

Chapter 6

AGRIPPA THE ELDER AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

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By considering the reign, and the aftermath of that reign, of King Herod Agrippa I, I am attempting to set a brief period of Christian history in its broader historical context. I hope to show how the study of Agrippa the Elder assists us, on the one hand, to exegete Acts 12 where the actions of the king and his death are the dominant motifs, and on the other to show how his unexpectedly early death may have created the context and the circumstances for the beginnings of the circumcision debate in early Christianity.

In doing so I express my appreciation in being asked to contribute to this collection of essays for my teacher David Broughton Knox. His study of Classical Greek at the University of Sydney as a foundation for post-graduate study in history and theology remains a sound model for the theological educator. His knowledge about and love of the Greek NT has been an ongoing inspiration. One will not forget the impact of his large and subtle mind probing, analysing and exploring the issues of exegesis for theology.

I. The Christian Community in Jerusalem (AD33-41)

If we fix the date of the crucifixion at 33, the Jerusalem Christian community would have been in existence for years when Agrippa began to rule over Judaea and Samaria.² This period may be divided into unequal parts by the crisis occasioned by the assault against the community led by Saul with the ensuing scattering far and wide of many of the members (Acts 8:1, 4, 19). Saul's inclusion of himself, some years later, in the list of those to whom the risen Lord appeared (1 Cor 15:8) has been understood by some to mean that Saul's conversion occurred quite close in time³ to the resurrection of Jesus, perhaps not more than two years later. According to Luke the conversion of Saul (in 34?) meant that "the church throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria had peace . . . was built up and . . . was multiplied" (Acts 9:31). It seems likely that this situation remained throughout the

intervening years of Roman prefects — Pilate until (?)37, Marcellus (?)37-41 — until 41 when Claudius extended the rule of Agrippa to Judaea-Samaria.

Why did Saul launch his attack upon the community? While the Sadducean High Priests opposed the apostles over the resurrection (Acts 4:1-2) and were jealous of the popularity of the new movement (5:15-17) only minor punishments were inflicted on the apostles (4:21; 5:40) with the great majority of the members untroubled. The community of Aramaic speaking believers had their own distinctive beliefs and life-style (2:44-45, 4:32-5:11), nevertheless the members were, as observant Jews who attended temple (2:46; 3:1; 5:12) and synagogue (26:11), well accepted within the wider Jerusalem community (2:47).

Serious troubles only arose with the emergence (within the community) of the "Hellenists" (Acts 6:1), a group about whom much has been written.⁴ Evidence from the Acts of the Apostles, the only direct source of information about the Hellenists, suggests that they were proselytes to Judaism (cf. v5), possibly of servile background (cf. Synagogue of freedmen v9) who in several previous generations had come from Greek speaking parts of the Empire (v9) to settle in Palestine. It seems probable that the "Hellenists" first language was Greek with indigenous Aramaic as secondary. Within the first year or two after the resurrection numbers of these "Hellenists", including widows, became believers and joined the Christian community in Jerusalem. Perhaps their origins may be traced⁵ back to those non-Judaeans who heard Peter speak on the day of Pentecost (2:5-11). The fervour for Jesus was matched by the implacable hostility of the non-converting "Hellenists" (6:11-14; 9:28-29, cf. 1 Thess 2:15).

The Christian "Hellenists" were very radical in respect of Judaism. Their leader Stephen taught that the law of Moses was now abrogated and that the Temple was not the dwelling place of God and would be destroyed (Acts 7:49-51; 6:13-14). He taught that Jesus was "the prophet" about whom Moses spoke (7:37; cf. Deut 18:15, 18) and revered him as "ruler", "deliverer" and "judge" (Acts 7:27, 35), as "the Righteous One" and as "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (v56). Stephen's radicalism was continued after his death by Philip who evangelized people in a Samaritan city (8:4-13) and in Gentile towns along the coast from Azotus to Caesarea (v40). Other "Hellenists" evangelized Gentiles in Antioch in Syria so that a large community of believers, which apparently included many "Greeks" (11:20-21; cf. Gal 2:12), came into existence. In view of the outcome of the "Hellenists'" activities it is not surprising that they met with such early hostility in Jerusalem.

