

Acts 26 - Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

III. Outreach to the remote parts of the earth (Acts 13:1—28:31)

(5) Paul's journey to Rome (21:17—28:31)

(B) Paul in Caesarea (23:23—26:32)

(b) Paul's defenses (24:1—26:32)

(iii) Before Agrippa (26:1-32)

Acts 26

(iii) Before Agrippa (26:1-32)

1 Now Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul extended his hand and *proceeded* to make his defense:

1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and *proceeded* to make his defense:

1 Then Agrippa told Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense.

1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

- Paul was not on trial here...when he appealed to Caesar, he guaranteed that his next trial would be before the emperor

— This was just a hearing to acquaint Agrippa with Paul's case, so Agrippa could give Festus help in understanding it and communicating it to the emperor

There is a consummate passion filling the soul of the apostle as he speaks. I think this is his masterpiece. His message on Mars' Hill is great, but it does not compare at all to this message. [J.V. McGee]

The Lord had told Paul that he would bear His name before the Gentiles and kings (9:15). This promise came to pass over and over again in Acts 21-28, culminating here. Jesus had also told His disciples that enemies would deliver them to prison and bring them before kings and governors for His name's sake, and this would lead to an opportunity for their testimony (Luke 21:12-13).

2 "Regarding all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate that I am about to make my defense before you today,

2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;

2 "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, that I can defend myself today against all the accusations of the Jewish leaders,
2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among *the* Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among *the* Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

3 since you are especially familiar with all the Jewish customs and controversies. I beg you, therefore, to listen patiently to me.

3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

- Paul is pleased that he is not dealing with a Roman, but with someone that knows the customs, the laws, the traditions of the Jews

Five Key Statements Summarize Paul's Defense

(1) "I lived a Pharisee" (v4-11)

(2) "I saw a light" (v12-13)

(3) "I heard a voice" (v14-18)

(4) "I was not disobedient" (v19-21)

(5) "I continue unto this day" (v22-32)

4 "So then, all Jews know my way of life since *my* youth, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and in Jerusalem,

4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem;

4 All the Jews know how I lived from the earliest days of my youth with my own people and in Jerusalem.

4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

5 They have known for a long time, if they would but testify to it, that I lived as a Pharisee, adhering to the standards of our strictest religious party.

5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

6 And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

6 "And now I stand here on trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our ancestors.

6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

Paul said that it was because of his Jewish heritage, not in spite of it, that he believed and preached what he did. The Jewish "hope" finds fulfillment in the Christian gospel. It was, therefore, ironic that the Jews, of all people, should have charged him with disloyalty.

7 *the promise* to which our **twelve tribes** hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. For this hope, O king, I am being accused by Jews.

7 *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

7 Our twelve tribes, worshiping day and night with intense devotion, hope to attain it. It is because of this hope, O King, that I am accused by the Jews.

7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

- "...twelve tribes" - Paul's mention of 12 tribes shows that he did not believe that 10 of the tribes became "lost," as some cults claim today

10 Lost Tribes?

While it is true that the 10 northern tribes (Israel) were conquered by Assyria in 722 BC and assimilated to some extent, it is not true that these tribes were "lost" or annihilated (Cf. 2 Chr 11:16f, et al.). Jesus spoke about all 12 tribes (Matt 19:28), and so did James (James 1:1) and the Apostle John (Rev 7:4-8; 21:12). God knows where His chosen people are, and He will fulfill the promises He has made to them. See [Myth of the "10 Lost Tribes"](#).

8 Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God raises the dead?

8 Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?

8 Why is it thought incredible by all of you that God should raise the dead?

8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

- Paul's reference to the *resurrection* was appropriate, because Jesus' identification as the Messiah depended on His resurrection

- None of Paul's hearers could reasonably doubt the resurrection of the dead since God had raised Jesus from the dead
- Furthermore, why could not an all-powerful God raise the dead?

9 "So I thought to myself that I had to act in strong opposition to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

9 Indeed, I myself thought it my duty to take extreme measures against the name of Jesus from Nazareth.

9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

- As a Pharisaic Jew, Paul had opposed the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah

— He did not believe in Jesus' resurrection, who did not seem to fit the scriptural image of the Savior

10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, after receiving authority from the chief priests, but I also **cast my vote against them** when they were being put to death.

10 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.

10 That is what I did in Jerusalem. I received authority from the high priests and locked many of the saints in prison. And when I cast my vote against them, they were put to death.

