

## Acts Chapter 26

---

- Festus the new governor has somewhat of a dilemma on his hands, he's inherited Paul's situation from Felix the previous governor.
- The Jews want Paul killed but they don't have a real case against him, because Festus was trying to help the Jews, Paul has taken advantage of his Roman citizenship and appealed to Caesar. The problem is that Festus is obligated to send Paul, but he doesn't have any kind of valid charge to accompany him and he's going to look foolish before Nero.
- Agrippa has come onto the scene and he's going to help Festus develop a charge against Paul if possible. All the players are present in their royal apparel and this trial so called is set to begin.

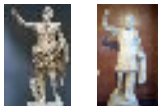
---

V: 1 Agrippa asks Paul to get started, granting him permission to speak. Paul is glad for this opportunity to once again answer the accusations leveled against him.

- Acts 9 - God speaks to and sends a disciple by the name of Ananias to go and pray for Paul who had encountered the Lord on the road to Damascus.
- Ananias was understandably a little hesitant to go knowing how zealously Paul had persecuted the church, but God directed him to go and pray for Paul.

**Acts 9:15** "But the Lord said unto him, go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel."

- Here in this chapter we're seeing the fulfillment of this scripture; Paul is preaching before Festus the governor, before king Agrippa and Bernice, as well as the Jews who accused him; Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.
- You've probably seen pictures of Roman statues, with one arm stretched out as though they were making a speech or a statement, it looks very philosophical.



- Our text describes Paul stretching forth his hand to speak, but the difference was that one of his hands was probably shackled to a long chain with a Roman soldier on the other end of it.

V: 2-3 Paul expresses his satisfaction knowing that Agrippa will understand the issues being familiar the the practices of Judaism.

- Up to this point, Paul had been making his defense before Felix and Festus, the Roman governors who really knew nothing about the Jewish faith or the scriptures.
- Agrippa knew both the scriptures and the customs of the Jews. Josephus declared that Agrippa had a great knowledge of the OT scriptures which in Paul's mind was a perfect opportunity to pave the way for him to share the dramatic testimony of his conversion to Christianity because Agrippa had a better chance of understanding the truth of Jesus from a scriptural and prophetic stand point.
- Paul was probably excited at this opportunity; it's not every day that he or anyone would have access to the governor, or kings and queens to testify about Jesus to them, knowing the tremendous influence these people would yield if they were converted.
- Paul intends to give him the full story from the beginning and asks for his patience.

V: 4-5 The Jews know all my history. Born in Tarsus, he was sent at an early age to the school of Gamaliel, a famous and one of the most well respected Rabbi's of his time.

- He was described as a Pharisee of the Pharisees whose zeal later led him to be one of the chief persecutors of the church.
- Agrippa would understand the differences between the Pharisees who were conservative and took the scriptures literally, and the Sadducees who were liberal, materialistic, and didn't take the scriptures literally.
- There are many factions of Judaism today, the Orthodox Jews, the Ultra-Orthodox Jews, the Reformed Jews or Secular Jews who are on the opposite side of the spectrum, and everything in between.
- Those that take the OT scriptures seriously, literally and are very religious vs; those that believe the writings of the OT are just good moral stories but not to be taken too seriously for their lack of foundation in fact or reality.

V: 6-7 Paul gets to the crux of the charges, he's here because of the differences between the Pharisees who believe in the resurrection of the dead, and the Sadducees who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead.

- When he talks about "... *the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers*:..." He's talking about the promise, the prophecies related to the coming of the Messiah.

- One of the distinctions being that Paul wasn't talking about the Messiah to come, but the Messiah who had already come.
- The Jews to this day are still looking for the 1<sup>st</sup> coming of the Messiah. Their criteria will be the one who brings peace between the Jews and their enemies and allows them to build the 3<sup>rd</sup> Temple.
- Not only did they miss the actual 1<sup>st</sup> coming of the Messiah, they've missed the fact that it is now Biblically & prophetically impossible for the Messiah to appear today for the first time because of the prophetically precise timing of the coming of the Messiah which has already passed, and which Jesus met to the day according to Daniel's prophesy concerning the coming Messiah. That day has passed.
- Because their criteria and expectations of the Messiah are un-Biblical, they will get an un-Biblical or false messiah, the Anti-Christ.

V: 8 Paul is raising the issue of God's limitations or lack thereof with Agrippa. Can't God do anything, is there anything that is impossible for God - including raising the dead?

- No doubt Agrippa had heard the rumors of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, Paul is about to assert that this is no rumor, but that it is a fact.
- Paul's question to Agrippa could be asked of any Atheist or skeptic today - they don't know all things, they don't possess even 10% of all the knowledge of the world and universe - they can doubt but they can't really "know."
- We "know" that God created all things, including the universe and world that we live in, as the creator of all things it would be easy for Him to raise the dead since He created all life to begin with.

V: 9-11 Paul testifies of his zeal against the church and the lengths he personally went to destroy the church - he's describing himself as an unlikely convert to Christianity, meaning the reasons must have been compelling.

- One of the most powerful evidences of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we can give is our own personal testimony - something that cannot be refuted.
- Paul begins to describe the radical transformation in his own life.

**1 Peter 3:15** "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

V: 12-14 Paul continues to testify that he was on his way to Damascus being commissioned by the Sanhedrin to continue his war against the church when suddenly there was a bright light, brighter than the noon day sun and everyone fell to the ground.

