rain may fall." . . . He prayed, but rain did not come down. What did he do? He drew a circle and stood within it . . . Rain began dripping."

Jewish sources (*Mishnah Berakot* 5:5 and *Talmud Berakot* 34) also mention another Hanina Ben Dosa who would pray for the dead to be raised.

Another point to note from this event in Acts is the usage of Jesus' name (*Yeshu* or *Yeshua*) in exorcism. Is this detail recorded in Acts believable?

In the same passage quoted above concerning Eleazar, it's interesting to note the way that he performed his exorcism:

Josephus, Ant. 8.2.5

"The manner of the cure was this: He put a ring that had a Foot of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac . . . he abjured him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed. . . . and when this was done, the skill and wisdom of Solomon was shown very manifestly: for which reason it is, that all men may know the vastness of Solomon's abilities, and how he was beloved of God . . ."

Eleazar used the name of Solomon as an essential element of his performance. Josephus' purpose in writing this section (which is right in the middle of a short biography of king Solomon) isn't to bring Eleazar fame, but is to show how effective and magnificent the name of Solomon is.

Another finding is that even pagan (non-Jewish) tradition contains this same feature of using another's name. In a particular Greek exorcism formula, Jesus' name is used:

1 Quoted from Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 154

Greek Magical Papyrus²

“ . . . After placing the patient opposite you, conjure as follows: “I conjure you by the God of the Hebrews, Jesus . . . I conjure you by the seal that Solomon placed on the tongue of Jeremiah.”

So using names during exorcism was a common practice – clearly. Interestingly, even pagan traditions use Jesus' name! Thus, this occurrence in the Book of Acts fits the time and customs in which it claims to be written.

ACTS 19:24

“FOR A MAN NAMED DEMETRIUS, A SILVERSMITH WHO MADE SILVER SHRINES OF ARTEMIS, BROUGHT A GREAT DEAL OF BUSINESS TO THE CRAFTSMEN.”

There is much Greek literature (from ancient plays, history, biographies, etc.) that mentions Artemis – also known as the Greek goddess Diana. Let's look at two examples:

Tacitus, Annals 3.61

“First of all came the people of Ephesus. They declared that Diana and Apollo were not born at Delos, as was the vulgar belief.”

2 From Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demonic Spells*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1:96; as quoted in Evans, *Fabricating Jesus*, p. 156-157

Strabo, Geography 14.1.22

“Chersiphron was the first architect of the temple of Diana; another afterwards enlarged it, but when Herostratus set fire to it, the citizens constructed one more magnificent. They collected for this purpose the ornaments of the women, contributions from private property, and the money arising from the sale of pillars of the former temple.”

ACTS 20:29

I KNOW THAT AFTER I AM GONE FIERCE WOLVES WILL COME IN AMONG YOU, NOT SPARING THE FLOCK.”

Other Jewish apocalyptic literature feature this same “sheep vs. wolves” phraseology, showing that it was a common way of expressing an illustration by Jewish people during this time. First, we find in *I Enoch* 89:13-15 the following:

I Enoch 89:13-15

“And when those twelve sheep had grown, they gave up one of them to the asses, and those asses again gave up that sheep to the wolves, and that sheep grew up among the wolves. And the Lord brought the eleven sheep to live with it and to pasture with it among the wolves: and they multiplied and became many flocks of sheep. And the wolves began to fear them, and they oppressed them until they destroyed their little ones . . .”

IV Ezra 5:18

"Israel in exile has been entrusted to your care? Rouse yourself, take nourishment. Do not abandon us like a shepherd abandoning his flock to savage wolves."

ACTS 21:28-31

[JEWISH PEOPLE WERE] SHOUTING, "MEN OF ISRAEL, HELP! THIS IS THE MAN WHO TEACHES EVERYONE EVERYWHERE AGAINST OUR PEOPLE, OUR LAW, AND THIS SANCTUARY! FURTHERMORE HE HAS BROUGHT GREEKS INTO THE INNER COURTS OF THE TEMPLE AND MADE THIS HOLY PLACE RITUALLY UNCLEAN!" (FOR THEY HAD SEEN TROPHIMUS THE EPHESIAN IN THE CITY WITH HIM PREVIOUSLY, AND THEY ASSUMED PAUL HAD BROUGHT HIM INTO THE INNER TEMPLE COURTS.) THE WHOLE CITY WAS STIRRED UP, AND THE PEOPLE RUSHED TOGETHER. THEY SEIZED PAUL AND DRAGGED HIM OUT OF THE TEMPLE COURTS, AND IMMEDIATELY THE DOORS WERE SHUT. WHILE THEY WERE TRYING TO KILL HIM . . ."

