

THE BOOK OF ACTS

CHAPTER 26

PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA

THE CHALLENGE OF CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Paul, who could have been intimidated by the political leaders he stands before, does not back down from boldly sharing his conversion experience and call to ministry, even when accused of being a madman. We must not be moved by the opinions others have of our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. God may bring those across our path who are at the point of almost being persuaded to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Perhaps the Lord will use us to plant the final seed so the one standing on the brink of his or her decision to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will finally be persuaded to enter into His kingdom.

AGRIPPA PERMITS PAUL TO SPEAK (1-11)

When Paul is permitted to address Agrippa, he uses the Roman style of oratory. He explains how he was trained to be a Pharisee. Paul continues by explaining how he was not much different from those now persecuting him because he once also persecuted Christians.

PAUL ADDRESSES AGRIPPA

Act 26:1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself:

Paul is completely poised and uses the Roman style in addressing these men. The stretched forth hand is to draw attention in respect to a speaker. There was probably a lot of small talk going on in the room. Paul has a message for them to hear.

Act 26:2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews,

I think (conclude) myself happy (makarias: Blessed), king Agrippa, because I shall answer for (defend) myself this day before thee touching (concerning) all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

Paul is happy in bonds. These men are unhappy in freedom.

Act 26:3 especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

Paul knows Agrippa's past, that he is a fourth-generation Herod and ruler of the Jews in Palestine. In truth, Paul is not on trial here; this group is on trial with God. Paul is God's representative in court.

PAUL SPEAKS OF EARLY LIFE

Act 26:4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.

Paul's life will be divided into his youth (verses 4-5) and his present life as a minister of the gospel (verse 6). Paul is telling them that everything he is about to say can be confirmed by the Jews who are accusing him.

Act 26:5 They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

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

Paul is saying the Jews will not testify against him on legal grounds in a court of law. They will accuse him from outside based on accusations and hearsay. Paul's testimony before salvation is not only taught in Acts 9, but in Galatians 1:13-14, and Philippians 3:4-6.

PAUL SPEAKS OF PRESENT LIFE AS A MINISTER

Act 26:6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.

Paul is saying, "The same ones who knew me then condemn me now." The "hope of the promise" is the sending of their Messiah, Jesus Christ. Every author and book of the Old Testament prophesied on his coming. Many of these promises are covenants.

There are four unconditional covenants given to Israel and now for those who are born again. The foundation of each covenant is personal faith in Jesus Christ, the promised One of the Old Testament. This is what Paul came to preach.

Act 26:7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

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

All the rituals still being observed by Israel still look forward to the coming of Messiah. Their rituals in the temple and court go on day and night at the very time Paul is speaking. Yet Jesus has already come, being crucified, and resurrected, they are expressing their rejection of Jesus by offering animal sacrifices. They do this in hope of a coming, yet the coming has already occurred. The Jews accuse Paul of preaching something they are looking forward to themselves.

Act 26:8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

Even those in the courtroom who are not Christians should be able to believe that God could raise someone from the dead.

PAUL'S PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

Act 26:9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

I verily thought (assumed) with myself, that I ought to do (prasso: policy, practice) many things contrary (in opposition) to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul explains he was also like the Jews who persecute him because he himself persecuted the Lord. He was a zealous religious man coming against the church.

The name of Jesus holds the power (Mark 16:17-18) and causes opposition to come. It was the supernatural that Paul (before conversion) had a difficult time with, as do all other religious people.

Act 26:10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Which thing I also did (poieo: carried out the policies) 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.

Not only was Paul told to throw Christians in prison and kill them, he also was in favor of and consented with the decision of those in authority over him in regard to Christians.

Act 26:11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad (emmainomai: maniac, rage at) against them, I persecuted them even unto strange (foreign) cities.

Paul traveled outside Jerusalem on special trips to persecute and jail believers. If they would renounce Jesus, they would be allowed to live. Paul became as an insane man in his zeal against the Lord. He was driven by demonic madness to many cities outside of Israel to persecute the church of Jesus.

PAUL'S CONVERSION RECOUNTED (12-18)

Paul now begins recounting his experience on the road to Damascus. He testifies about hearing a voice from heaven and explains being called to be a minister, especially to the heathen.

