

-Save This Page as a PDF-

Festus Seeks Agrippa’s Counsel

25: 13-27

59 AD

Festus seeks Agrippa’s counsel DIG: How fair is Festus in describing the case? How much does he seem to know about Judaism? About the Way? How would this have affected any decision he would have made in this case? Do you think he is honestly trying to find the truth in this matter? Why? This Agrippa as the son of Herod in 12:1-23, and grandson of Herod the Great (Matthew 2: 1-20). Why hadn’t he learned anything from the horrible demise of his father and grandfather? Why might he be especially interested in hearing from Paul? What is the problem Festus faces? Why doesn’t he just let Paul go?

REFLECT: When you have questions about your faith, who do you go to for answers? Why? How else do you seek input? How do you deal with people who are your superiors at work, or government authorities, who are leading worldly lifestyles? Do you respect their position (Romans 13:1-7), or should you say something? Where do you draw the line? Do you generally take responsibility for the mess you have caused yourself? Or do you blame others? What keeps you going in the midst of questions and unanswered situations? How do you typically deal with things you don’t know and can’t figure out?

Paul’s appeal to **the emperor** placed **Festus** in a difficult spot. **He** would have to write an official report specifying the charges that stood against **Paul**, and the reason for **the appeal**. On the one hand, if the charges were weak or not sufficient under **Roman** law, **the emperor** would surely wonder about **Festus’** competence. Why had **he** not resolved the matter in **Judea**, one way or the other, even if it meant dismissing the matter or setting **Paul** free? On the other hand, if **Paul**, a **Roman** citizen, had appealed to **Rome**, there must have been something about the situation that was grave enough to warrant this action. What was **Festus** not telling **the emperor** that **he** ought to know about the situation in **Judea** involving **the**

Jewish leadership? These were the sort of thoughts that were likely running through **Festus’** mind as **he** sought a way to write **his** report so that **he himself** would not fall under suspicion. As fortune would have it, **he** was about to receive help from an unexpected source – **Jewish** nobility.⁵⁸³

The private explanation: There would be an interval before arrangements could be made for sending **Paul** to **Rome**. In the meantime, **the Jewish King Marcus Julius Agrippa II and his** sister **Julia Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus (25:13)**. This was likely a more-or-less official visit to establish relationships with the new **governor** upon **his** assumption to office.

This **king** was **Agrippa II** who was **the son** of **Agrippa I** ([to see link click Bl - Herod Agrippa Get’s His Due](#)) and the great grandson of **Herod the Great** (see the commentary on [The Life of Christ Av - The Visit of the Magi](#)). **He** was educated in **Rome** and was very sympathetic to **Roman** policy. When **his father** died, **he** was seventeen years old and was not appointed to any office at that point. But in 48 AD **he** was made **the king** of Chalais, which was a small province in northern Palestine. Later in 53 AD **he** exchanged this kingdom for the patriarchies of Philip and Lisanius and was given authority by Rome over the Jewish Temple with the authority to appoint the high priest. In this position **he** came to anger **the Jews** in two ways. **He** built a palace overlooking the Temple compound and **he** also angered them by **his** frequent changes of the high priesthood.

Bernice was **Agrippa’s** younger sister (by one year). **She** was first married to **her** uncle Herod who was the king of Chalais when **she** was only thirteen. When **he** died **she** went to **Rome** to be with **Agrippa II** and had an incestuous relationship with **him**, which was something of a scandal in its day. **She** later married a second time to Polemon, the king of Cilicia, perhaps to avert the rumors. But **she** didn’t seem to have lived with him very long. When **Agrippa II** became king **she** left Polemon to live incestuously again with **her** brother. **She** later became the mistress of both Vespasian and Titus, father and son, once again creating a major scandal in elite **Roman** circles. **She** lived with Titus openly when **she** arrived in Rome with Agrippa in 75 AD. But popular disapproval of the alliance made it impossible for Titus to marry **her**. A **Jewess** was not socially acceptable. So when **he** became emperor in 79 AD, **he** was forced to abandon **his** liaison with **her**.⁵⁸⁴