Opposition against the "Hellenist" Christians was led by a young Pharisee, Saul (Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:21; 22:4; 26:9-11; Gal 1:13-14, 22-23). Though born in Tarsus in Cilicia Saul was brought up⁶ in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3; 26:4) since only there was it possible to have the intense study of the Law referred to in Gal 1:13-14 and Phil 3:5. The party of the Pharisees to which Saul belonged is now thought⁷ to have been that of the rigorous and inflexible Shammites. Gamaliel, Saul's teacher, though a grandson of Hillel is believed⁸ to have been a follower of Shammai. From the parallelism of Phil 3:5:

kata nomon pharisaïos ("in regard to the law, a Pharisee")

kata zēlos diōkōn tēn ekklēsian ("as for zeal, persecuting the church")

it has been inferred⁹ that, if in regard to *nomos* (law) Paul was *pharisaïos* (a Pharisee) so in regard to *zēlos* (zeal) he was (*ho*) *diōkōn* (a persecutor). In other words, Paul was by deepest conviction a zealous persecutor. When the Jerusalem mob attempted to kill him years later he said (ironically?) "(I was) a zealot for God just as you are today" (Acts 22:3). We conclude, therefore, that Saul belonged to that tradition of violent intolerance associated with Phinehas (Num 25:1-10; Ps 106:31) and Mattathiah father of the Maccabean revolt (1 Macc 2:23-8) which took direct action against anyone who introduced Hellenizing influences among God's people. It may be significant that in the rabbinic exegesis¹⁰ of Num 25:13 the killing of an apostate was regarded as offering a sacrifice to God.

Saul would have viewed the "Hellenists'" attack on the Torah and the Temple as a grievous evil to be properly eradicated by force. He would have concluded that Jesus must have been "the accursed of God" since he was "hanged on a tree" (Deut 21:23). Saul's allusion to this Deuteronomic text in Gal 3:13 makes it very likely that this had been his original view. "Once," he confessed, "I knew Christ *kata sarka* (according to the flesh), but now I know him thus no longer" (2 Cor 5:16 adapted). References to "the tree" in the Acts and elsewhere (Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet 2:24) are suggestive of an early Christian apologetic response to the accusation that the one "hanged on the tree" must have been the "accursed of God".

Saul, Pharisee and Zealot belonged, therefore, to that same "philosophy" of violent and direct action as seen in the hacking down of the eagle installed by Herod on the Temple gate in 4BC (*J.W.* i, 647-55) and in the uprising against the introduction of the Roman head tax in AD6 (*J.W.* ii, 117-18, *A.J.* xviii, 4). More recently there had been demonstrations against Pontius Pilate who in his first years as Prefect had attempted to "subvert Jewish practices" (*katalusei tōn nomimōn*

tōn Ioudaikōn — *A.J.* xviii, 55) by bringing the Roman legionaries' standards into Jerusalem and by plundering the sacred treasury (*Corbonas*). It is conceivable that Saul had been present in Jerusalem at the time of these disturbances as well as for the crucifixion of the blasphemous Nazarene (cf. *A.J.* xviii, 63-64; 2 Cor 5:16). Certainly the emergence in Jerusalem of the "Hellenists" would have been viewed by Saul as critical for the purity of Israel and an occasion for direct zealous action. Although the Aramaic speaking apostles did not leave Jerusalem (Acts 8:1) it is quite possible that many from that ethnic group suffered along with the "Hellenists" (Gal 1:13, 22-23; Acts 26:11). Nevertheless it seems that the "Hellenists" in particular were forced to move to foreign cities like Damascus (Acts 9:1-2, 21). The Aramaic Christians with their more conservative attitudes to Torah and Temple were able to remain. It is intrinsically probable that their conservatism intensified in the absence of the "Hellenists" in the aftermath of the assault on them. The twin events of the conversion of the persecutor Saul and the dispersal of his enemies the "Hellenists" provided an opportunity for peace and growth for the Aramaic Christian communities of Judaea, Galilee and Samaria, that is, until the next crisis six or seven years later — the attack of King Herod Agrippa.

II. Agrippa I in the New Testament

Agrippa the Elder is referred to in only one place in the NT — Acts 12, where he is referred to as *Hērōdēs ho Basileus* (Herod the king) (v1) or simply as *Hērōdēs* (Herod) (vv6, 11, 19, 21). He is, nevertheless, extremely important in the history of Roman Palestine both for what he attempted to achieve in his eight years as king (37-44) and/or the effect on the Jews of his unexpected death at the age of fifty-four. Although Agrippa is primarily significant for mainstream Jewish history it is no exaggeration to say that Christian history was profoundly affected by his reign and also by the consequences of his death.

