

## I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week we studied Acts 24 and we saw how Paul preached to Felix, the Roman Governor of Judea, and his wife, Drusilla. Paul preached the death and resurrection of Jesus, and focused on the themes of righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come. Felix was afraid, because he knew he was a sinner in danger of judgment. But Felix did not repent and turn to Jesus for salvation. Instead Felix procrastinated, always leaving the decision for another day, a more convenient time. But there is no convenient time for repentance, and as far as we know, Felix never repented of his sins.



Paul talks to Felix and Drusilla

Last week's scripture passage ended with Acts 24:27. **“When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.”** Felix was a corrupt procrastinator and when his rule was over he left Paul in prison. But as we shall see in today's Scripture, Festus is a man of action who had a reputation for diligence and justice. Festus governed Judea from about 59 AD to 62 AD.

Let's read Acts 25:1-12 and see how Festus takes charge of Paul's situation.

## II. Scripture Reading (Acts 25:1-12, NIV 1984)

1 Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem, 2 where the chief priests and Jewish leaders appeared before him and presented the charges against Paul. 3 They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way. 4 Festus answered, "Paul is being held at Caesarea, and I myself am going there soon. 5 Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong." 6 After spending eight or ten days with them, he went down to Caesarea, and the next day he convened the court and ordered that Paul be brought before him.

7 When Paul appeared, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. 8 Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar." 9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?" 10 Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" 12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

## III. Teaching

Let's look at Acts 25:1 again, **“Three days after arriving in the province, Festus went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.”** Only three days after arriving in Caesarea, the new governor was ready to travel to Jerusalem and meet the Jewish leaders. He was probably expecting to discuss with them about how best to meet their needs while also enforcing the demands of Caesar, the Roman emperor. I think he must have been very surprised that the thing they were most interested in was the fate of Paul. Felix had kept Paul in prison in Caesarea for two years, but their desire to murder Paul had not lessened. Of course, the Jewish leaders did not tell Festus this, they just asked Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem. Secretly, they planned to attack Paul on the road.



**Acts 25:3, “They urgently requested Festus, as a favor to them, to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, for they were preparing an ambush to kill him along the way.”** Festus did not agree to their



request, but he asked them to come to Caesarea instead. Once again, the Jews made serious charges against Paul, but they still did not have any evidence to back up their charges.

Paul again claimed innocence. **Acts 25:8, "Then Paul made his defense: "I have done nothing wrong against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar."** Festus seems to have been a good man, but he was also a politician. To succeed as governor, he would need the cooperation of the Jewish leaders. So, in order to try to please them, Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem for trial. The new governor was probably unaware that the Jews had plotted before to kill Paul in an ambush, but Paul knew the danger very well.

**Acts 25:10-11, "Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"** Paul had had two years to think about how best to respond the next time he had his day in court. Now Paul demands his rights as a Roman citizen. These rights included the right to appeal to the emperor if unfairly accused. Festus conferred with his council before answering, but legally Paul's appeal to Caesar left him no choice. So Festus declared that Paul would be sent to Caesar in Rome.

The arrangements to send Paul to Rome would require a few days. During that time, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus. Let's read Acts 25:13-27 and see what happens.

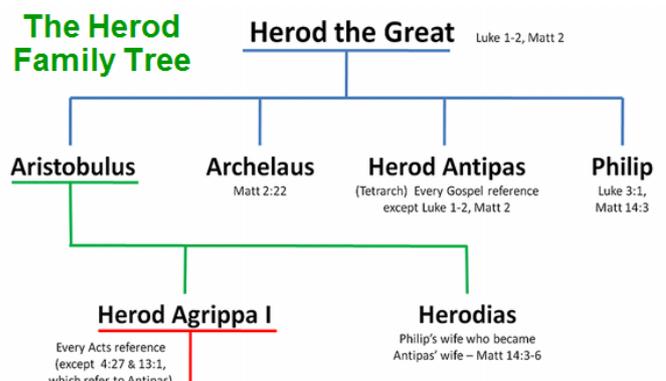
IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 25:13-27, NIV 1984)

13 A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. 14 Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. 15 When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. 16 "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. 17 When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. 18 When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. 19 Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. 20 I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21 When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him." 23 The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27 For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."

V. Teaching

The King Agrippa who appears in this passage is actually King Herod Agrippa II. Agrippa and Bernice were brother and sister, but according to the Jewish historian Josephus, they are said to have lived together in sin, as if



married. Last week we talked about another sister of Agrippa named Drusilla; she was the girl that Governor Felix had tempted away from her first husband and married.

These three were children of King Herod Agrippa I. He is the King Herod in Acts 12, the one who killed James, had Peter arrested, and who was later struck by an angel of the Lord and eaten by worms after he accepted praise as a god from the crowd.