The nature of the royal couple’s state visit required **their staying several days in Caesarea**. That gave **Festus** the opportunity to seek **Agrippa’s** experience and expert advice. **He laid Paul’s case before the king**. As **king of the Jews**, **Festus** felt that **Agrippa** was in a unique position to assist **him** in the matter of **Paul’s** appeal. In contrast to Tertullus’ carefully crafted charges appealing to **Roman** administration and legal interests, all the charges against **Paul** were initiated by **the Jews** primarily concerned religious matters. **Festus** was extremely aware of **his** own incompetence in that area. **The governor** needed a specific charge to write in **his** report before sending **Paul** to **Rome . . .** and up to that point **he** had no specific charge. Therefore, **he** started from the beginning: **There is a man left behind as a prisoner by Felix (25:14)**.

Festus’ conversation with **Agrippa** is enlightening, but not for any new information. **Verses 15-21** are **Festus’** own version of the events covered in **25:1-2**. What is interesting are the small differences in **his** version. Like Lysias, **he** sought to paint **himself** in the best possible light, even at the expense of bending the truth somewhat (see [Cu - Paul Escorted to Caesarea](#)). **Festus** was already presenting **himself** in the role of **Paul’s** protector. **When I was in Jerusalem, the ruling kohanim and elders of the Judeans brought charges against him, asking for a judgment against him. I answered them that it is not Roman practice to turn over anyone before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense concerning the charges. So when they came together here, I did not delay, but on the next day sat on the judgment seat and ordered the man to be brought in (25:15-17)**. Initially, there was no question about delivering **Paul** to **the Jews**

without a fair trial, only where the trial would be held.⁵⁸⁵

When the accusers stood up, they were not bringing a charge of what crimes I suspected. This most likely meant a crime of treason, or any crime violating **Roman law**. **Instead, they had certain issues with him about their own religion and a dead man named Yeshua, whom Paul claimed to be alive.** Festus’ reference to the resurrection is intriguing. It shows how incomprehensible to a pagan the whole concept must have been. And that is the point. **He** wasn’t competent to try the case, which **he himself** had admitted. **Since I was at a loss as to how to investigate [Jewish law], I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there in regard to them.** Festus gave the impression that **he** wanted to move the trial to **Jerusalem** because of “Jewish questions” that could only be asked by **Jewish people in Jerusalem** territory.⁵⁸⁶ If **Festus** had already determined that no **Roman** law had been broken, why didn’t **he** throw the charges out like **Gallio** did (**18:15**)? In **25:9** Luke has given us the answer: **he** wanted to **do the Jewish leaders a favor (25:18-20).**⁵⁸⁷

But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the legal decision of His Majesty the Emperor, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to Caesar. No doubt flattered by the appeal to **his** expertise – and curious – **Agrippa said to Festus, “I was wishing to hear the man myself” (25:21-22a).** This suggests that **Agrippa** had been wanting to hear **Paul** for a long time. **He** undoubtedly knew of **Paul** and looked forward to hearing the leading spokesman for **the Way** in person.⁵⁸⁸

Many have noted the parallels between this narrative and the appearance of **Yeshua** before **Herod Antipas** (see the Commentary on **The Life of Christ Lp - When Herod Saw Jesus, He Was Greatly Pleased**). **Both Herods** expressed a desire to meet or hear the person in question. **Both** do indeed meet the party in question, but **they** do not determine the issue. **Both** also appear before **a Roman governor**. **Both** have **Roman** officials say that they could find nothing to charge them with under **Roman** law. And, finally, neither of **them** should have been on trial in the first place. These parallels can of course be overdone, since **Jesus** goes on to be unjustly crucified and **Luke** neither says nor implies any such outcome for **Paul**. Nevertheless, **Festus** assured **Agrippa, “Tomorrow, you shall hear him” (25:22b).** The stage was then set for **Paul** to fulfill what **Messiah** had long ago promised – that **His** witness, and **Paul** in particular, would **carry His name before kings and governors on account of His name (Luke 21:12-13; Acts 9:15).**⁵⁸⁹

