



Paul Preaches to King Agrippa Acts 25:13 - 26:32

Introduction

Having appealed his case to Caesar, Paul probably felt both an assurance that Christ's promise to him (Acts 23:11, that he would bear witness for Him in Rome) would be fulfilled and an eagerness to be on his way (Acts 19:21). However, the wheels of the Roman government moved slowly. Festus had to arrange transportation for his prisoner and prepare the proper papers stating the charges against Paul. As Paul waited in prison in Caesarea, he would have another opportunity to preach the gospel—this time to a king, thus fulfilling another promise made to him by the Lord (Acts 9:15, that he would bear Christ's name *before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel*).

While Paul was still in Festus' custody, Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I of Acts 12, arrived in Caesarea to welcome Festus as the new governor. Festus took advantage of this opportunity to explain Paul's case to the king, hoping to benefit from his knowledge and experience in dealing with the Jews. Both Festus and Agrippa heard more than they really desired when Paul was called to give his defense. As always, Paul was filled with enthusiasm as he defended his faith. It was his heart's desire that all who heard his message might come to Christ (26:29), and he clearly spoke from the depths of his heart.

Outline of Acts 25:13 - 26:32

- I. Agrippa Visits Caesarea - Acts 25:13-27
- II. Agrippa Hears Paul's Message - Acts 26:1-23
- III. Agrippa and Festus Respond - Acts 26:24-32

I. Agrippa Visits Caesarea - Acts 25:13-27

As ruler of the territories of northeast Palestine, King Agrippa paid a courtesy visit to the new governor of Caesarea. He brought with him Bernice, his sister, whom he also presented as his queen. Bernice had been married and widowed twice before, and many believe that she was now having an incestuous relationship with her brother.

- A. Festus presents Paul's case to Agrippa - Acts 25:13-21

After Agrippa had been in Caesarea *many days*, Festus sought his help in preparing the specific written charges against Paul required to transfer him to Rome. Agrippa was the perfect person to consult. Besides having

greater authority than Festus, he was a practicing Jew and had some influence over Jewish affairs. Because of his Jewish background, the Roman government had given him the responsibility of appointing the Jewish high priest and of presiding over the affairs of the temple treasury in Jerusalem. Agrippa was familiar with the Jewish religion and would understand the intricacies of the case better than Festus, a Gentile.

Festus reviewed Paul's case in a clear and orderly way.

1. Paul had been a prisoner of Felix - 25:13-15

Festus had acquired the case from the previous governor, Felix, who had left Paul in prison as a favor to the Jews. The Jewish chief priests and elders had brought the case to his attention during his visit to Jerusalem, and had asked him to pass sentence on Paul.

2. Festus was prepared to judge promptly - 25:16-17

Festus had reminded the Jews that Roman law required the accused be allowed to give his defense in the presence of his accusers before judgment was passed. The very next day Festus had taken his place on the judgment seat to hear Paul's defense.

3. Accusations were of a religious nature - 25:18-20

Because the Jews had asked for a *sentence of condemnation* (NASB 25:15 and 25:26), Festus had expected them to present proof of crimes Paul had committed. However, the charges turned out to be disputes over their own religion and over Jesus' death and resurrection. Festus knew little of Jewish religion and was not sure how to handle the case. He had suggested that Paul go to Jerusalem for judgment.

4. Paul appealed to Caesar - 25:21

When presented with the possibility of returning to Jerusalem, Paul had appealed to *Augustus*. (*Augustus* means *the revered* or *august one*. It had been the name of the first Roman emperor, but was now applied to all Roman emperors.) Festus had retained Paul in custody and was now waiting to send him to the emperor Nero.

- B. Agrippa requests to hear Paul - Acts 25:22

Agrippa had probably heard about Paul's reputation

and wanted to hear first hand what he had to say. Festus eagerly responded to Agrippa's request, *Tomorrow you shall hear him.*

C. Paul brought before Agrippa - Acts 25:23-27

The very next day the imprisoned apostle faced the king. (See Mark 13:9 and Acts 9:15.)

