

# Come to Understanding

They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding,  
and they that murmured shall learn doctrine. — Isaiah 29:24

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## I Will Call for You

We are often faced with an inward struggle when we try to resist that which we know to be true. Such was the case with Felix, the Roman governor of Judah. After he assumed the responsibility of judging Paul concerning the accusations that the religious Jews had made against him, he was able to hear his witness. Speaking to both Felix and his wife, Drusilla, Paul told him about the importance of faith in the Messiah:

24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in the Messiah. -Acts 24

While Drusilla was called a “Jewess,” she was not of the tribe of Judah. She was actually the great granddaughter of King Herod the Great and the daughter of Herod Agrippa I. The Herod family were Edomites (called Idumeans by the Greeks), which are the descendents of Esau, the brother of Jacob, who was also called Israel. Esau hated Jacob for receiving the blessing that he believed to be rightfully his. Therefore, Esau vowed to kill Jacob:

41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. -Genesis 27

The Edomites began to consider themselves “Jews” after the cities of Idumea were conquered by John Hyrcanus, who ruled Judah as a high priest from 134 to 104 B. C. He required them to be circumcised and to adopt the Jewish laws (see Charles F. Kent, *The Makers and Teachers of Judaism from the Fall of Jerusalem to the Death of Herod the Great*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1911, p. 242). One author describes the event whereby the Romans conferred upon Herod the Great the title, “King of the Jews:”

History presents no stranger nor more dramatic sight than Herod, the Idumean, accompanied by Antony and Octavian going to the temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill to offer sacrifices in connection with his assumption of the historic title, King of the Jews. (see Kent, *Ibid.*, p. 285)

To further shore up his control over the Jews, Herod used force to slaughter them by the thousands in the process of conquering Judea, Jerusalem, and then, finally tak-

ing control of the temple. Then, in an effort to win the loyalty of the surviving Jews, Herod travelled to Samaria and married Mariamne, the daughter of John Hyrcanus (see Kent, *Ibid.*, p. 285). However, even as Herod tried to legitimize his claim to his title of the “King of the Jews” through his marriage to Mariamne, questions circulated as to whether the high priest Hyrcanus was really a descendant of Aaron (a Levite, as required by Jewish law) or whether he was a pagan (see John Jahn, *History of the Hebrew Commonwealth*, Trans. by Calvin E. Stowe, London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1829, p. 126).

During Paul’s encounter with Felix and Drusilla, Herod’s family was in firm control of Judea and was in the process of expanding its influence within the Roman Empire. It was in the backdrop of these political dynamics that Paul spoke to them in a direct and uncompromising manner as he reasoned with Felix concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” As Paul shined the light of truth upon their lives, Felix responded as many of us do when we are convicted of our sins. He trembled with fear:

25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go your way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for you. -Acts 24

What was it that made Felix tremble before the words of Paul? Whatever it was, Felix was apparently not willing to repent of it. Instead, he sent Paul away, saying “when I have a convenient season, I will call for you.” He was saying, in effect, “Don’t call me, I’ll call you.”

Considering his former position as a Greek slave, Felix had risen to great power. However, even though he was the governor of Judah and was married to Drusilla, who is called a “Jewess,” he did not convert to the Jewish religion, as required by the Jewish laws, which Drusilla claimed to keep (see James S. Jeffers, *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1999, p. 136). Therefore, he remained a religious Gentile, even as he governed the Jews.

By the time Drusilla married Felix, her father, Herod Agrippa I, had already died a dreadful death in the midst of pompous arrogance:

21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration to them.

So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense,  
and caused them to understand the reading. — Nehemiah 8:8

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22 And the people gave a shout, *saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.*

23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. -Acts 12

Therefore, it was the responsibility of Drusilla's brother, Herod Agrippa II, to find her a suitable husband. This Agrippa had already married his other sister, Bernice. They were the pompous couple that would later also hear Paul's case for Christianity:

23 And on the next day, when Agrippa had come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and had entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. -Acts 25

As Herod Agrippa II tried to expand his power throughout the Roman Empire, he attempted to find Drusilla a husband with royal credentials from strategic kingdoms. However, to maintain their credentials among the Jews, it was necessary that her new husband convert to the Jewish religion by keeping the outward Jewish rites and traditions that had been adopted by Herod's family of Edomites. In doing so, he arranged for Drusilla to marry Epiphanes, the son of king Antiochus. However, despite his promise, that marriage fell apart because Epiphanes refused to be circumcised (see Josephus, *The Works of Josephus*, bk. 20, chs. 7, William Whiston, trans., Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985, p. 640).

Next, Agrippa arranged for Drusilla to marry Azizus, the king of Emesa. He submitted to the circumcision as a condition for the marriage (see Josephus, *Ibid.*, p. 640). He did so even though Emesa, which is now known as Homs, Syria, was the center for the worship of the sun god known as El Gabal (also called Elagabalus). The god was worshipped as a cone-shaped black stone believed to have come from heaven (see Luigi Piccardi and W. Bruce Masse, eds., *Myth and Geology, Geological Society of London, Special Publication No. 273*, Bath, United Kingdom: Geological Society Publishing House, 2007, pp. 220-221).

Even though Drusilla was already the bride of Azizus and, as such, the queen of Emesa, Felix saw her as a means by which he could become part of the Herod family. Once he set his sights upon her for marriage,

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Felix was apparently willing to use any means available to achieve his end. He enlisted the services of a magician named Simon, who promised her happiness if she left Azizus and married Felix. Drusilla accepted the offer (see Josephus, *Ibid.*, p. 641).

Up until her marriage to Felix, Drusilla had insisted that her husbands keep the outward rites of the Jewish religion. She had apparently abandoned that conviction by marrying Felix. Therefore, hearing the words of Paul, the unrepentant Felix, as well as Drusilla, had much to tremble about. While some may have claimed Drusilla to be a "Jewess," Paul says she was not:

25 For circumcision truly profits, if you keep the law: but if you are a breaker of the law, your circumcision is made uncircumcision.

26 Therefore if the uncircumcised keeps the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?

27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfills the law, judge you, who by the letter and circumcision do transgress the law?

28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

29 But he *is a* Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God. -Romans 2

The Greek word that is translated as "Jew" is actually *ιουδαίος* (*Ioudaios*). It comes from the Hebrew name, *יהודה* (*Yahuwdah*), which is translated as "Judah." This is the name Leah gave to her fourth son, which she bore with Jacob. She revealed the meaning of his name, which is "praise Yahweh:"

35 And she conceived again, and bore a son: and she said, Now will I praise Yahweh: therefore she called his name Judah; and stopped bearing. -Genesis 29

While there are many that call themselves the people of Judah, or "Jews," those that are true are the ones that are true to his name. They are the ones that praise Yahweh. Yahshua (Jesus) calls those that say they are Jews and are not, liars and the synagogue of Satan:

9 I know your works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but you are rich) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan. -Revelation 2

He says that His people are the ones that have kept His word and have not denied His name. The others, He says again, are liars and of the synagogue of Satan:

8 I know your works: behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it: for you have a little strength, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name.

9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before your feet, and to know that I have loved you. -Revelation 3

It is no marvel that Felix trembled as he told Paul, "I will call for you."