- That was when Paul first heard the voice of the Lord asking Saul why he was persecuting Him / Jesus who Saul didn't recognize at first.
- Jesus said that it was hard for Saul to kick against the pricks.
- Sometimes when oxen were feeling ornery they would kick back towards the plow or the farmer driving the plow. To remedy this and to train the ox they would place these sharp sticks, or "ox goads," or "pricks" so that when the ox kicked backwards they would kick these goads and hurt themselves, learning not to do that.
- Jesus is saying that Paul has been fighting a painful battle, learning a painful lesson.
- Paul had a conflicted conscience; part of him was obviously siding with the religious leaders and all of his training and education yet part of him was beginning to question what he was seeing.

At the trial and stoning of Stephen:

**Acts 6:10, 15** "10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake." - "15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

We read that later as they were actually stoning Stephen:

**Acts 7:58** "... and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul."

- Paul had witnessed these events, he may well have seen the trial and crucifixion of Jesus as well, all these things added up to his "kicking against the pricks."

V: 15-18 Paul continues that as he fell to the ground he asked "who art thou Lord?"

- The word for "**Lord**" is "Kurios" the NT equivalent of the OT "Jehovah" or "Yahweh."
- Jesus then began to speak to Paul, instructing and directing him that he would be God's ambassador to the Gentiles to open their eyes and deliver them from the power of Satan to God, that they might be forgiven of their sins and receive an eternal inheritance from God.

- Everything changed for Paul, all his past experiences and training were out the window, now he was walking in the newness of life - a new creature in Christ Jesus.

**Philippians 3:12-14** “<sup>12</sup>Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. <sup>13</sup>Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, <sup>14</sup>I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

- Paul is moving forward, and this is part of it, doing what Jesus said - declaring the Gospel.

V: 18 To open their eyes, meaning their eyes have been shut, or they've been blinded.

- The enemy wants to keep us in darkness, blind to what is before us. Our prayer is that God would bind the hand of the enemy that keep our loved ones and those around us in deception and blindness.
- To turn them from darkness to light:

**Ephesians 5:8** “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.”

**1 John 1:5-7** “<sup>5</sup>This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. <sup>6</sup>If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

- To turn them from the power of Satan to the power of God: At one time we were all in bondage to sin and to the power of Satan.
- Jesus died to redeem us, to set us free from the bondage of sin.

**John 8:36** “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

- That they might receive forgiveness:

**Colossians 2:13** “And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses.”

- To receive an inheritance:

**Romans 8:16-17** “<sup>16</sup>The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: <sup>17</sup>And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ;...”

V: 19-23 Paul declares that he's been obedient to what God has called him to do.

- He's been preaching the message, the gospel of grace to the Gentiles - which totally incensed the Jews, he preached that the Messiah had come, and that the Jews had crucified Him, and that He / Jesus had risen from the dead which really tweaked the Sadducees who controlled the Sanhedrin.
- Paul's preaching led to many Jews and Gentiles getting saved, turning away from Judaism.
- He was making friends everywhere. Basically this is the laundry list of gripes that the Jews had against Paul.
- Paul also said that every thing he's said lines up with scripture, that nothing he's taught has been outside Moses (law) or the prophets.
- <sup>20</sup>Repentance has been described as a change of direction, or a change of mind; regeneration is a change of heart. Redemption is changing one's state—trading the kingdom of darkness and death for the kingdom of light and life.

V: 24 Basically Festus interrupted and said loudly that Paul was crazy. Obviously he wasn't picking up what Paul was putting down.

**1 Corinthians 2:14** “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

- Agrippa probably understands a lot of what Paul is talking about but Festus is Roman, and not a student of scripture, this is all craziness to him. (*Conviction*)
- How many of our friends and relatives thought we were crazy when we became born again, became radical, on fire Jesus freaks? I mean going to church Sundays and Wednesdays? A little over the top don't you think?

V: 25-26 Paul has given them the heart of the Gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

- Agrippa would have been well aware of the crucifixion of Jesus and would certainly have heard the rumors of his resurrection from the dead. More than likely he'd heard about Paul's conversion, which was a big deal - now he's got a front row seat and an understanding of why, connecting the dots so to speak.

V: 27 Moment of truth: Paul senses that Agrippa's heart is ripe for the plucking so he asks him if he believes.

V: 28 Agrippa responds that you almost persuade me.

NASB: "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."

NIV: "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

- "With a little persuasion you would make me a Christian."
- In any event / translation it still ends the same way, "close, but no cigar..."
- Like so many millions over the years, close, almost there, then turned away at the last moment, so many that choose their sin over salvation.

**John 3:17-19** "17For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. 18He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. 19And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

V: 29 Paul makes his final plea, probably holding up his arm rattling the chain, telling his attentive audience "I wish you could all be as I am, knowing the joy of following and serving Christ... except that I would not want you to be in chains."

V: 30-32 Festus, Agrippa, and Bernice get up, seemingly ignoring the issue of salvation and begin to confer about the criminal charges, or lack there of.

- They acknowledge his innocence and bemoan the fact that he's appealed to Caesar, which if he hadn't he'd be set free.
- According to Jesus, Paul would testify of Him in Rome and all of this is just part of God's plan for getting him there.

**Romans 8:28** "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."