The public explanation: Paul’s speech before **Agrippa II** is the climax to all his defense in **Acts 22-26**. It reaches back to all his previous arguments before **the Jewish crowd** (see **Cp** - **Paul’s Testimony on the Temple Steps**), **the Sanhedrin** (see **Cr** - **Paul’s Defense before the Great Sanhedrin**), and **the Roman governors** (see **Cv** - **Paul’s Defense before Governor Felix**), and presents his final statement on his belief that **Yeshua’s** sacrifice was superior to Levitical sacrifices (see the commentary on **Hebrews Ca** - **Messiah, the Perfect Sacrifice**). It is also climactic with regard to its setting because **Paul** bore his witness not only the gathered **Roman** leaders, but also **a Jewish king**. It is not surprising, therefore, that **Luke** went into some detail in describing the setting for this speech. One wonders if **Luke** was present in the visitor’s gallery. Otherwise, **Paul** (or somebody else) must have rehearsed it all to **him** later, although **Luke** may also have had access to the official documentation of the spectacle.

This scene is one of the most riveting in the B’rit Chadashah. **So on the next day, Agrippa II and Bernice came with great pageantry (25:23a)**. The royal procession must have been breathtaking. **Agrippa II** would have been decked out in all the trappings of royalty, including a purple robe, golden crown, rings, and perhaps even a scepter. **Bernice**, though not technically **Agrippa’s** queen, would have been similarly attired. **Luke** may have intended a subtle irony by drawing attention to **Bernice’s** presence. The outward show of **pomp** opposed to the reality of **their** inward lives was stark. **They entered the audience hall with the commanders**, undoubtedly in full-dress uniforms, **and the most prominent men of Caesarea** wearing **their** finest clothes. An immaculately dressed honor guard of soldiers undoubtedly escorted the dignitaries into the auditorium.⁵⁹⁰ Finally, when the beautiful, the rich and the powerful had paraded in and everyone was seated, **then at the order of Festus, Paul was brought in (25:23b)**. The little tentmaker from Tarsus, hands in chains, stood before **them** all. It was high drama and great entertainment.⁵⁹¹

Festus’ account of the situation was a mixture of truth and error. But it provides a useful summary for understanding **Paul’s** whole experience. Then **Festus** said: **King Agrippa and all present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Judean population petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting out that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving of death** (but his desire to send **Paul** to **Jerusalem** contradicted his own conclusions and forced **him** to appeal to **Emperor Nero**). **And when he himself appealed to His Majesty the Emperor, I decided to**

send him (25:24-25). In addition to painting **himself** in the best possible light, **Festus** seemed to imply that **Paul** was **himself** responsible for the whole situation with the unnecessary appeal, as if **he** had not **himself** virtually forced **Paul** to do so because of **his** own yielding to **Jewish** pressure. In any event, **Festus** at least once again acknowledged **Paul’s** innocence.

Now **Festus** set the immediate agenda. **Yet, I have nothing specific to write to my lord about him. Therefore, I have brought him before you** (plural, meaning the whole assembly) - **and especially before you, King Agrippa** (a nominal **Jew** who knew something about **Jewish** law) - **so that after the preliminary investigation has taken place, I might have something to write (25:26).** Since **Agrippa** would presumably have to send a complete dossier - including a certified copy of Lysias’ letter, an extract of the trial proceedings under Felix and perhaps notes from Felix’s interviews with **Paul**, and a record of **his** own investigation - **his** dilemma was quite real because none of those documents indicated that **Paul** was guilty of anything.

For it seems illogical (Greek: *alogos* meaning *senseless*) **to me when sending a prisoner, not to report also the charges against him (25:27).** It would be senseless indeed, perhaps fatal, to one’s career. Such reports were not optional. **Festus’** remark was extremely ironic because the whole situation was indeed *senseless*. **He** no charges against **Paul** because there was none to be found. The difficult spot **Festus** found **himself** in was very much **his** own doing.⁵⁹²