

Ouachita Baptist University

## Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

---

Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts

W.O. Vaught Archive

---

1-1-1984

# When the Glamorous Agrippa and the Beautiful Bernice Faced Paul

W. O. Vaught

*Ouachita Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn\\_acts](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_acts)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "When the Glamorous Agrippa and the Beautiful Bernice Faced Paul" (1984). *Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts*. 117.  
[https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn\\_acts/117](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_acts/117)

This Sermon Notes is brought to you for free and open access by the W.O. Vaught Archive at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

WHEN THE GLAMOROUS AGRIPPA AND THE  
BEAUTIFUL BERNICE FACED PAUL

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 125  
ACTS 25:13-16

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.  
Immanuel Baptist Church  
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 25:13-16 "And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him."

The Bible must be interpreted in the light of the time in which it was written. Here in this part of the Acts Paul was exposed to some of the greatest men in the Roman Empire. Claudius was the Emperor at the time, but he was soon to be poisoned by his adopted son Nero, and during the rule of Nero, a sharp decline would set in because of his poor leadership. These men were surrounded by Pallos, Narcissus, and Felix and in reality these three men controlled the empire. Narcissus was the paramour of the wife of Claudius and along with Felix and Pallos they just about ran the show. Felix, for a time had been the Procurator of Judaea, but as this passage opens he had been replaced and deposed, and Festus had been appointed to take his place. Festus was a very able man and very aggressive. This Agrippa we are to study in this passage is known as Herod Agrippa II in history. His grandfather was Herod the Great and was a genius. These men made things great during the Augustian Age. For almost one hundred years the family of Herod the Great was the most powerful family in the empire. It was Herod Agrippa I who recommended to the Roman Senate that Claudius be made Emperor. They all wore short hair, no side-burns, and they wore the Roman Toga with a golden braid. They were clear thinkers and had a fantastic conception of the law. Historians have written much about the attractiveness of Agrippa and Bernice. Agrippa was a magnificent physical specimen. You remember, it was his great uncle who killed John the Baptist. His father executed James, the pastor of the Jerusalem Church. He grew up in Rome and received the best education of the empire. His sisters were Drusilla, the beautiful blonde, and Bernice, the most beautiful redhead. Every historian who wrote about this family tells how the beauty of Drusilla was neutralized by her pride and vanity, but they also say that Bernice was probably the most beautiful woman that ever lived in the Roman Empire. Poems were written about her beauty. Even after the age of fifty, she still maintained her personal beauty. The Roman Senate feared her as they feared no other person in the empire. So when you read these names you need to know something about them. Drusilla was so jealous of her sister Bernice that she was determined to out do her. Bernice was married to a king in what is now Turkey, and Drusilla was married to the King of Amesa. Felix came along and whispered sweet nothings in her ear, something like this-- "My dear, some day I'll be the emperor of the empire and I want you to be by my side and be the first lady of the empire." Drusilla fell for this line and left her husband in Amesa and ran away with Felix. You see, this would have made her greater than her beautiful sister, Bernice. Bernice was so beautiful she didn't need to be jealous of Drusilla so she went back to live in incest with her brother, Agrippa, II. Later on she will tire of this arrangement and will become the mistress of Vespasian. When Vespasian will leave Palestine to go back to Rome to become the emperor, Bernice will become the mistress of his son, named Titus, even though she was ten years older than Titus. Eventually Titus will tell the Roman Senate that he wants to marry Bernice and they will tell him "NO" for they feared her more than any woman in the empire. Historians say that she was twice as dangerous as Cleopatra.

I put all this history here just to show you that God allowed Paul to witness to all these famous people. Paul, possibly the greatest man to walk the earth other than Jesus Christ, had a marvelous opportunity to tell them of the saving power of his Lord

Here in our present passage we will see how Paul witnessed to these very attractive and desparately wicked people. Please remember that Agrippa and Bernice were brother and sister and were living in open sin together when they came to Caesarea.

You will recall how we have studied Caesarea. Herod the Great had built it and had erected at Caesarea a great harbor. It was built on the Athenian Plan and cost billions to erect. And let us keep in mind that all of these three who sat in judgment of Paul will spend eternity in hell. All had a fantastic chance to be saved, but they went negative and will be in hell forever. We might have called this section of Acts "The Three Judges In Hell." They are in fire today, and will eventually be in hell forever.