King Herod Agrippa I was, in turn, the grandson of Herod the Great, the King Herod who tried to kill Jesus by ordering the slaughter of the baby boys of Bethlehem in Matthew 2. As you can see on this chart, nine of the members of the Herod family appear in the New Testament. Only Aristobulus does not appear in Scripture, probably because his father, Herod the Great, had him killed in 7 BC, at the young age of 24.

Herod Agrippa II was the last king of the Herod family and he was an expert on Jewish beliefs and history. He ruled over Syria, but had great influence in Jerusalem, because he had been given the authority to oversee the temple treasury and to appoint the high priests of the temple.

This man, King Agrippa, had probably already heard a great deal about Paul and so he was interested in the case when Festus mentioned it to him. At King Agrippa's request, Governor Festus arranged a meeting so that Agrippa could hear Paul speak. **Acts 25:23, "The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in."**

Because Paul had already appealed to Caesar, Festus makes it clear that this was not a trial, although it must have looked like one. In his opening statement, Festus says in **Acts 25:25, "I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome."** Festus is not placing Paul on trial again, but he is instead trying to figure out what he can write to Caesar to explain the reasons for Paul being sent to Rome. Festus explains further in **Acts 25:27, "For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him."**

Paul's case was a riddle to Governor Festus. Festus's predecessor, Felix, had held Paul prisoner for two years, but he had not charged Paul with any crime because there was no evidence that Paul had done anything wrong. The Jewish leaders wanted Paul killed and Festus did not want to offend them, but he could not let Paul, a Roman citizen, come to harm without being convicted at trial. In the middle of all of this, Paul had appealed to Caesar and by law must be sent to Rome. But before he could send Paul to Rome, he needed to write a summary of Paul's case. Now, Festus is hoping that King Agrippa, who is supposed to be an expert on Jewish affairs, will be able to suggest what to write. Next week, we will see how that turns out.

Before we go on, let's take a look at this painting by Nikolai K Bodarevski and consider the scene. The hall was prepared and all of the important people were gathered. King Agrippa and Bernice entered with great pomp and ceremony. Governor Festus also would have been robed in his best Roman finery. All three would have been seated on thrones, because Agrippa gave his sister the status of a queen. Into the midst of this gathering, Paul was brought, in chains.



Paul probably looked small and unimportant as he stood before the great men of the region. But remember, they had gathered so that the king could hear Paul's words. So, who was really the important one? Do you remember what the Lord told Ananias about Paul in **Acts 9:15? "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."** As we have studied our way through Acts, we have seen how Saul, the zealous persecutor of Christians, was transformed by the Lord to become Paul, the apostle to the gentiles. Now we have an iconic moment where Paul stands before a King and a Governor and gives his testimony.

Next week we will listen to Paul's testimony before Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, and the rest of the important people. Paul will speak of how his life was before he met Jesus and of how he met Jesus on the Damascus Road. Paul will tell of how he has lived since then. He will speak of the death and resurrection of Jesus and of the salvation that God has prepared for the Jews and the Gentiles, for



all who will believe in Jesus, the Light of the World. How will Agrippa respond? Next week we will see.

## VI. Conclusion

In **Matthew 19:28-30**, Jesus answered Peter's questions about rewards for the faithful service of the disciples. **"Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.'"**

In their day, King Agrippa and all of the Herod family were first; but now they are almost forgotten in history. But the heritage of Jesus' disciples is the worldwide church and Paul's letters make up nearly half of the books of the New Testament. In every way, the disciples who humbled themselves to follow Jesus and to serve others have become great.

In the world, the way of greatness is power, money, and fame. But in the Kingdom of God, the way up is down. In **Mark 9:35**, we read, **"Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, 'If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all.'"**

Many people today, perhaps especially in Japan, dislike ambition. But that is because our image of ambition is selfish ambition - ambition for personal gain. But ambition to be a blessing to others is very different and very good. The Apostle Paul was one of the most ambitious men in all of history. He was ambitious to proclaim the Good News of salvation to the world and to see Jews and Gentiles, men and women, kings and slaves alike come to faith in Christ. In order to achieve his ambition, he was willing to humble himself and serve others in every way. What about us? Can we be ambitious like Paul?

In 1876, at the age of 50, William S. Clark came to Japan to establish the Sapporo Agricultural College, which later became Hokkaido University. In Sapporo, you can see this statue of him. At the base of the statue it says, *"Boys be ambitious."* But this was not the Clark's whole message. It is widely reported that he actually said, *"Boys be ambitious for Christ."* This is the kind of ambition that is good. It is the kind of ambition Paul had. It is the kind of ambition we need.



Pursuit of the things of this world leads only to loneliness and disappointment. But if we are ambitious for the Kingdom of God and for the glory of our risen Lord Jesus, then we can have the joy of blessing many people with the love of Christ. Let us each ask ourselves. How can I be ambitious for Christ? How can I love others with the love of Jesus? Let's pray.

## VII. Prayer