

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 165

Sha'ul's Appears Before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa ~ Part 5

Note: To examine the graphics in this series, click on them for a pop-up version.

We continue in the **Book of Acts**. **Sha'ul's Appears to the Roman Authorities** beginning in Acts 25:9.

Sha'ul's Appeals to Ceasar

⁹ But Festus, wanting to do the Judeans a favor, asked Sha'ul, "Would you be willing to go up to Yerushalayim and be tried before me there on these charges?"¹⁰ Sha'ul replied, "I am standing right now in the court of the Emperor, and this is where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Judeans, as you very well know. ¹¹ If I am a wrongdoer, if I have done something for which I deserve to die, then I am ready to die. But if there is nothing to these charges which they are bringing against me, no one can give me to them just to grant a favor! I appeal to the Emperor!"¹² Then Festus, after talking with his advisers, answered, "You have appealed to the Emperor; you will go to the Emperor!"

Progress on **Sha'ul's** case ceased for two years while **Felix** waited, perhaps for a bribe (Acts 24:26). Now, with **Festus** showing himself uninterested in justice, **Sha'ul** decides to enter his appeal to be tried by the highest authority, a right available to **Roman Citizens** since 509 BCE. **Yeshua** had promised that **Sha'ul** would one day go to **Rome** (Acts 23:11), and he had long wanted to go there (Romans 1:10–15). His dream is fulfilled in Acts 28:16 below.

Festus and Agrippa

¹³ After some days, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus.

King Agrippa. **Herod Agrippa II**, the last **Herodian king**, was raised in **Rome** and made king in 50 CE, six years after the death of his father, **Herod Agrippa I** (see Acts 12:3). His capital was **Caesarea Philippi** (modern **Banyas**), at the foot of **Mount Hermon**, some 40 miles northeast of **Caesarea**, where modern **Isra'el**, **Lebanon**, and **Syria** meet. **Bernice** was **Agrippa's** sister, so their relationship was incestuous. **Felix's** wife, Drusilla (Acts 24:24), was the sister of both. **Bernice** was later mistress of two emperors, **Vespasian** and **Titus**, and almost became **Empress**. Obviously, she had long since given up whatever vestiges of **Jewish** religion and morals she might have once had.

¹⁴ Since they were staying on there for some time, Festus had the opportunity to acquaint the King with Sha'ul's situation. "There is a man here," he said, "who was left behind in custody by Felix.

Agrippa and **Bernice** made an official visit to welcome the new procurator but stayed on longer than necessary. **Festus** used the time to discuss the perplexing but not pressing issue of **Sha'ul**.

¹⁵ When I was in Yerushalayim, the head cohanim and the elders of the Judeans informed me about him and asked me to pronounce judgment against him. ¹⁶ My answer to them was that it is not the custom with Romans to give up an accused man just to grant a favor, before he has met his accusers face to face and had the opportunity to defend himself against the charge. ¹⁷ So when they arrived here with me, I did not delay, but took my seat in court the next day and

ordered the man brought in.¹⁸ "When the accusers stood up, instead of charging him with some serious crime as I had expected,¹⁹ they disputed with him about certain points of their own religion, and particularly about somebody called Yeshua, who had died, but who Sha'ul claimed was alive.

Gallio, in similar circumstances, had refused to sit in judgment on a matter of internal concern among **Jews** (Acts 18:12–16). **Festus** was less wise. Nevertheless, this **Gentile's** description of the dispute as one *about certain points of their own religion* is additional evidence that **Messianic Judaism** is a form of **Judaism**.

²⁰ Being at a loss as to how to investigate such questions, I asked him if he would be willing to go to Yerushalayim and be tried on these matters there. ²¹ But since Sha'ul appealed to be kept in custody and have his case decided by His Imperial Majesty, I ordered him held until I could send him to the Emperor."

Once again, no good case was made against **Sha'ul**, and once again, he defended himself against the three principal possible accusers—the **Pharisees**, concerned with **the Torah**; the **Sadducees** and **cohanim**, concerned with **the Temple**; and the **Roman** state, embodied in **the Emperor**. Luke omits the specifics of both accusation and defense.

*²² Agrippa said to Festus, "I myself have been wanting to hear the man." "Tomorrow," he replied, "you will hear him."*¹

In our next post, we will continue to learn about **Sha'ul's Appearances Before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa**.

¹ Acts 25:9-22.