

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 25:13-26:11 | Session 69 | Paul, the Political Prisoner to Appease the Jews | A.D. 62

Political maneuvering always plays a role in history. There is nothing new under the Sun. To maintain peace in the region, Paul is under Roman house arrest in Caesarea for one reason; to appease the Jews. The accusation: Paul claims Jesus was the Messiah and is alive. For that, the Jews want Paul dead. Because Paul disagreed that he had *committed anything worth of death* (25:11), he used the privilege of his Roman citizenship to appeal to Caesar himself in Rome (25:11). While awaiting transfer to Rome, the Jewish king, Agrippa visited Caesarea and desired to meet this man Paul who was causing so much consternation among the Jews.

Verse 13—

Agrippa and Bernice. This is Agrippa II. His father, Herod Agrippa I, is the one who had James the apostle, the brother of John, killed by the sword in Acts 12:1,2. Agrippa I was the king who was making himself out to be “god” and was *smote by the angel of the Lord, because he gave not God the glory* (Acts 12:21-23). Agrippa II was the great-grandson of Herod the Great (Christ was born when Herod the Great was ruling). **Bernice** was Agrippa II’s sister, although there were abundant rumors, they had an incestuous relationship. In order to hold on to their power, all of the Herod family were political pawns of Rome (absolute power corrupts). Agrippa II was the last Herod in the dynasty. They came to Caesarea to **salute** (greet; probably desiring some favor) **Festus** the governor.

Verse 14,15—

Caesarea was not only a Roman stronghold where justice was meted out, it was also a resort. Agrippa and Bernice were there **many days**. At some point **Festus** brought up the name of **Paul** and declared his case before the king.

Verses 16,17,18—

Clearly the Jews had communicated to Festus they wanted Paul **delivered up to die**, but Paul had not met his **accusers face to face** in order to **answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him**. Festus relates to Herod that when he met with the accusers, **they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed**. Festus realized this was a religious dispute and he was not comfortable with that.

Verses 19, 20, 21, 22—

For Festus, the issue was one concerning **their own superstition**, that is, **Jesus, which was dead, Paul was affirming to be alive**. The word superstition is not used here in the way we would think of it (like hocus-pocus) rather, it meant more of *their reverence for God or gods*. Festus **doubted** the entire situation and didn’t have any idea, as a Roman, how to judge such a matter of what he perceived to be Jewish religious practices. Paul had, however, appealed to Caesar (25:11). We noted in our previous session that the Caesar who was in power at this time was *Nero*, but here it says **Augustus**. The term **Augustus** means *The August One*. It is sometimes translated *Emperor*. Most all of the Caesars adopted **Augustus** as a generic imperial title (in Luke 2:1, “And it came about in those days, that there went out a decree

from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.” That Caesar was Octavian). All of this piqued the curiosity of Herod Agrippa who wanted to hear what Paul had to say for himself.

Verse 23—

Great pomp. What we may not receive from a cursory reading of this passage is that Paul’s case is bigger than it appears. Paul is a very popular man and the stir he is causing by his preaching of the Kingdom gospel to the Jews is the front-page headline. And now, the great apostle Paul who was called by Jesus himself to preach before kings has a providential opportunity (See Acts 9:15). Paul, while he may appear as a lowly prisoner in chains before *elite’s earthly pomp and circumstance*, is an *ambassador for the true King* (2 Corinthians 5:20; Ephesians 6:20). While Scripture does not address you and me as being ambassadors, we can certainly act in that capacity since an ambassador is one who represents or promotes a person or an activity. Here stands Paul before the king and the full display of Roman military power, the **chief captains, and principal men of the city**. This is a big deal.

Verses 24,25,26,27—

As Paul stands before this great crowd, Festus introduces him a **man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me...that he ought not to live any longer**. Even Festus realizes Paul had **committed nothing worth of death**. In essence the Roman governor is declaring Paul *not guilty*. Since Paul had been under arrest, the Roman governor had declared him not guilty three times (Acts 23:29; 25:25; 26:31). This reminds us of when Jesus Christ stood before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate; he was declared innocent three times (Luke 23:4, 15, 22). Since Paul had appealed to Caesar, in Festus’s mind had done nothing wrong, he is hoping Agrippa might find something to accuse him with before he sent him to Rome. The last thing Festus wanted to be accused of was a frivolous lawsuit. Therefore, Agrippa’s advice would be valued.

CHAPTER 26:1-8 | THE AMBASSADOR OF JESUS CHRIST SPEAKS

Verses 1-11—

Paul was given permission by Agrippa to speak, **then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself**. He states his defense that he is being persecuted for his hope in the resurrection. This is Paul’s common theme; a promise of resurrection foretold by the prophets. Paul knew the Torah and he lived by the Torah. In fact, his primary defense is that he has remained faithful to Judaism (26:5,6,7, 10,11). Paul makes the assumption that Herod Agrippa II was knowledgeable in Jewish affairs.

It is important to note that Paul is not being **judged** for the grace gospel, rather the **hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers**. This is not a new gospel. All of what Paul is presenting was foreseen in Scripture. What was not foreseen was that the Gentiles could be included with the Jews outside of the covenants and the commonwealth of Israel. We will see this in more detail next time.