1. Agrippa's pomp - 25:23

Agrippa and Bernice put on quite a display as they entered the auditorium where they would meet Paul. Also in attendance were the commanders of the five Roman cohorts stationed in Caesarea and the leading citizens of the city. These all stand in stark contrast to the lowly prisoner, Paul. *There is quiet humor in Luke's account of the great ceremony with which they assembled: Luke had a true sense of values, and knew that in Paul there was a native greatness which had no need to be decked with the trappings and grandeur that surrounded his distinguished hearers. History has vindicated Luke's perspective..... All these very important people would have been greatly surprised, and not a little scandalized, could they have foreseen the relative estimates that later generations would form of them and of the prisoner who now stood before them to state his case (The Book of the Acts, F. F. Bruce).* What a lesson this is for us today in a world which puts so much emphasis upon outward appearance and eloquent speech. Would that our discernment be more Godlike in looking beyond the carefully planned words and embellishments to the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

2. Festus' introduction of Paul - 25:24-27

Festus introduced Paul to the Gentile crowd as the man whom the Jews wanted to put to death. His own assessment, as Felix before him, was that Paul had done nothing deserving of death. When Paul appealed to the emperor, Festus had decided to send him there. His problem was that there were no specific charges to write against Paul. His hope was that the present examination would reveal clear charges against Paul to present to the emperor.

II. Agrippa Hears Paul's Message - Acts 26:1-23

Agrippa gave Paul permission to speak and Paul gladly began his defense. His speech was directed specifically at Agrippa because he knew the king was Jewish, was an expert in Jewish customs, and was interested in Jewish theology. Paul's speech is a defense of the gospel he preached and the life he lived in conformity to it. He shows that his message and his way of life include nothing to provoke ill will toward himself, especially from the Jews.

A. Paul recounts his life as a Pharisee - Acts 26:1-11

Paul explained that he lived for the hope of Israel and that this hope centered around the resurrection from the dead. Even though the Jews in general believed in the resurrection, they were using that as the basis of their charges against him.

1. The Jews knew him and his way of life well - 26:4-5

Although Paul had been born in Tarsus of Cilicia, he had been raised in Jerusalem from his youth. His teacher had been the distinguished rabbi, Gamaliel, and as a Pharisee, he lived strictly according to the law (Acts 22:3).

2. He was being accused for being loyal to the Jewish religion and hope - 26:6-8

In ancient times, God had promised the Jewish fathers that the Messiah would come (Acts 13:23). Romans 1:2-5 explains that this promise included the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ: *He (God) promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.* Paul shared the hope of all orthodox Jews that the Messiah would come and that the dead would be resurrected. Furthermore, Paul believed that the Messiah was Jesus. He had come and He had risen, demonstrating the resurrection of the dead and confirming the hope of Israel. It was amazing to Paul that the Jews, with whom he shared the hope of resurrection, should accuse him of preaching about that hope. Of course the real issue was the resurrection of Jesus which declared Him to be the Messiah.

Paul's question, *Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead,* was probably addressed to his entire audience. Agrippa, being a Jew, must have believed that God could raise the dead while the main audience of Gentiles most likely did not. The main question here, however, is not whether God has the ability to raise the dead, but whether He actually had raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That was the stumbling stone for the Jews. That was the reason they attacked Paul's teaching and wanted to destroy him.

3. He formerly opposed Christianity - 26:9-11

Paul confessed that he had originally shared the same blindness of heart as the Jews. He had persecuted those who proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus. All the Jews in Jerusalem knew that he had imprisoned the

Christians, agreed to verdicts of death against them, and tried to make them renounce Jesus. He was so violently opposed to the Christians that he even followed them to foreign cities to persecute them.

B. Paul recounts his conversion - Acts 26:12-18

This is the third account in Acts of Paul's conversion. The first was described by Luke (Acts 9:1-19) and the second by Paul before the Jewish crowds in Jerusalem (22:1-21). Now Paul shares his testimony with King Agrippa and the Gentile elite. *The main lines of the story are naturally the same, but the variations in telling bring out different aspects of its significance* (Acts, I. Howard Marshall).

1. On the road to Damascus - 26:12

Paul was traveling to Damascus, absorbed with his zeal to persecute the believers in that city. He had been commissioned by the chief priests to search for the Christians and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

2. The light from heaven - 26:13

It was around noon that Paul saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around himself and those who were with him.

3. The voice - 26:14-18

The intense brightness of the light caused the whole traveling party to fall to the ground. As he lay there, Paul heard a voice speaking to him in Hebrew.

a. The question - 26:14-15

The voice called Paul by his Hebrew name, Saul, and asked why he was persecuting Him. The voice added that it was hard for Paul to *kick against the goads*. A *goad* was an implement used to prod farm animals. The statement may picture Paul struggling against his conscience or against his destiny. In either case, it points out his futility in persecuting the church.

Paul's reply to the voice was, *Who are You, Lord?* He recognized that the voice came from a heavenly being, but did not know who it was. Although Paul had not answered the question posed to him, the Lord graciously overlooked that and answered Paul's important question, *I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*

b. The command and commission - 26:16-18

Jesus told Paul to stand up. He had come to commission him for ministry as a witness for Himself. That ministry was to be to both Jews and Gentiles. Jesus' promise to

deliver Paul from the Jews and Gentiles is a clear implication that he would be persecuted by both groups of people.

