

## Agrippa

I am Herod Agrippa II, great grandson of Herod the Great, who built the Temple. When Porcius Festus succeeded Governor Felix at Caesarea, I was asked to consult on the case of a man called Paul. It was a rather tangled situation that should have been handled at a local level by the religious court. But he had been brought to then Governor Felix, who held Paul for two years.

When the new governor arrived, he was pressured by the Jewish leaders to reopen the case. Rather than return to Jerusalem as suggested by Festus, Paul, who was a Roman Citizen, appealed to Caesar. We had heard rumors that it was because of a threatened assassination. The Governor asked for help in identifying the charge to include in the letter to Caesar.

I was familiar with Paul. He had been a Pharisee of impeccable credentials and a rising star in the Sanhedrin. He was willing to go to extreme and violent measures to protect the pure religion of the Torah and the Talmud. He had been changed by a mystical experience to become a follower of the sect he once persecuted. Bernice and I were interested in hearing him for ourselves.

Paul began, "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies." He still had his oratorical gifts. It sounded like pure flattery but was also a subtle commentary on my marriage. Bernice was my sister, and this was her third marriage.

After reviewing his flawless credentials and his international campaign to root out the followers of the way, came the interesting part. "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'"

Festus could not take it any more and shouted, "You are out of your mind, Paul. Your great learning is driving you insane." Paul responded that he was not insane, then turned to me and said, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do." I was shocked and replied, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul was quick on his feet, "Short time or long -- I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

As we left the room, the talk was confined to the legal ramifications. Festus said, "This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment." I responded, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." But we all knew that we had seen something that challenged Festus' rationality and my morality. This man was part of something that was changing the world!