Luke's inclusion of the Agrippa data may be evidence for the importance of this man. Certainly Luke wishes his readers to know about the tragic death of one of the original disciples of Jesus and the miraculous escape of another. Clearly, too, he seeks to teach his readers about the sovereignty of God in that, despite Agrippa's treatment of James Zebedee and Peter and of his own soldiers, he himself died suddenly because of his blasphemous behaviour so that "the word of God grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24). The author also uses the episode to signal that the leadership of the community has now passed from Peter to James (the brother of Jesus — Acts 12:17, cf.

15:12-21; 21:18; cf. Gal 2:9 where James' name is listed before Cephas and John). It is, furthermore, important for him to introduce to his readers John Mark who will accompany Barnabas and Saul in their Gentile mission from Antioch (Acts 12:25-13:5; cf. 12:12). Despite all this the author does appear very interested in Agrippa himself mentioning, not only his arrest of James and his evil plans for Peter, but also his search for Peter, his examination and execution of his soldiers, his journey to Caesarea, his dispute with the people of Tyre and Sidon and the circumstances of his death. Are these gratuitous details a pointer to the wider significance of Agrippa, the information about whom is included despite its chronological awkwardness? The famine which brought Barnabas and Saul to Jerusalem in 11:27-30 is to be dated c. 47¹¹ whereas the Agrippa story recorded in chapter twelve must have occurred earlier since Agrippa died in 44. Acts chapter twelve, therefore, may represent the author's attempt to do justice to the intersection of Christian history with a very important historical figure, King Agrippa.

The major literary sources for data about Agrippa are Josephus and Luke neither of whom indicate where or from whom they obtained their information. It may be significant, however, that the extended "we" passage of Acts 20:6-21:17 indicates that the author of Acts came to Caesarea and Jerusalem where he would have had opportunity to talk to people about the events of fifteen years (or so) earlier. Certainly the numerous specific details contained in chapter 12 suggest that the author had access to reliable written sources or, more probably, had himself researched the story in a careful way. The text, as it stands, distinguishes "James brother of John" from "James" who will become the leader of the Jerusalem Church (15:13; 21:18). Others to be mentioned by name are Peter (12:5-18), Mary (v12), John Mark (v12), Rhoda (v13) and Blastus (v20). Though not named, the "four squads of soldiers" (v4, cf. vv6, 18, 19) and the "people of Tyre and Sidon" belong credibly to the story. There are important time notes about the arrest of Peter "during the days of Unleavened Bread" (v3) and the delay of his execution until "after Passover" (v4). The passage also makes reference to specific places — the house of Mary (v12), the implication that "James and his brothers" were not at that house but somewhere else (v17) and the subsequent journey of Agrippa from Jerusalem to Caesarea (v19) — confirmed by Josephus (*A.J.* xix, 343). The title used for Blastus — "Chamberlain" (*koitōn* v20) is confirmed by Josephus' use of the same word for a certain Crispus who later served Agrippa II in a similar office (*Vita* 382). While there is no extant corroboration of the dispute between Agrippa and the people of Tyre and Sidon and their request

for peace on account of dependence on Agrippa's kingdom for food (v20) this incident is intrinsically probable, given the fertility of Galilee. While the accounts of Luke and Josephus about the death of Agrippa diverge in certain details they are in agreement about the main points — Caesarea as the place of the event, the splendid robe, the acclamation of Agrippa as "a god" and his sudden death (vv19-23, *A.J.* xix, 343-350). The information in Acts 12, therefore, is impressively detailed both as to Agrippa and also the Christians who appear in the story.

III. Herod Agrippa I: A Career Sketch (10BC-AD44)

Agrippa's grandfather was Herod the Great who became king of Israel in 37BC after a civil war against members of the Hasmonean (or Maccabee) family, the incumbent dynasty which had ruled for a century and a quarter. After ousting the previous rulers Herod set about systematically killing off the leading survivors among the Hasmoneans including one of his wives Mariamne, Agrippa's grandmother, whom Herod removed in 29BC. Years later Herod also killed Agrippa's father Aristobulus (7BC) as well as Aristobulus' brother Alexander. Agrippa, his two brothers and two sisters, half-Hasmonean as they were, were fortunate indeed to survive the bitter jealousy of the old king. Their survival was probably due to the fact that their mother Bernice was daughter of Salome, Herod's sister.

