MAKING THE BIBLE REAL – one site, and one story at a time: the Holy Land pilgrimage experience.

You are looking at Caesarea Maritima. Every pilgrimage we arrange pays it a visit and studies it’s history. It was built by Herod the Great (the same Herod who ordered the slaughter of baby boys in Bethlehem when Jesus was born). Much Bible history is linked to this place – but for now, I want to talk about Drusilla, wife of Felix the governor of Judea. She is mentioned in the Book of Acts 24:24 – 27 – and these events may have occurred in the very same theatre we have pictured. A Jewess, Drusilla was the great-granddaughter of Herod the Great. She was also the daughter of Herod Agrippa I – and sister to both Herod Agrippa II and Berenice (who was notorious for her affairs with her brother, Agrippa and well-known in Rome because of her long-time affair with the Roman general, Titus – he was the son of Emperor Vespasian and the very same general who oversaw the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD).

Before I tell Drusilla’s story, for the purpose of perspective, it would be helpful to pause for a moment to think about the public and media fascination with the British royal family of today. Their every scandal, event and even the clothes they wear constantly fill the tabloids and make headlines.

Equate that with Israel at the time the Book of Acts. Judea was not some far off, out of the way place – Judea was the natural land bridge between three continents. The Via Maris [Way of the Sea] was the safest and most used trade route connecting Europe with Africa and Asia. Caesarea’s extensive harbor combined with its location on the trade route, quite likely made it one of the world’s most lucrative and coveted properties -- whoever controlled Judea controlled the trade routes and possessed the potential to reap great wealth as a result. No wonder Rome wanted a piece of the action. The eyes of the world were literally on Judea and the people who ruled.

As a result, much was written about them; we do know a lot -- and with no television soap operas to engage, Herod’s family provided plenty of scandalous fodder.

Exceptionally beautiful, multiple records documented that Berenice was extremely jealous of her younger sister and treated her cruelly. Drusilla was given in marriage to the king of Emeza before her fifteenth birthday. Felix (one of the governors of Judea who replaced Pontius Pilate after he was removed from office and sent home in disgrace) “saw” Drusilla and “had” to have her. We even know he used an emissary to win her affections and lull her from her unhappy marriage. She left her husband to become Felix’s third wife. She was with Felix when the apostle Paul appeared to share the Gospel with the governor. Acts 24:25 makes it clear that Paul’s confessions and discussion of faith caused Felix to feel convicted and frightened. Drusilla at his side, had no reason to be there in an official capacity – we can only assume that she, too, was curious to hear what Paul had to say. We also know from verse 26 that Felix conversed with Paul “frequently” and that Paul remained there for two years. Only extremely hardened hearts could have dismissed what they heard.

Eventually, Felix was also proven incompetent and discharged from his post around 60 AD. Little is known about what happened to him after – but Drusilla [due to the great interest in both her and Berenice] is known to have had a son with Felix. Pliny the elder (a friend of Vespasian the emperor) and his nephew, Pliny the younger, were present at the destruction of Pompeii in 79 AD. Their records show that Drusilla’s son perished when Vesuvius erupted and possibly also Drusilla. Felix was not with them.

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