Act 26:12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Whereupon (in madness) as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priest,

Act 26:13 At midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter Than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

Only one type of light is brighter than the sun; the glory of God.

Act 26:14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Falling to the ground is a natural reaction to coming in contact with God's glory (2 Chronicles 5:13-14). Although Paul was the only one who heard the voice (22:9), everyone saw the light. By persecuting people, Paul was persecuting the Lord Jesus (Matthew 25:40) and was one step away from the point of no return. Like Pharaoh, his heart had become hardened by resisting the gospel. The "prick" is an ox goad, a hard instrument to train a horse or ox. It is much like our spurs today. Saul was so hardened through hearing Stephen and other ministers, the Lord had to do something drastic to reach him.

Act 26:15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Saul understood the Lord was talking to him, but as most religious people, he did not know who the Lord was. He found out Jesus is Jehovah and Messiah.

Act 26:16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister (huperetes: under rower, servant, subordinate [13:5]) and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

Paul had no more answers for Jesus. He quietly believed and rose up a new man. Paul also had a new purpose (a new commission): to be an under rower, a beginning minister in the kingdom of God.

Paul could not minister until he first learned as a servant, a "helps" minister (Galatians 1:15-16). When Paul began to preach, it consisted of his vision on the road to Damascus and the Word revealed to him (Galatians 1:16). The revelation of the Word is just as dramatic as a vision of Jesus in His glory. And God promised Paul there would be more visions and revelations to come.

Act 26:17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

Paul will be supernaturally delivered from religious Jews and Gentile heathen. Paul is called to preach to the Gentiles (Galatians 2:8), but always has a place in his heart for the Jewish people (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1).

Act 26:18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them 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 are sanctified by faith in Me.'

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power (exousia: authority) of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness (remission) of sins, and inheritance among them; which are sanctified (positional) by faith that is in (deposited in) me.

Unbelievers have been blinded by sin and Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4), but the Word of God brings light (Ephesians 1:17-18). With the entrance of the gospel and repentance, their eyes are opened, and they can see the Word (light) and walk toward it. Sinners receive forgiveness because everything has been provided (2 Peter 1:3). Man's part is to simply accept the free gift as an act of his will.

PAUL RECOUNTS HIS LIFE AFTER CONVERSION (19-23)

Paul then testifies about obeying the "heavenly vision" in taking the gospel to the Gentiles. He explains how the Jews tried to kill him. Paul continues by testifying that he had witnessed and continues witnessing about Jesus' suffering, dying, and being the first raised from the dead for both Jews and Gentiles.

Act 26:19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

Whereupon (God visiting and instructing me), O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

Paul received Jesus when he saw the vision and also accepted the call to minister to the Gentiles.

26:19 Being Obedient to the Heavenly Vision, PROPHETIC DREAMS AND VISIONS. For vision surrounded Paul's conversion and Acts: Steven's stoning (7:55, 58-59), Paul's experience near Damascus (9:3), Paul's vision in prayer (verses 11-12), and Ananias's vision (verse 10, 17). Each time, Paul testified that the Lord spoke to him in a vision. His defense against those who thought him to be a heretic was that he "was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (26:19).

As Charles Spurgeon said, "we must take care that we do not neglect heavenly monitions through fear of being considered visionary; we must not be staggered even

by the dread of being styled fanatical, or out of our minds. For to stifle a thought from God is no small sin.”

Note further the place visions played in the apostle Paul’s experience. Read Acts 7:56-8:1; 9:1-16; 13:2-4; 14:19; 16:9-10; 18:9-11; 22:17-18; 27:22-25; 2 Corinthians 12:1-4; Galatians 1:11-12; 2:2; Ephesians 3:1-5.

Act 26:20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

Paul declared the gospel first at Damascus. He announces what he has seen. This verse also covers the first three missionary journeys (Judea to the Gentiles). Good works is also a part of the gospel message. When a person accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior, they should also begin to step out into good works which speak of their conversion.

Act 26:21 For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

Paul was taken and beaten by the Jews for preaching about Jesus Christ being the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of mankind. This may not be how the Romans believe or the Jews, but it is not the issue. Paul is free to preach his own beliefs without being taken to jail. The Jews want to kill Paul over preaching his own beliefs about Jesus Christ.