Bernice apparently concluded that Judaea was no safe place for her children. One source of danger, clearly, was Herod; the other was Archelaus and Antipas sons of Herod and the Samaritan Malthace, who had been named in the king's will as his successors. Whether Herod was alive or dead Judaea, clearly, was dangerous for Bernice and her children. So she took them to Rome some time after her husband's death and before the passing of the old king (4BC). Certain parallels between Agrippa and Jesus might be noted. Both were born in Judaea within a few years of one another — Agrippa in 10BC, Jesus in (?)7BC; both were taken by their parent(s) from Judaea on account of the extreme danger near or shortly after the death of Herod. After a period of obscurity, both become public and prominent figures — Jesus in (?)30, Agrippa in 37.

After leaving Judaea Agrippa's life fell into three parts. In the first, 6BC-AD23 Agrippa lived in Rome where, with his mother, he came under the patronage of Antonia, the mother of Claudius and grandmother of Gaius (Caligula), both of whom would become emperor, though in reverse order. Agrippa's boyhood friendship with Gaius and Claudius would prove very important to him in the years to come.

His free spending, a lifelong weakness, led to the depletion of his funds and the death in AD23 of Tiberius' influential son Drusus was the signal for Agrippa to leave Italy for Palestine.

The middle part of Agrippa's life, from AD23-27, is a catalogue of mishaps and misdemeanours — suicide contemplated in Idumea, dismissal by brother-in-law Antipas in Tiberius for quarrelling, dismissal by Flaccus Legate of Syria for taking a bribe, flight from creditors in Ptolemais, Anthon and Alexandria, imprisonment by Tiberius at Capri for indiscreet remarks about the emperor's future. So serious were his financial and personal problems that he was fortunate indeed to escape from them. Only the kindness of Antonia and her grandson Gaius extricated Agrippa from what were, in fact, quite hopeless circumstances. To this point in his life Agrippa, though a Jew, appears to have behaved like the Gentiles among whom he lived. Not even when back in Palestine (AD23-27) was there any evidence of the life-style of an observant Jew. This was soon to change, however, following the dramatic alteration in his circumstances after AD37.

The final period of Agrippa's life, 37-44, by contrast with the disastrous middle period, is (as told by Josephus) a story of success and good fortune. Agrippa's friend Gaius quite unexpectedly became emperor in succession to Tiberius. Agrippa was not only released from prison but made king of the now vacant tetrarchy of Philip to the north-east of Galilee. More good fortune was to follow. Back in Palestine the tetrarch Antipas, jealous of Agrippa's elevation, petitioned Gaius that he too might be appointed as "king", only to be dismissed in exile for his trouble. Gaius then added Antipas' territories to those already under Agrippa's control. His final stroke of good fortune, the surprising appointment of Claudius as emperor after the assassination in 41 of Gaius, meant that Judaea and Samaria were also given to Agrippa. Agrippa's now enlarged territory, therefore, approximated that of his grandfather Herod the Great. Agrippa's good fortune ended dramatically and unexpectedly with his death aged fifty-four in 44.

Throughout his career, whether commoner or king, Agrippa's life was marked by extravagance and a high public profile. Everything he did made a great impact — whether pursued by creditors, imprisoned by the emperor, provoking a civil war in Alexandria, addressing the Roman Senate, or being rebuked by the Legate of Syria. As he lived so also he died — spectacularly! Throughout the span of his life Agrippa acquired and spent large sums of money to satisfy his self-indulgence and his love of ostentation.

IV. Agrippa According to Josephus

Josephus devotes no less than one and two-thirds books of his *Ant.* to the story of Agrippa. Although there are a number of lengthy digressions the Agrippa story appears as a self-contained unit within the larger framework of the *Ant.* Both the beginning and the ending of the Agrippa component are clearly signalled. Josephus introduces Agrippa into the narrative in the context of the death of Tiberius (xviii, 126) and continues: "it may also be edifying to tell the story of Agrippa" (xviii, 129). The author has placed the death of the king near the end of the Book xix so that Book xx opens with the words: "On the death of Agrippa as I reported in the previous book . . ." Within these two extremities Josephus tells "the story of Agrippa". An extensive genealogy of Herod the Great occurs near the beginning of the Agrippa narrative, the focus of which is not Herod but Agrippa, who is referred to eight times. Agrippa is the exception to the "misfortunes" (xviii, 128) which befall other members of Herod's line. By contrast Agrippa's story is "remarkable" (xviii, 129) because "from a position of no distinction he rose to his high and mighty exaltation" (xviii, 129, cf. 124; xix, 296).