10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

- "...cast my vote against them" - cast my vote against them. In the Greek it actually says "gave a small pebble."

— The point of this is that the Sanhedrin's practice was to vote with small stones: black and white; guilty or not guilty

— However, the reference is more likely metaphorical (Cf. 8:1; 22:20)

11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was extremely enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

11 And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

11 I would even punish them frequently in every synagogue and try to make them blaspheme. Raging furiously against them, I would hunt them down even in distant cities.

11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

- Paul was so zealous in his errant beliefs that he would do whatever necessary, including pursuing Christians to distant cities, to persecute them

12 "While so engaged, as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,

12 "While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,

12 "That is how I happened to be traveling to Damascus with authority based on a commission from the high priests.

12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13 at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who were journeying with me.

13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

13 On the road at noon, O King, I saw a light from heaven that was brighter than the sun. It flashed around me and those who were traveling with me.

13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

14 "All of us fell to the ground, and I heard a voice asking me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me? It is hurting you to keep on kicking against the cattle prods.'

14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

- Paul discloses two new bits of information about his Damascus Road encounter...

— “All” off his companions fell to the ground as a result of the bright light. This shows that the event was real, not a vision only seen by Paul.

— The Lord spoke to Paul in Hebrew, probably to confirm to Paul that the One addressing him was the God of the Jews

- “...kick against the goads” - a common rural metaphor for opposing the inevitable (such as “banging your head against a wall”). The action only hurts the one doing it, not the object of his hostility.

— “goads” - sharp sticks used to drive cattle

15 And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

15 And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

15 “I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ “The Lord answered, ‘I’m Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

16 But get up and stand on your feet; for this **purpose** I have appeared to you, to appoint you as a servant and a witness not only to the things in which you have seen Me, but also to the things in which I will appear to you,

16 But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

16 But get up and stand on your feet, because I’ve appeared to you for the very purpose of appointing you to be my servant and witness of what you’ve seen and of what I’ll show you.

16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

- “...purpose” - Paul was devoted to a Person, not a cause. After his conversion, he belonged to Jesus Christ. He saw nothing else and he lived for nothing else (Cf. 1 Cor 2:2).

17 rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

17 rescuing you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

17 I’ll continue to rescue you from your people and from the gentiles to whom I’m sending you.

17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

- Paul brought Jesus' words on the Damascus Road (Cf. 9:5-6; 22:8,10), His instructions through Ananias (Cf. 22:14-15), and His command in Paul's Jerusalem vision (Cf. 22:18-21) all together in this passage to summarize the commission God had given Paul for his life.
- Paul's reference to "Gentiles" would have drawn a favorable reaction from this Gentile audience

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, and **from the power of Satan to God**, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

18 You will help them understand and turn them from darkness to light and from Satan's control to God, so that their sins will be forgiven and they will receive a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

- Paul's commission from God (Cf. Is 35:5; 42:6-7,16)

- This is one of the best summary statements of Paul's mission and the mission of every believer (Cf. Matt 28:19-20; Col 1:12-14)

- Essentially, the Lord said to Paul, "Your whole life is to be overpowered and subdued by Me; you are to have no end, aim or purpose but Mine"

- As the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, we must learn to not be "disobedient to the heavenly vision"—not to doubt that it can be attained

- It is not enough to give mental assent to the fact that God has redeemed the world, or even to know that the Holy Spirit can make all that Jesus did a reality in my life. I must have the foundation of a personal relationship with Him.

- Paul was not given a message or a doctrine to proclaim...he was brought into a vivid, personal, overpowering relationship with Jesus Christ

- Paul was to do for others what God had done for him, and so should we...

- "...from the power of Satan to God" - if Paul (and all believers) are transferred from Satan's dominion to God's dominion, we must be in the kingdom?

19 "For that reason, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

19 "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

19 "And so, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.

19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 but *continually* proclaimed to those in Damascus first, and in Jerusalem, and *then* all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they are to repent and turn to God, performing deeds consistent with repentance.

20 but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

20 Instead, I first told the people in Damascus and Jerusalem, then all the people in Judea—and after that the gentiles—to repent, turn to God, and perform deeds that are consistent with such repentance.

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

- A general description of Paul's ministry (not a strict chronological reference, Cf. 9:20-30; Gal 1:18-24)

21 **For these reasons** some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to murder me.

