

86. Agrippa Was Told About the Case of Paul

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that God can even take the evil plans of men and change them in such a way that He carries out His plans instead. Festus wanted to gain favor with the Jews by making it possible for them to murder Paul. Instead, God worked through his sinful choice to make it possible for Paul to present the Gospel to the emperor of the Roman Empire. In our topic today, we are going to see that Festus told Agrippa that it seemed unreasonable to him to send a prisoner to the emperor and not be able to list any crime. Agrippa agreed to help him figure out what charge to write against Paul.

Acts 25:13 says, “And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.” Here, we see the last of the members of the family of Herod that are mentioned in the New Testament. This King Agrippa is the son of King Agrippa so is actually Agrippa 2. He is the great grandson of Herod the Great who tried to kill Jesus when Jesus was a baby. His great uncle was the ruler who murdered John the Baptist and later had Christ sent to him by Pilate. He was the son of Herod Agrippa who killed James and put Peter in prison. Acts 12:2-3 says about his father, “Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was *during* the Days of Unleavened Bread.” Because of his background, this Agrippa was very familiar with Jewish law.

Bernice was the sister of both Agrippa and Drusilla, the wife of the former governor, Felix. Agrippa and Bernice had both spent part of their lives in Rome. While in Rome, Drusilla had been the mistress of the Roman emperor, Vespasian, and then later the mistress of his son, Titus. Here, we see that Agrippa and Drusilla were now living in an incestuous relationship. As we can see, even though this family was familiar with the Old Testament, the entire family lived in total rebellion against God.

Acts 25:14-22 says, “When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying: ‘There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix, about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed *me*, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him. To them I answered, “It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.” Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in. When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters. But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.’ Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘I also would like to hear the man myself.’ ‘Tomorrow,’ he said, ‘you shall hear him.’” Here, we see that one day Festus told Agrippa about Paul and his appeal to Caesar.

Festus told Agrippa that Felix had left a prisoner in Caesarea when he completed his time as the governor. Then, he told how the Jewish chief priests and elders had informed him about this

prisoner when he had gone up to Jerusalem. Festus said that the Jewish leaders asked for judgment against him. The word translated “judgment” means *a sentence given*, usually a death sentence. This word is used in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, where we read, “These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” Here, the word is translated “judgment”.

Festus said that he told the Jews that the Roman legal system did not deliver any man to death until the person that was accused had the opportunity to meet his accusers face to face. He said that any prisoner had the opportunity to defend himself against the charge that was brought against him. Of course, this was especially true when the prisoner was a Roman citizen. Festus said that the Jews immediately came to Caesarea without any delay so that the Jews could bring their accusations against the prisoner.

Festus said he sat on the judgment seat the very next day. When the Jews got up to accuse the prisoner Festus said that he suddenly got a surprise. The Jews did not bring a charge like murder, insurrection or any other crime. Instead, the Jews asked some questions of the prisoner about their own religion. Festus said that these questions were about a man named Jesus. The Jews said that this Jesus had died. In contrast, Paul said that this Jesus was alive. Here, we see that the thing that makes Christianity different from any religion is the resurrection. Every religion has a founder. Once that religion has existed long enough, the founder of that religion dies. It is true that Christ also died. However, the difference is that Christ has risen from the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:19-20 says, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.” The resurrection is what makes Christianity different than any religion.

Festus then tried to cover up efforts to please the Jews and put Paul in a situation where the Jews could kill him. Instead, Festus told Agrippa that because he was uncertain of such questions, he had asked the prisoner if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and be judged there on such matters. This statement by Festus actually makes no sense. Since the accusers and Paul were both in Caesarea, a change of location to Jerusalem would not add any new facts about the questions. In addition, a change of location would not suddenly make the questions about the resurrection a crime for which a Roman governor could give the death penalty. Here, we see that Festus was just trying to cover up his own hypocrisy.

Festus then said that the prisoner was unwilling to go to Jerusalem. Instead, he had appealed his case to Augustus. The word “Augustus” was a title which actually means the revered *one or the worshiped one*. Several of the Caesars added it to their name. The actual Caesar ruling at this time was Nero. Festus said that he had commanded Paul to be kept until he could be sent to Caesar. Agrippa answered that he had wanted to hear Paul for a long time. This probably filled Festus with happiness, because he did not have any crimes that he could list for Paul. As a result, Festus told Agrippa that he would have the opportunity to hear Paul the next day.

Acts 25:23-27 says, “So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’

command Paul was brought in. And Festus said: ‘King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer. But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him. I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write. For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.’” The next day, Agrippa and Bernice came with a great showy appearance. Festus also had instructed all of his commanders and the leading men of the city of Caesarea to be there. Then, Paul was brought in.

In the rest of this chapter, we see that Festus gave his speech. Then, in our next topic, we will see that Paul is asked to speak. Here, we see that Festus wanted to impress Agrippa and all of those who were gathered there that day. After Paul was brought in, Festus said, “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us.” Then, Festus went on to describe the prisoner. He said that a large crowd of Jews had petitioned him about his prisoner. The word translated “petitioned” means to *request, pray or make intercession*. He said that the Jews had made their request both in Jerusalem and Caesarea. Festus said that all the Jews said that Paul was not fit to live any longer. The word translated “fit” means it *is necessary, right or proper*. As a result, Festus made it very clear that this great multitude of Jews all wanted Paul put to death.

Festus said that after examining Paul, he found no reason why Paul should be put to death. What Festus did not say is that he had been seeking a way to please the Jews by giving them an opportunity to murder Paul. Paul had understood exactly what Festus was doing and that was why he had appealed to Caesar. Although Paul had appealed to Caesar, Festus used the title of Augustus to show his reverence and worship of Caesar. Festus said that he had decided to send Paul to Augustus.

However, then Festus said that he had a problem. He wanted the help of the people there, especially the help of Agrippa, to determine what he should write to his lord. Festus said he had no charge to write against Paul. As a result, he wanted Agrippa and the others to help examine Paul and then tell him what charges to write to Caesar. Then, Festus said, “For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.” By this statement, Festus showed that his only concern had been to please the Jews. He knew that Paul was innocent and that he should have released Paul. We want to help our physical and spiritual children realize that there will be times when people will seek to please others instead of doing what they know is right in the sight of God. This happens because they are driven by fear, instead of being led by the love of Christ. We want to help our children learn to be led by the love of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to please God rather than people.