It is possible that Josephus' source, with its account of the king's life and death and its genealogy, may have in its original form borne some similarity to the Gospels, in particular those according to Matthew and Luke. It may be noted that Josephus' stated intention "to tell the story (*diēgēsasthai*) of Agrippa" resembles the "narrative" (*diēgēsīn*) about Jesus referred to by Luke (Luke 1:1, 3). Moreover just as the Gospels were written for the spiritual or moral benefit of the reader (1:1-4; John 20:31) so too Josephus, or his source, has written about Agrippa for the "moral instruction of mankind" (*sōphronismō tou anthreiou genous A.J.* xviii, 129).

Josephus was interested to explain the reversal in Agrippa's circumstances, especially since they were against the trend within Herod's line. On one hand "the contrast between his former distress and his present prosperity" was "an object lesson in demonstrating the great power of fortune (*tuchē*) over mankind" (xviii, 239). On the other hand, however, Josephus saw Agrippa's "reversal" as a "proof (*deigma*) . . . that God uplifts fallen fortunes" (xix, 296). It is, however, unnecessary to explain what happened to Agrippa as due to "fortune" or "God", as several examples will make clear. When, after his adventures in Palestine Agrippa returned to Italy, it was "to gain some advantage at the court" (*A.J.* xviii, 126) possibly to dislodge Antipas as Tetrarch of Galilee (*J.W.* ii, 178). Soon afterward he borrowed heavily to cultivate Gaius, doubtless hoping that he would succeed Tiberius (*A.J.* xviii, 167-168). The appointment of Agrippa to various territories

once Gaius became emperor is not surprising. Furthermore, Claudius' support of Agrippa in 41 was logical in the aftermath of the instability caused by Gaius' antisemitic policies in Egypt and Palestine. Josephus' "rags to riches" account of Agrippa, while striking and to a point insightful, fails to take account either of his mother's good connections with Antonia or Agrippa's own calculated political intrigues.

How authentic a picture does Josephus give us of Agrippa? Josephus' Agrippa was a restless, flamboyant and gregarious man, a version which is confirmed to a point by the portrait of the king which occurs on coins minted for pagan subjects. He was the first ruler of the Jews, Roman or Jewish, whose appearance we possess through coinage. Agrippa is presented as plump, intelligent and good natured. Josephus' rather romanticized version of Agrippa may be explained by the author's need to receive the ongoing patronage and support of the younger Agrippa during the nineties when the *Ant.* was published (see *Vita* 364); Luke's presentation of Agrippa as a ruthless opportunist, corroborated (obliquely) as it is by elements in Josephus' account, may be truer to the facts.

V. Agrippa and the Gentiles

Only in the last three years of his life, from the time he returned to Jerusalem as king over the entire compass of his grandfather's kingdom, did Agrippa appear to take Judaism seriously. Until then there is no suggestion that he lived other than as a pagan — whether in Rome among the aristocrats of the Julio-Claudians up to age thirty-three or whether living in Palestine from his thirty-third to his forty-seventh years. Even after receiving the kingship over the Tetrarchies of Philip and Antipas he spent much of his time in Rome apparently living as a Gentile until his final return to Palestine as king over the enlarged area.

Agrippa's attitudes and policies towards his Gentile subjects are difficult to establish. The numismatic evidence¹² indicates an accommodating policy, though the coins found in non-Jewish parts of his kingdom are rare. One example, dated to the seventh year of Agrippa's reign (43/44) bears on the obverse the laureated head of Claudius with the legend in Greek TIBERIUS CAESAR AUGUSTUS. The reverse appears to depict Agrippa offering sacrifice being crowned by two women with the legend GREAT KING AGRIPPA FRIEND OF CAESAR.¹³ Another example, dated to the eighth year of Agrippa's reign (44) has on the obverse the diademed head of Agrippa I with the legend in Greek GREAT KING AGRIPPA FRIEND OF CAESAR. The reverse has laureate Tyche holding palm branch in

left and rudder in right hand with the legend CAESAREA NEAR THE PORT OF AUGUSTUS.

Consistent with the Gentile character of the coinage to non-Jewish areas is the evidence from Josephus that Agrippa attended the Theatre in Caesarea (*A.J.* xix, 332-334), as well as the festival of games in the amphitheatre in Caesarea (*A.J.* xix, 343; Acts 12:21) where he did not object to being hailed as a "god" (*A.J.* xix, 344-345; Acts 12:22). Moreover, when abroad he was a generous benefactor of pagan culture, as for example at Berytus where he built a theatre, baths, and an amphitheatre for gladiatorial combat (*A.J.* xix, 335-337).