An inscription recently found at the ancient temple in Jerusalem says that any gentiles who were in the inner courts would face death. Josephus and Philo discuss this temple inscription and law:

Josephus, Ant. 15.11.5

" . . .this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in under pain of death."

Philo, Leg. Ad Gaium 212

" . . . the fact that death against which there can be no appeal is decreed for any gentiles who go into the inner courts."

ACTS 21:31

"WHILE THEY WERE TRYING TO KILL HIM, A REPORT WAS SENT UP TO THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF THE COHORT THAT ALL JERUSALEM WAS IN CONFUSION."

Josephus records some details about the location where the Roman cohort would have been stationed, which matches the description and context of this incident in Acts:

Josephus, The War of The Jews 5.5.8

"[The tower of Antonia] had passages down to them both, through which the guard (for there always lay in this tower a Roman legion) went several ways among the cloisters, with their arms, on the Jewish festivals, in order to watch the people, that they might not there attempt to make any innovations; for the temple was a fortress that guarded the city, as was the tower of Antonia a guard to the temple; and in that tower were the guards of those three."

ACTS 21:37-38

"THE OFFICER REPLIED, "DO YOU KNOW GREEK? THEN YOU'RE NOT THAT EGYPTIAN WHO STARTED A REBELLION AND LED THE FOUR THOUSAND MEN OF THE 'ASSASSINS' INTO THE WILDERNESS SOME TIME AGO?"

The Roman officer thought that Paul was a particular Egyptian who had started a rebellion and led many into the wilderness (desert east of Jerusalem). Josephus tells us about this Egyptian rebel and his description matches the exact details of this rebellion as recorded by Luke:

Josephus, Ant. 20.8.6 and 20.8.10

"And now these impostors and deceivers persuaded the multitude to follow them into the wilderness, and pretended that they would exhibit manifest wonders and signs, that should be performed by the providence of God. . . . Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives . . . Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him."

"So Festus sent forces, both horsemen and footmen, to fall upon those that had been seduced by a certain impostor, who promised them deliverance and freedom from the miseries they were under, if they would but follow him as far as the wilderness."

ACTS 22:27, 28

"SO THE COMMANDING OFFICER CAME AND ASKED PAUL, "TELL ME, ARE YOU A ROMAN CITIZEN?" HE REPLIED, "YES." THE COMMANDING OFFICER ANSWERED, "I ACQUIRED THIS CITIZENSHIP WITH A LARGE SUM OF MONEY." "BUT I WAS EVEN BORN A CITIZEN," PAUL REPLIED."

The Roman officer says that he acquired his Roman citizenship by purchasing it. Ancient historian Dio Cassius records this practice:

Dio Cassius, Roman Hist. 60:17.5-6

“A great many other persons unworthy of citizenship were also deprived of it, whereas he granted citizenship to others quite indiscriminately, sometimes to individuals and sometimes to whole groups. For inasmuch as Romans had the advantage over foreigners in practically all respects, many sought the franchise by personal application to the emperor, and many bought it from Messalina and the imperial freedmen. For this reason, though the privilege was at first sold only for large sums, it later became so cheapened by the facility with which it could be obtained that it came to be a common saying, that a man could become a citizen by giving the right person some bits of broken glass.”

ACTS 23:2

“AT THAT THE HIGH PRIEST ANANIAS ORDERED THOSE STANDING NEAR PAUL TO STRIKE HIM ON THE MOUTH.”

This high priest acts violently towards Paul. Is this an accurate account – a high priest being so violent? This is not the same Ananias mentioned earlier in Acts (4:6). Interestingly, however, Josephus records the violent nature of this man:

Josephus, Ant. 20.9.2

“But as for the high priest, Ananias he increased in glory every day . . . he also had servants who were very wicked, who joined themselves to the boldest sort of the people, and went to the thrashing-floors, and took away the tithes that belonged to the priests by violence, and did not refrain from beating such as would not give these tithes to them.”

ACTS 23:3

"THEN PAUL SAID TO HIM, "GOD IS GOING TO STRIKE YOU, YOU WHITEWASHED WALL! DO YOU SIT THERE JUDGING ME ACCORDING TO THE LAW, AND IN VIOLATION OF THE LAW YOU ORDER ME TO BE STRUCK?"