21 For this reason *some* Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.

21 For this reason the Jewish leaders grabbed me in the Temple and kept trying to kill me.

21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

- "For these reasons" - Paul's preaching to Gentiles (v20)

— Paul did not explain what he preached to the Gentiles (that they could obtain salvation simply by faith in Christ)

— This message is what infuriated the Jews and led to Paul's arrest

22 So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place,

22 So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;

22 I've had help from God to this day, and so I stand here to testify to both the powerful and the lowly alike, stating only what the prophets and Moses said would happen—

22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

23 *as to* whether the Christ was to suffer, *and* whether, as first from the resurrection of the dead, He would proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

23 that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

23 that the Messiah would suffer and be the first to rise from the dead and would bring light both to our people and to the gentiles."

23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

- Paul preached a message completely in harmony with Israel's faith

— Many of the Jews rejected the ideas of a suffering Messiah, His resurrection from the dead, and His direct ministry to Gentiles, but Paul showed support for these in the OT

24 While Paul was stating these things in his defense, Festus *said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your great learning* is driving you insane."

24 While *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus *said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your great learning* is driving you mad."

24 As he continued his defense, Festus shouted, "You're out of your mind, Paul! Too much education is driving you crazy!"

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

- "...great learning" - *ta polla grammata*, indicates that it was Paul's knowledge of the Scriptures that impressed Festus, not his general knowledge

25 But Paul *said, "I am not insane, most excellent Festus; on the contrary, I am speaking out *with* truthful and rational words.

25 But Paul *said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.

25 But Paul said, "I'm not out of my mind, Your Excellency Festus. I'm reporting what is absolutely true.

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

- Paul responded that what Festus called madness was true and reasonable

26 For the king knows about these matters, and I also speak to him with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this **has not been done in a corner**.

26 For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

26 Indeed, the king knows about these things, and I can speak to him freely. For I'm certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, since this wasn't done in a corner.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

- "...has not been done in a corner" - Paul is referring to the fulfillment of prophecy in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the preaching of the gospel
- Jesus' ministry was well-known throughout Palestine

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you believe."

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe them!"

27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

- Paul reasoned that if Agrippa believed the prophets, he could not help concluding that Jesus fulfilled what they predicted

- Paul was backing the king into a corner with what had not been done in a corner

- All of this was beyond Festus, but Agrippa knew the issues, and Paul was aiming his presentation of the gospel primarily at him

28 Agrippa *replied* to Paul, "**In a short *time* you are going to persuade me to make a Christian of myself.**"

28 Agrippa *replied* to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."

28 Agrippa asked Paul, "Can you so quickly persuade me to become a Christian?"

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

- Agrippa was now on the spot: if he agreed with Paul, or even appeared to agree, he would have lost face with Festus and the other Romans present. Festus had just said he thought Paul was mad.

- On the other hand, if Agrippa said he did not believe the prophets, his influence over his Jewish hearers and subjects would have been damaged greatly. Consequently Agrippa replied noncommittal.

- "...In a short *time* you are going to persuade me to make a Christian" - some translations, including the KJV, give the impression that Agrippa was "almost" persuaded

- However, the ISV and other translations are more accurate. Agrippa's statement was more of a question on how Paul could persuade him to believe in such a short speech.

29 And Paul *said*, "I would wish to God that even in a short or long *time* not only you, but also all who hear me this day would become such as I myself am, except for these chains."

29 And Paul *said*, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

29 Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I wish to God that not only you but everyone listening to me today would become what I am—except for these chains!"

29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

- Paul's desire was for "all" his hearers to surrender their lives to Christ

Agrippa's Verdict

30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

30 Then the king, the governor, Bernice, and those who were sitting with him got up.

30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

- By standing, Agrippa signaled the end of the hearing

31 and when they had gone out, they *began* talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything deserving death or imprisonment."

31 and when they had gone aside, they *began* talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

31 As they were leaving, they began to say to each other, "This man hasn't been doing anything to deserve death or imprisonment."

31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

- Luke implies that everyone present concurred that Paul was completely innocent

— This was the previous verdict of the Pharisees (23:9), Claudius Lysias (23:29), and Festus (25:25). Now, Agrippa voiced the same opinion.

32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

32 Agrippa told Festus, "This man could have been set free if he hadn't appealed to the emperor."

32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

- In Agrippa's opinion, Paul did not even need to be in prison, much less die for what he had done