While all this could be interpreted as a natural continuation of his earlier and Gentile life-style we should note Josephus' remark that while Agrippa was a benefactor of all alike he was, nevertheless, "more generous and more compassionate to his compatriots" (xix, 330). If anything the evidence is that Agrippa was unbending against Gentiles. He initiated severe action against the men of Dora who had set up a statue of Caesar in the synagogue (xix, 299-310). Moreover his taxation policy towards the people of Batanaea was harsh (*A.J.* xvii, 28) and he was also, for reasons unknown,¹⁴ displeased with the people of Tyre and Sidon (Acts 12:20). When Agrippa died in Caesarea, despite recently being hailed as a "god", the Gentile populations of Caesarea and Sebaste publicly celebrated his death (*A.J.* xix, 358) and indecently insulted the statues of the king's daughter which they set up on the roofs of the brothels (xix, 355-357).

Apart from the incident in Caesarea when he was hailed as a god¹⁵ the remaining evidence is consistent with the interpretation that he accommodated himself to his Gentile subjects, but only to a limited extent, and that in certain respects he was severe towards them. The rejoicing at his death and the vilification of his daughters' statues is evidence of this.

VI. Agrippa and the Jews

The statement in the Acts of the Apostles that Agrippa was keen to "please the Jews" (12:3) is corroborated by other sources — by numismatic evidence, by the traditions of the Talmud and by Josephus.

Numerous coins issued by Agrippa have been found near Jerusalem which indicate by their style the careful policies of the king towards his Jewish subjects. On the obverse of coin types¹⁶ 51, 52, 53 there is a canopy on a shaft which, it is suggested,¹⁷ was the king's parasol — an ingenious way of identifying the king but symbolically and without offending portraiture. The legends are in Greek and read

OF KING AGRIPPA. On each of the reverse sides there are three ears of barley inside dotted borders with the legend "6th year" (i. e. of Agrippa's reign). These numerous coins are a clear evidence that the king was deeply aware of the scruples of the Jews and that he took pains to ensure that no coin should be minted which might cause offence.

A number of traditions reflecting the piety of Agrippa have survived in the Talmudic literature. It is recorded, for example, that he once made way for a bridal procession, a matter for which successive rabbis praised him (*Ketub.* 17d). On another occasion at the Feast of Tabernacles when the scroll was handed to the king to be read publicly he did not read it sitting as prescribed, but standing — an action for which he was also praised by the scribes (*Sota* 41b). When he read "thou mayest not put a foreigner over thee" (*Deut* 17:15) Agrippa's eyes ran with tears being a descendant of Herod, an Idumean. This evidence from the Talmud, being so late, needs to be used with caution.

It is Josephus, however, who provides us with the most extensive and detailed evidence for Agrippa's practice of Judaism.¹⁸ On returning to Jerusalem as king, now over Judaea and Samaria, Agrippa dedicated to the Temple the gold chain given to him by Gaius at the time of his release from prison (*A.J.* xix, 294-297). There he "offered sacrifices of thanksgiving, omitting none of the ritual enjoined by law" arranging, for example, for the cost of shaving "a very considerable number of Nazarites" (xix, 293). Agrippa took a close interest in the High Priesthood deposing in quick succession Theophilus son of Ananus, Simon Cantheras son of Boethus, Jonathan and Matthias sons of Ananias before settling on Elionaeus son of Cantheras (xix, 297-8, 312-316, 342). When some young Gentiles profaned the synagogue of Dora by installing an effigy of Claudius, Agrippa went to Petronius Legate of Syria who took decisive action to remove the statue and punish the offenders (xix, 299-310). Josephus summarizes Agrippa's attitudes to Jewish religion in glowing terms: "He enjoyed residing in Jerusalem and did so constantly and he scrupulously observed the traditions of his people. He neglected no rite of purification, and no day passed for him without the prescribed sacrifice" (xix, 331).

Josephus wants us to understand that Agrippa's political actions were consistent with and an expression of his zeal for Judaism. His intercessions with Gaius not to desecrate the temple (xviii, 298) and with Claudius over Jewish rights in Alexandria (xix, 279) must be seen in this light. He remitted the taxation on households which was,

apparently, levied for the building of the city walls (xix, 299) while at the same time initiating (at public expense!) the fortification of the city walls on the side of the "New City" (xix, 299). In this he fell foul of Marsus successor to Petronius, who reported the matter to Claudius. Agrippa also convened a meeting of neighbouring client kings at Tiberius, a matter which also provoked the suspicions of Marsus who ordered the kings to return home (xix, 338-342).