Jesus explained the purpose of Paul's ministry to the Jews and the Gentiles as twofold:

1.) *To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, from the power of darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God.*

2.) *That they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.*

Later, in his letter to the Colossians, Paul would write of these very things. In that letter, he reminded his beloved readers how God, the Father, has *qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. For He delivered us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins* (Colossians 1:12-14). Paul was one of God's messengers to spread this message to the Jews and more particularly to the Gentile world. Who did God send into your life to share this message with you? Who can you share this message with? Who do you know who needs to have their eyes opened to see the light and receive the gift of forgiveness and the hope of an unfading inheritance with God and other believers?

C. Paul describes his ministry - Acts 26:19-23

Paul humbly told King Agrippa that he had been obedient to the command received in the vision.

1. Preaching - 26:19-20

He had gone first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. He had offered the gift of salvation to both on the same terms. Both the Jews and the Gentiles needed to turn to God and show the fruits of repentance in their lives. All people have this same need!

2. Persecution - 26:21

It was because of his preaching the message of salvation that the Jews had apprehended him in the temple in Jerusalem and tried to kill him.

3. Perseverance in preaching the prophetic message - 26:22-23

With God's help, Paul had continued sharing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ with all who came across his path, from prisoners to kings. Throughout his travels and imprisonment, God had kept him safe, rescued him from danger, and preserved his life.

Paul had proclaimed what the prophets and Moses had

envisioned. He had not delivered a new doctrine, but simply explained how the prophecies of ancient Scriptures had been fulfilled. As promised of old, Christ had come, suffered, died, and risen from the dead. Christ was the *firstfruits* (1 Corinthians 15:20), the *firstborn from the dead* (Colossians 1:18). God had made Him *a light to the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth* (Isaiah 49:6b). Lost sinners are in spiritual darkness and only Christ can give them light.

III. Agrippa and Festus Respond - Acts 26:24-32

As Paul drew his defense to a close, Festus was the first to respond.

A. Festus' loud interruption - Acts 26:24-26

From the Greek viewpoint, the resurrection was impossible, and for Paul to speak about it with such intensity and enthusiasm led Festus to question his sanity. He told Paul in no uncertain terms that too much time spent in study was driving him mad.

Paul responded calmly and courteously. He defended his sanity. His words were *of sober truth* (NASB). Besides that, Paul had not been preaching about things which had been *done in a corner*. The gift of salvation was not a secret. Christ had appeared openly. His public ministry could not have escaped the notice of King Agrippa!

B. Agrippa's hedge to Paul's question - 26:27-29

Paul turned to the king and cornered him with a direct question. *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.*

As a representative of the Roman government, Agrippa did not want to disagree with Festus. Besides, if he answered affirmatively, Paul might ask him to turn and repent. However, he could not answer negatively for fear of jeopardizing his influence with the Jews. Agrippa was in a tight spot. His answer was most likely meant as a joking rebuttal, *you almost persuade me to become a Christian*. Unfortunately, *almost* never saved anyone.

Paul took Agrippa's answer quite seriously. To him, salvation was no joking matter. His heart's desire was that every single person gathered in that auditorium would become *altogether* a Christian just as he was, except of course for his prisoner's chains.

C. Agrippa's assessment of Paul's case - 26:30-32

The Pharisees (Acts 23:9), Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:29), and Festus (Acts 25:25) had all declared Paul to be innocent, and now Agrippa reaffirmed it: Paul had not

violated any law and did not deserve death or imprisonment. In fact, Agrippa declared that he deserved to be set free. However, Paul had appealed to Caesar and the legal process had to be followed. Paul would be sent to Caesar.

Applications

1. Paul presented his case clearly and enthusiastically. He was careful to be courteous to his listeners, but he did not spare them the sober truth. He also did not concern himself with what the governor or the king might think of him for believing the gospel. In all these ways, Paul is our example in sharing the gospel with others. How can you take a lesson from Paul in proclaiming the gospel to the lost?

2. Charles Spurgeon said, *almost persuaded to be a Christian (Acts 26:28) is like the man who was almost pardoned, but he was hanged; like the man who was almost rescued, but he was burned in the house. A man that is almost saved is damned*. Are you sure that you are *altogether* saved (26:29), and not merely flirting with the truth? If you are not confident of your salvation, please ask your discussion leader for a Disciplers Confidence Letter which will tell you how to have the assurance you need.