Paul says to the high priest, "God is going to strike you!" This high priest did not die naturally – but was slain by a group of rebels, as Josephus records:

Josephus, Wars 2.17.9

"But on the next day the high priest was caught where he had concealed himself in an aqueduct; he was slain, together with Hezekiah his brother, by the robbers: hereupon the seditious besieged the towers, and kept them guarded, lest any one of the soldiers should escape. Now the overthrow of the places of strength, and the death of the high priest Ananias . . ."

ACTS 23:24

"... AND [HE PROVIDED] MOUNTS FOR PAUL TO RIDE SO THAT HE MAY BE BROUGHT SAFELY TO FELIX THE GOVERNOR."

Felix is recorded by the Roman historian Tacitus (in two separate works) as being a very violent man. His wife, also a primary character during this event in Acts, is also mentioned in the first reference:

Tacitus, Histories 5.9

"The kings were either dead, or reduced to insignificance, when Claudius entrusted the province of Judaea to the Roman Knights or to his own freedmen, one of whom, Antonius Felix, indulging in every kind of barbarity and lust, exercised the power of a king in the spirit of a slave. He had married Drusilla, the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra, and so was the grandson-in-law, as Claudius was the grandson, of Antony."

Tacitus, Annals 12.54

"Not equally moderate was his brother, surnamed Felix, who had for some time been governor of Judaea, and thought that he could do any evil act with impunity, backed up as he was by such power. . . . Felix meanwhile, by ill-timed remedies, stimulated disloyal acts; while he had, as a rival in the worst wickedness, Ventidius Cumanus, who held a part of the province, which was so divided that Galilea was governed by Cumanus, Samaria by Felix."

ACTS 24:2

"WHEN PAUL HAD BEEN SUMMONED, TERTULLUS BEGAN TO ACCUSE HIM, SAYING, "WE HAVE EXPERIENCED A LENGTHY TIME OF PEACE THROUGH YOUR RULE, AND REFORMS ARE BEING MADE IN THIS NATION THROUGH YOUR FORESIGHT."

Tertullus, who was hired by the Jewish leaders for Paul's trial, tries to "butter-up" Felix by mentioning that he "has attained much peace." Some think that this "peace" which Felix had obtained refers to some certain events mentioned by Josephus:

Josephus, Wars 2.13.2

"This Felix took Eleazar the arch-robber, and many that were with him, alive, when they had ravaged the country for twenty years together, and sent them to Rome; but as to the number of the robbers whom he caused to be crucified, and of those who were caught among them, and whom he brought to punishment, they were a multitude not to be enumerated."

ACTS 24:22, 24

“THEN FELIX, WHO UNDERSTOOD THE FACTS CONCERNING [CHRISTIANITY] MORE ACCURATELY, ADJOURNED THEIR HEARING, SAYING, “WHEN LYSIAS THE COMMANDING OFFICER COMES DOWN, I WILL DECIDE YOUR CASE.” . . .

SOME DAYS LATER, WHEN FELIX ARRIVED WITH HIS WIFE DRUSILLA, WHO WAS JEWISH, HE SENT FOR PAUL AND HEARD HIM SPEAK ABOUT FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS.”

Felix's wife, Drusilla, was Jewish – as Luke tells us. This is perhaps why Felix would have a more advanced knowledge about different sects of Judaism – as mentioned in verse **22**. Josephus gives us some more information about Drusilla:

Josephus, Ant. 20.7.2

“ . . . he gave his sister Drusilla in marriage to Azizus, king of Emesa, upon his consent to be circumcised . . . [the marriage] was in no long time afterward dissolved upon the following occasion: While Felix was procurator of Judea, he saw this Drusilla, and fell in love with her; for she did indeed exceed all other women in beauty; and he sent to her a person whose name was Simon . . . [who] endeavored to persuade her to forsake her present husband, and marry him; and promised, that if she would not refuse him, he would make her a happy woman. Accordingly she . . . [married] Felix . . . ”

ACTS 24:27

“AFTER TWO YEARS HAD PASSED, PORCIUS FESTUS SUCCEEDED FELIX, AND BECAUSE HE WANTED TO DO THE JEWS A FAVOR, FELIX LEFT PAUL IN PRISON.”

Not much is known about this Porcius Festus, however, Josephus does mention him in two of his works:

Josephus, Ant. 20.3.9

"Now when Porcius Festus was sent as successor to Felix by Nero, the principal of the Jewish inhabitants of Cesarea went up to Rome to accuse Felix. . ."