Was Agrippa sincere in his practice of Judaism? From this distance and with such disparate sources it is not possible to answer that question with confidence. It is impossible to say what he really believed. What can be said is that while to a degree he accommodated himself to the practices of his Gentile subjects he placed greater emphasis on "pleasing the Jews". His arrest of those Christian leaders who had some association with Gentiles is confirmation of this. It is striking that he killed James Zebedee whose brother John had evangelized Samaritans (Acts 8:14) and that he arrested and would have killed Peter who had evangelized both Samaritans (v14) and the Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea (10:34-48). It may be significant that Agrippa had planned to bring Peter "out to the people" (12:4), possibly to dramatize the scandal of fraternizing with and baptizing Gentiles. On his escape Peter had to flee. On the other hand it was safe for James, brother of Jesus, leader of the Aramaic speaking believers to remain in Jerusalem (v17). Like Saul's persecutions some years earlier Agrippa's antipathy appears to have been directed towards those whose loyalty to Judaism was suspect, whereas those who were conservatively Jewish stood in no significant danger.

VII. The Death of Agrippa: Consequences in Jewish and Christian History

The appointment of a Jewish king to Judaea after thirty-five years of direct Roman rule must have brought great hope to the Jewish people, especially since he was (apparently) so piously observant as well as zealous for the welfare of the people. His friendship with Claudius and influence with Petronius were reassuring to the Jews, particularly in the light of the antisemitic policies of Pilate and Gaius. His untimely death in 44 followed as it was, not by the appointment in succession of the younger Agrippa, but by a return to Roman rule, now for the first time to Galilee, must have dashed all hope of salvation for the Jews by terrestrial means. Moreover, the new emperor's appointed governors were now styled "procurators", personal financial representatives of Claudius, rather than the more military "prefects". If anything the new arrangements made for even more corruption than before.

It is probably no accident that the death of Agrippa and the return to Roman rule coincided with the rise of apocalyptic sign-prophets¹⁹ like Theudas who in the manner of Joshua sought to divide the waters of Jordan to lead the multitude to the wilderness (*A.J.* xx, 97-98). The famine of c.47 and the resultant rise of banditry (*A.J.* xx, 101-102; *J.W.* ii, 253) contributed to the instability of the post-Agrippa period.²⁰ The late forties and early fifties were marked by a series of notorious and inflammatory actions by Roman soldiers during the time of the inept Cumanus — an act of indecency in Jerusalem during Passover (*J.W.* ii, 224) and the burning of Scriptures near Beth-Horon (*J.W.* ii, 229). Soon after, in the days of Felix (52-60) there arose the *sicarii*, a terrorist faction which specialized in the assassination of notable Jews who were known Roman sympathizers (*J.W.* ii, 254).

Significantly, it was in the period immediately after the death of Agrippa that a Christian community of predominantly Gentile composition came into being in Antioch (*Acts* 11:19-30), from which a mission, led by Barnabas and Saul, was directed to Gentiles in Galatia (*chaps.* 13-14, cf. *Gal* 2:7-9). Churches of Gentile believers were created through the activities of Barnabas and Saul (*Acts* 14:21-23). This Antioch-based thrust towards the Gentiles coincided with the deepening apocalypticism and nationalism in Judaea in the bitter aftermath following the death of Agrippa. In this new environment the Jerusalem believers led by James became more conservatively Jewish, more moderate and liberal persons like Peter and John Zebedee apparently losing their following and withdrawing to other places — Peter for example to Antioch (*Gal* 2:12, cf. v9). It was in these critical circumstances that the circumcision party arose in Jerusalem composed, it seems, of believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees (*Acts* 15:5). Representatives of this group came to Antioch and applied pressure on Jews like Peter and Barnabas to withdraw table fellowship (including at the Eucharist?) from the Gentiles (*Gal* 2:11-14). A great dispute between these visitors and Paul (and Barnabas?) ensued (*Acts* 15:2).

The reverberations of the quarrel in Antioch were apparently felt in the newly formed Galatian churches²¹ where an unnamed individual (*Gal* 5:11, cf. 3:1?) and his supporters (1:6) were "disturbing" the churches (5:11) alienating the members against Paul (4:17) over the question of the necessity to submit to circumcision for true membership of the people of God (5:2-12; 3:6-14). Some form of persecution had been applied to Gentile believers to submit to circumcision and the keeping of the law and it seems that (some of?) those who capitulated were in turn applying pressure on other Gentile Christians (6:12-13). While it is unclear whether or not the

Jerusalem circumcision party visited Galatia it seems probable that problems there arose from that quarter, perhaps through correspondence.

