

Herod Agrippa: Almost Persuaded

To the Seashore

It was probably in the spring of the year that King Agrippa and his wife Bernice came from their home in Galilee to visit Festus, the Roman governor, who was in Caesarea. They stayed many days; probably this was a vacation for them: it would be a time away from their post in Galilee, and they'd have an occasion for the use of their finery. what good would it do to wear riches at home, when the only people to see fishermen, farmers, and the like?

One day, as Festus and Herod Agrippa (as he was called, family name and all), sat and talked, the newly appointed governor told his Galilean friend (but from Idumea, his own country) about one of the cases that he had been presented at his judgment seat.

An Interesting Story

He told him, "There's this man named Paul," he said confidentially, leaning over, "left by Felix when I replaced him. When I was in Jerusalem, he was complained about by some of the leading Jews. They were really angry!" he went on. "But I reminded them that in this empire, criminals are entitled to come face to face with their accusers before they have the death penalty brought against them!"

Satisfied with his tale so far, Festus continued speaking to his guest: "So the Jewish leaders said they'd

just come to Caesarea when I went, and accuse him there. But their charges against him turned out to be nothing like I had imagined. They were so violently opposed to this man even living any longer that I thought he'd done something horrible." He sat back in his seat for effect.

"I discovered when the questioning began that they had some really strong superstitions, and they accused Paul of talking unlawfully about a man named Jesus. But I know for a fact that he's dead. Paul says he's alive, and saying that really stirs up these Jews. When I heard them disagreeing with him at this point, I asked, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and have a trial there?"

"No", he answered. "I am a Roman. I can see an unfair trial coming, with you letting them have their own way." Then he shocked us all: "I appeal to Caesar," he announced.

"So I am saving him for when I can send him to Caesar. But he really doesn't seem to have done anything. What can I say is his charge?"

"I'd like to talk to the man myself, Agrippa responded. "Interesting case...", he mused, while he put his fingers to his chin thoughtfully.

Agrippa Hears Paul

Agrippa and Bernice used the occasion as a state function, although Agrippa was not really considered a judge in the matter, but only an advisor.

They wore clothing of wealth, pearls and diamonds. Of course this did not make their advice any better than it otherwise would have been. But vain people do sometimes like to display their possessions. And the prisoner must have really stood out, when compared to their finery.

"Agrippa", Paul said confidently, "I am glad you are going to hear my defense, since you are known for being very expert at dealing with us Jews, knowing about our customs and traditions since you're originally from Idumea. Today, Felix, I am being questioned by the Jewish leaders about something we've believed in for a long time--resurrection.

"King Agrippa", he began again, "why would anyone think it strange that our great God would raise the dead? Why, when this whole thing about Jesus of Nazareth started, I was one of the strongest fighters against it. I believed it was misleading the people. I got permission to punish anyone who believed in Him."

"Once, O King, I went to Damascus with permission to punish any believers there. As I was still on the road, about noon, I saw a light shining on me and my companions--even brighter than the sun. Everybody fell down. I could hear a voice--it was talking to me--saying "Saul, Saul, why are you trying to hurt me? It is hard to fight against God." I remember how I was down on the dusty, hot road. "Who is it that is talking to me?" i said. "I can't see.." I shielded my eyes and kept trying to see someone.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up now, for I want you for my servant, and you will preach to the Gentiles."

"King Agrippa, I obeyed the vision. First, I preached in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and now to the Gentiles. These men keep trying to kill me, but with God helping me, I tell everyone I can that Christ rose from the dead after he died on the cross, and all that our prophets have told us would happen."

Paul, You're Crazy!

Festus could no longer be silent. "Paul!" he cried, "you are crazy! You've been studying too much!"

Respectfully Paul spoke to Festus, "No, I am not crazy, Festus. These are true things I am saying. And I'm sure the King has heard them too, and has kept up with everything about Jesus. It wasn't kept secret." Then, turning toward Agrippa, "Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? Yes, I know you do."

Agrippa's Decision

Agrippa, deeply moved, said to Paul, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian".

"I would that everyone in this room were just like me--a Christian--except for the chains I wear today."

The king knew he had no fitting reply. He was not a Christian. "After all," he reasoned, "that would mean I

would have to tell EVERYONE that I believe in Jesus. And what would my friends say?" he stood up slowly, followed by Festus and Bernice, then by all their dinner guests. Everyone went out. The occasion was not nearly so enjoyable as they had thought at first. As they left, Agreppa said to the governor, "If he had not appealed to Caesar, I think this man would have been freed."

(This story is told in the Bible: Acts 25.)