Act 26:22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, **witnessing** both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—

Having therefore obtained help (acquired assistance) of God (Roman intervention), I continue (perfect tense---remain standing) unto this day, witnessing both to small (citizens) and great (government leaders), saying none other things than those which the prophets (major and minor) and Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy) did say should come (to pass):

Paul is saying, “The God they say they serve helped me to escape from them.”

26:22 witnessing, *martureo* (mar-tt-reh-oh); Giving evidence, attesting, confirming, confessing, bearing record, speaking well of, giving a good report, testifying, affirming that one has seen, heard, or experienced something. In the NT it is used particularly for presenting the gospel with evidence. The English word “martyr” comes from this word, suggesting that a witness is one willing to die for his testimony.

Act 26:23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew (kataggello: announce, declare, teach) light unto the people (Jewish), and to the Gentiles.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecy showing that Jesus would suffer, be resurrected, and proclaim salvation to the Jews and Gentiles (Psalm 22; Isaiah 42:6; 53:1-12; 60:1). Even though Agrippa is presiding over the meeting, Festus interrupts Paul. Paul will use this occasion to answer Festus and hit Agrippa with Old Testament scriptures.

PAUL CONTINUES HIS DEFENSE UNDER PRESSURE (24-32)

Festus interrupts Paul's testimony accusing him of being mad. Paul refutes his accusation. After hearing Paul, Agrippa recognizes that he is innocent and he is in jail because of a religious dispute between Paul and the Jews. However, King Agrippa also does not release Paul and uses Paul's appeal to Caesar as the excuse.

Act 26:24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

And as he thus spake for (defended) himself, Festus said (interrupted) with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself (mainomai: maniac, mad); much learning doth make it thee mad (mania: mania, crazy).

Festus calls Paul insane, raving mad. Festus has heard of Paul's study even while in prison and attacks his knowledge of the Word.

Act 26:25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.

Even under great pressure, Paul keeps his composure. Paul is speaking the Old Testament scriptures which Festus knows nothing of. Paul now makes him look bad before the Jews and Agrippa.

Act 26:26 For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.

For the king (Agrippa) knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely (Agrippa would never interrupt me): for I am persuaded that one of these things are hidden from him; for this thing (death, burial, resurrection) was not done in a corner.

Coming from the Herodian line, Agrippa was well versed in the Old Testament scriptures. If Paul is angry, Agrippa is also angry. Agrippa has seen the rituals, heard the prophecies, and knows of the injustices done to Jesus.

Act 26:27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

Paul has known for some time that Agrippa believed the Old Testament Scriptures. Agrippa figures out quickly where Paul is heading. He knows Paul will tie Jesus into the Old Testament verses and stops short of believing in Jesus as his own Savior.

Act 26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

And Agrippa [replied] to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian" (NIV).

This is a sarcastic remark made by Agrippa to cut Paul off. He saw the close coming and did not want to have to make the decision for or against Jesus. He is simply saying, "If I allow you to speak any longer, I might accept Jesus."

Act 26:29 And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

And Paul said, I would (wish) to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day (the full crowd in the court), were (ginomai: would become) both almost, and altogether (by my few or many words) such as I am, except these bonds.

Paul wishes they will become born again through a few or many words from him, in a little amount of time or much. Paul will do or say whatever it takes to make them believers, but he does not wish prison on any of them.

Act 26:30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;

And when they had thus spoken, the king arose (jumped) up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

When the king jumps up, so does everyone else.

Act 26:31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."

They now all understood Festus' dilemma. They see Paul's innocence and understand he is simply in prison for a religious disagreement with the Jews. They are also angry with Festus for allowing this to continue as long as it has. He should not have kept Paul in prison for political expediency.

Act 26:32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

This is not true. Why doesn't he just walk in and set Paul free? He is afraid of Paul and of displaying weakness before the people. Paul has been in prison for two years now, and it would be an admission of his own oversight to free Paul. Paul upset him in the courtroom, and it would be a blow to his pride to now set Paul free. He uses Paul's appeal to Caesar as a scapegoat. Like Festus and Felix, he is also a weak leader.