It is in the aftermath of Agrippa, therefore, that we discover the context and the circumstances of the genesis of the Judaizing mission which would pursue and accompany Paul in his apostolate to the Gentiles — whether in Antioch, or to Galatia, Corinth, Philippi or Rome. In earlier times, before Agrippa, Gentiles accepted baptism and fellowship at the hand of Peter without circumcision, certainly with accompanying controversy, but with no more than that (Acts 10:44-11:18; 15:6-11). After the death of Agrippa all that changed. Nationalism and apocalypticism intensified within Judaism and the lifestyle of the Jerusalem church inevitably came to express the ethos of the wider society (cf. Acts 21:20). It was from this community,² especially from those whose sympathies were "pharisaic" and "zealotic", that successive missions were launched to overturn the influence of Paul among both Jews and Gentiles — e.g. in Antioch (Gal 2:11, cf. Acts 15:24) and Corinth (2 Cor 3:1; 11:12-22).

Notes

1. A list of major primary sources for Agrippa I together with the most important secondary literature up to 1973 may be found in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (Rev. and Ed. G. Vermes and F. Millar; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973) 1:442-53. See also S. Safrai and M. Stern (Eds.) *The Jewish People in the First Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) Vol. 1, M. Stern, "The Herodian Dynasty and the Province of Judea" in *The World History of the Jewish People* (Ed. Avi-Yonah; London: Allen, 1975) Vol. 3, and L. I. Levine, "The Jewish-Greek conflict in Caesarea", *JJS* 25 (1975) 318-97.

2. H. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977) 95-114.

3. M. Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (tr. London: SCM, 1979) 83.

4. See literature cited in F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (London: Nelson, 1969) 206 n.1, 207 n.2. Also Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (tr. London: SCM 1983) 4-11, with extensive notes.

5. So Bruce, *History*, 207.

6. See further Hengel, *Acts*, 71-80.
7. See literature cited in S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 43, n.6.
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*, 42.
10. Sipre Num. 131. Cf. also W. R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots and Josephus* (Westport, CN: Greenword, 1973) 178.
11. See J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (tr. F. H. and C. H. Cave; London: SCM, 1967) 141-4.
12. See Y. Meshorer, *Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period* (Tel Aviv: Am Hassefer, 1967) 78-80, and D. Hendin, *Guide to Ancient Jewish Coins* (New York: AHIC, 1976).
13. This agrees with inscriptional data which refers to Agrippa as *philokaisar eusebēs* and *philosomaiois*. See Schürer, *History*, 452, n.42.
14. Bruce (*History*, 248) suggests Agrippa's displeasure may have been due to the Dora incident.
15. See W. Dittenberger, *Orientalis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae* number 418 which appears to be a prayer for Agrippa made to Zeus. The view of W. Wirgin (*Herod Agrippa: King of the Jews* [Leeds: Leeds University, 1968]) that Agrippa was viewed as Messiah is based on doubtful patristic evidence.
16. As classified by A. Kindler, *Coins of the Land of Israel* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1974).
17. B. Kanael, "Ancient Jewish Coins", *BA* 2 (1963) 51.
18. Josephus' comparison of Agrippa with Herod implies that Agrippa was more sincere in his practice of Judaism than his grandfather (*A.J.* xix, 328-331). See also M. Stern, "Social and Political Re-alignments in Herodian Judaea" *The Jerusalem Cathedral* (Ed. L. Levine; Detroit: Wayne State University, 1982) 40-62.
19. See P. W. Barnett, "The Jewish Sign-Prophets AD40-70, Their Intentions and Origin", *NTS* 27 (1981) 679-97.
20. See R. A. Horsley, "Popular Messianic Movements around the Time of Jesus", *CBQ* 46 (1984) 471-95.
21. Cf. R. Jewett, "The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation", *NTS* 17 (1970-71) 198-212, and Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (NIGNTC; Exeter: Paternoster, 1982) 128-34.
22. See C. K. Barrett, "Paul's Opponents in II Corinthians", *NTS* 17 (1971) 233-54 and P. W. Barnett, "Opposition in Corinth", *JSNT* 22 (1984) 3-17.