Josephus, Wars 2.14.1

"Now it was that Festus succeeded Felix as procurator, and made it his business to correct those that made disturbances in the country."

ACTS 25:11,12

"IF THEN I AM IN THE WRONG AND HAVE DONE ANYTHING THAT DESERVES DEATH, I AM NOT TRYING TO ESCAPE DYING, BUT IF NOT ONE OF THEIR CHARGES AGAINST ME IS TRUE, NO ONE CAN HAND ME OVER TO THEM. I APPEAL TO CAESAR!" THEN, AFTER CONFERRING WITH HIS COUNCIL, FESTUS REPLIED, "YOU HAVE APPEALED TO CAESAR; TO CAESAR YOU WILL GO!"

Could any Roman citizen appeal to Caesar? Although the Roman official had to agree to the appeal (and also Caesar – eventually), we would think that perhaps strange. However, this practice is recorded by Roman historians, including Dio Cassius:

Dio Cassius, History 51:19.6-7

"They also decreed that Caesar should hold the tribunician power for life, that he should aid those who called upon him for help both within the pomerium and outside for a distance of one mile, – a privilege possessed by none of the tribunes, – also that he should judge appealed

cases, and that in all the courts his vote was to be cast as Athena's vote."

ACTS 25:13

"AFTER SEVERAL DAYS HAD PASSED, KING AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVED AT CAESAREA TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS TO FESTUS."

Bernice was the sister of Drusilla and Agrippa II (also present in this account). Quite a few ancient sources mention Bernice (including Josephus). Here are two historians who have not been referenced much throughout this work, who have something to say about Bernice:

Tacitus, Histories 2.2

"Some supposed that he [Titus] retraced his steps for love of Queen Berenice [Bernice], nor was his young heart averse to her charms, but this affection occasioned no hindrance to action."

Suetonius, Life of Titus 7

"Besides cruelty, he was also suspected of riotous living, since he protracted his revels until the middle of the night with the most prodigal of his friends; likewise of unchastity because of his troops of catamites and eunuchs, and his notorious passion for queen Berenice, to whom it was even said that he promised marriage. . . . Berenice he sent from Rome at once, against her will and against his own."

ACTS 27:17

"AFTER THE CREW HAD HOISTED IT ABOARD, THEY USED SUPPORTS TO UNDERGIRD THE SHIP. FEARING THEY WOULD RUN AGROUND ON THE SYRTIS, THEY LOWERED THE SEA ANCHOR, THUS LETTING THEMSELVES BE DRIVEN ALONG."

The shallows of Syrtis was a well known for being extremely dangerous for ships

because of its moving sand bars, as Pliny describes:

Pliny the Elder, Natural History 5.4

"A third Gulf is divided into two smaller ones, those of the two Syrtes, which are rendered perilous by the shallows of their quicksands and the ebb and flow of the sea."

ACTS 28:4

"WHEN THE LOCAL PEOPLE SAW THE CREATURE HANGING FROM PAUL'S HAND, THEY SAID TO ONE ANOTHER, "NO DOUBT THIS MAN IS A MURDERER! ALTHOUGH HE HAS ESCAPED FROM THE SEA, JUSTICE HERSELF HAS NOT ALLOWED HIM TO LIVE!"

The Greek term for "Justice" is *Dike*. This refers to a Greek goddess who the local people thought would be responsible for Paul's death.

Theogony of Hesiod 901

"Next he [Zeus] married bright Themis who bare the Horae (Hours), and Eunomia (Order), Dike (Justice) . . ."

Herodotus, Histories 8.77.1

"I cannot say against oracles that they are not true, and I do not wish to try to discredit them when they speak plainly. Look at the following matter: "When the sacred headland of golden-sworded Artemis and Cynosura by the sea they bridge with ships, After sacking shiny Athens in mad hope, Divine Justice [Dike] will extinguish mighty Greed the son of Insolence . . ."

ACTS 28:11

AFTER THREE MONTHS WE PUT OUT TO SEA IN AN ALEXANDRIAN SHIP THAT HAD WINTERED AT THE ISLAND AND HAD THE "HEAVENLY TWINS" AS ITS FIGUREHEAD . . .

The twin brothers carved into the boat were Zeus' twin brothers, Caster and Pollox. They are sometimes referenced to as Dioscuri:

Homer, Odyssey 11:309

"Next, Leda, wife of Tyndarus I saw, who bore to Tyndarus a noble pair, Castor the bold, and Pollux . . ."