ACTS 25:13 "And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus." Here are people who, in their lifetime, had everything you think you ever wanted. They had prestige, power, position, beauty, pleasure and wealth. People today would snap at the chance to have these things. But just remember, you can have all these things and be unhappy. They did. Caesarea was one of the most beautiful cities in all the earth. All the Roman officials loved to come there and spend some time. Agrippa, II and Bernice had been wanting to come for some time. This is where they grew up, but as long as their blonde sister, Drusilla, was living there with Felix, they wouldn't come. But since he had been relieved of his post and Festus had been assigned to Caesarea, they now can make the journey back to the home of their youth. Festus, that brilliant lawyer, had just arrived on the scene and was ready to clean up the mess left by Felix. He had already attended a ten-day party in Jerusalem and in this drunken entertainment at Jerusalem he lost his objectivity. The chief priests and the Pharisees threw a ten-day party for Festus up at Jeruslaem. Of course, you know what they had in mind. For more than two years they had been plotting how they could get to Paul. "After certain days" is just a phrase that tells us all these things had transpired. Agrippa, II had a kingdom to the North, and when Festus came to Caesarea, Agrippa, II and Bernice decided they would pay him a visit. The members of the Roman Senate rejected Bernice as wife of the emperor and they gave as their reason the fact that she lived in open sin with her brother. The real truth was that they were afraid of her and her beauty and they were afraid she would steal the empire away from them. Most of the members of the Roman Senate were guilty of the same kind of sin. But of course this kind of hypocritical action is characteristic of people of this kind. They sat there wrapped in their beautiful senatorial robes and looked down their self-righteous noses and rejected her as the wife of the new emperor, Titus. In reality, they were afraid of her brains and her beauty and her ability.

Now Agrippa and Bernice put on a good front, but they were very unhappy people. From a human standpoint they had it all, but they had no happiness. Paul is going to present Jesus to them but they will pass him by and continue in their unhappiness. They will have one opportunity to become Christians but they will fumble away their chance. All these super stars had a horrible death. Drusilla lived out her life and died in the lava at the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D. Festus will lose his kingdom and live to a ripe old age and be miserable every minute of it. Paul will stand up in the midst of it all and give a strong witness for Jesus Christ.

ACTS 25:14 "And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:"

They had a party one night. The word for Festus "declared" is "Anatithemai" and means to say it again and again and again. Festus had been outdone by Paul's appeal to Rome. Festus really has nothing significant to write and thereby accuse Paul to Nero. He is in a real jam and he doesn't know how to handle the situation. So Festus laid before his two charming guests Paul's cause. Possibly he told them that this was all caused by Felix and that he would have to straighten out this mess left him by Felix. He told them there was a certain man, and he used the word "Aner" and this means a very noble man. Festus had developed a great respect for Paul. In other words, Felix had left a hot potato in his hands and he didn't know what to do with it.

ACTS 25:15 "About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him." This is the time when he had that ten-day party in Jerusalem with the chief priests and Pharisees. We read they "informed me." Well, I should say they did. During those days of the party of drinking and dining, they told him every lie they could about Paul. In fact, that is all they had thought about for several years.

ACTS 25:16 "To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him." "To whom I answered" means that Festus is telling his side of the story and puts himself in a good light. Now why was this bird trying to hustle Paul back to Jerusalem for trial? Because during that ten-day party he had been prejudiced and he was trying to distort Roman law. Festus wanted to ingratiate himself to those Jerusalem leaders and he knew he could do it in this way. Now Festus had no proof at all that Paul was guilty of any wrong. Festus knew that under Roman law a man was innocent until proven guilty, but after one ten-day party, he was ready to set aside Roman law and take Paul to Jerusalem for trial. But Paul called his hand and appealed to Caesar.

So the self-righteous attitude of Festus just glares out at you in this passage. So often this is the case, the more a man fails the more he displays his self-righteousness.

Just imagine Festus putting himself up in judgment of Paul! Festus is appearing here to Agrippa and Bernice that he is doing a noble and just thing, when in reality he was trying to get Paul to Jerusalem in order to satisfy the blood thirsty Jews in Jerusalem. This verse is a very accurate photograph of the inner life of this hypocrite called Festus. Festus was so filled with mental attitude sins he couldn't even think straight.

In our next study we will begin our study of the witness of Paul before these famous guests.