

Day 133, Acts 25

by David Servant

Paul's appeal to Caesar highlights the contrast between his faith and the actions of the Roman Emperor Nero, who persecuted Christians in horrible ways.

Scripture: Luke 23:1, Acts 9:15, Acts 12:2, Acts 19:21, Acts 23:11, Acts 25:13, Romans 1:16, 2 Timothy 4:6, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Persecution", "Apostle Paul"

Description

David Servant delves into the historical context surrounding Paul's trials before King Agrippa II, Governor Felix, and Governor Festus, highlighting the dark and tumultuous family history of the Herodian dynasty, including beheadings and immoral relationships. Despite facing persecution and being kept in custody, Paul's influence remained strong through his letters and ministry. Paul, as a Roman citizen, appealed to Caesar Nero for a fair trial, revealing Nero's notorious reputation for cruelty, including persecuting Christians and blaming them for the Great Fire of Rome.

Transcript

Do you remember what the Lord said to Ananias when he objected to being commissioned to find and minister to Saul of Tarsus? If not, allow me to refresh your memory. The Lord said to Ananias, Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel (9:15).

Twenty-three years later, we begin to see the fulfillment of God's word that Paul would bear His name before kings, as he testified before the governor of Judea, Marcus Antonius Felix, his successor, Porcius Festus, and also King Herod Agrippa II, king over northern Judea and the seventh and last king of the Herodian dynasty, whom we read about today. It was Agrippa II's father, Herod Agrippa I, who ordered the beheading of the apostle James (12:2) and who was struck by an angel and subsequently died from worms, having not given glory to God when an audience exalted him (12:23). Agrippa II's great-grandfather, Herod the Great, is remembered for his slaughter of the babies of Bethlehem recorded in Matthew 2. And Herod Agrippa II's great-uncle, Herod Antipas, was responsible for the beheading of John the Baptist. Quite a family heritage.

Agrippa II arrived in Caesarea with his sister, Bernice (25:13). The Jewish historian Josephus recorded some facts about Bernice's three short-lived marriages, the first two of which ended with her husbands' deaths. Her second marriage was to one of her uncles. She deserted her third husband. Josephus also

recorded contemporary rumors of Bernice's incestuous relationship with her brother (Agrippa II), who never married during his lifetime. All of this should give you a better idea about the people before whom Paul was being tried. All folks who needed Jesus!

It seems incredible that after two years of being kept in custody at Herod's Praetorium in Caesarea, the Jewish Sanhedrin still wanted Paul to be executed. It suggests that he was still quite influential through his letters and personal ministry to those who visited him.

In any case, Paul had known for years that he was destined to go to Rome (19:21), and it had been confirmed to him two years earlier when Jesus appeared to him in Jerusalem (23:11). As a Roman citizen, he had a right to a fair trial to defend himself before his accusers, and he also had the right of appeal. So he appealed to Caesar (the title used by Roman Emperors), who in Paul's time was a twenty-year-old named Nero.

Nero is remembered for his execution of his mother, for kicking one of his pregnant wives to death, and for being the emperor who fiddled while Rome burned. Because of rumors that Nero himself was the arsonist, he placed the blame on the Christians, persecuting them in horrible ways. Some were even used as human torches to illuminate Rome at night. This was described by the Roman senator and eye-witness historian, Tacitus:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Of course, these days it is Nero who is burning.

And that ends our history lesson for today!

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