

## Acts 26 – Pauls Preaches to rulers and kings

CHAPTER 26 - THEME: Paul before Agrippa.

This testimony of Paul is not a defense of himself. It is a declaration of the gospel with the evident purpose of winning Agrippa and the others present to Christ. This is a dramatic scene, and this chapter is one of the greatest pieces of literature, either secular or inspired. This chapter was marvelous to me even before I was saved. - McGee

### *Paul's Defense Before 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:**

The appearance of Paul before Agrippa is, in my judgment, the high point in the entire ministry of this apostle. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy that he should appear before kings and rulers. Undoubtedly it was God's will that he should come before King Agrippa. I have already indicated that this made a profound impression on me when I memorized it. I must confess that it had some effect upon my decision later on to study for the ministry.

There are several features about this chapter that we ought to note before we get into Paul's message before King Agrippa. First of all, I want to make it clear again that Paul is not on trial. This is not a court trial. Paul is not making a defense before Agrippa. He is preaching the gospel. In view of the fact that this great apostle had appealed to Caesar, not even King Agrippa could condemn him, and he is certainly out of the hands of Governor Festus, as the final verse of this chapter confirms: "Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar" (v. Act\_26:32). They no longer had the authority to condemn him. Neither could they set him free. They are helpless. So, Paul is not attempting to make a defense. Rather he is trying to win these men for Christ.

This was not a trial, but it was a public appearance of Paul before King Agrippa and the court so that they might learn firsthand from the apostle what "that way" really was. You see, everyone was talking about The Way. Someone would ask another, "Say, have you heard about this new thing, The Way?" The other would reply, "Well, I have heard some things about it. It is something new going around. What's it all about?" I would imagine that even Festus and Agrippa had some sort of exchange like that. Agrippa would have said, "I've been hearing about this, but I'd like to know more about it. We ought to get it from an expert." Therefore, they have this public appearance to explain The Way. I think this was one of the most splendid opportunities that any minister ever had to preach Christ. There has never again been an opportunity quite like this.

This was an occasion filled with pagan pomp and pageantry. It was a state function filled with fanfare and the blowing of trumpets. There was the tapestry and tinsel. The function was attended by all the prominent personages of that section and the prestige of Rome. There must have been a scramble for people to be able to attend this occasion. The purple of Agrippa and the pearls of Bernice were in evidence. There were the gold braid and the brass hats of the Roman Empire. The elect and the elite, the intelligentsia and the sophisticates had all turned out in full regalia. There would be the pride and ostentation and the dignity and display which only Rome could put on parade in that day.

Notice again how Dr. Luke records it: "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth" (Act\_25:23).

This stirs the imagination. I trust that somehow; we can picture this scene before us as we listen to the message of Paul. This elaborate gathering is for just one purpose: to hear from a notable prisoner by the name of Paul. He is the one who has already been over the greater part of the Roman Empire, certainly the eastern part of it, preaching The Way.

When the door of that great throne room swings open, a prisoner in chains is ushered into this colorful scene. He is dressed in the garb of a prisoner, and he is chained to two guards. He is unimpressive in his personal appearance. This is the man who teaches and preaches the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ for men because they are sinners

## Acts 26 – Pauls Preaches to rulers and kings

and need a Savior. This is the one who can speak with authority about the new Way. And they will listen to this man because he knows how to speak and because he is an intelligent man. The light of heaven is on his face. He is no longer Saul of Tarsus but Paul the apostle. What a contrast he is to that gay, giddy crowd of nobility gathered there!

Festus told how the Jews had tried to kill Paul. My, how they hated him, and yet they had no real charge against him. That whole crowd looked at Paul, and I rather think that he looked over the whole crowd.

Paul is not a scintillating personality. Some liberal has called him, "Pestiferous Paul." Well, you can call him that if you want to. Maybe in the Roman Empire that is what they thought of him. Remember that the Lord Jesus had said, "If the world hates you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (Joh\_15:18). This man is true to the Lord Jesus, so the world will hate him.

I do not think, frankly, that Paul was physically attractive. Yet he had the dynamic kind of attraction which the grace of God gives to a man. He was energized by the Holy Spirit. Oh, that you and I might be able to say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal\_2:20).

Now let's turn our eyes from the glitter and the glamour of the occasion to the two men who stand out in this assembly: Agrippa and Paul. What a contrast! One of them is in purple, the other is in prison garb. One is on a throne; the other is in shackles. One wears a crown; the other is in chains. Agrippa is a king, but in the slavery of sin. Paul is a chained prisoner, rejoicing in the freedom of sins forgiven and liberty in Christ. Agrippa is an earthly king who could not free Paul nor himself. Paul is an ambassador of the King who had freed him and who could free Agrippa from the damning effects of sin.

We need to remember that King Agrippa was a member of the family of Herod. He belonged to the rottenest family that I know anything about. It is the worst family that is mentioned in the Bible. I think old Ahab and Jezebel were like Sunday school kids compared to the Herod family. You know the old bromide about giving the Devil his due. Well, let's give the Herods their due. Agrippa was an intelligent man and a great man in many respects in spite of his background. He knew the Mosaic Law, that is, he knew the letter of it. Paul rejoiced in this because it gave him an opportunity to speak to a man who was instructed and who would understand the nature of the charges.

As I have said before, I can't help but believe that Paul was getting a little impatient during those two years of incarceration. He had appeared before the mob in Jerusalem, before the captain, then before Felix (publicly, then privately many times), then he appeared before Festus. Now he must appear before Agrippa. None of these other men fully understood the background of the charges against Paul. Neither did they understand the gospel. This is true even of the Roman captain in Jerusalem. It is amazing that these people could have lived in that area, have been exposed to Christians, have heard the apostle Paul, and still not really have understood. Yet that was the situation.

Paul's plea to Agrippa to turn to Christ is magnificent. It is logical and it is intelligent. Rather than being a defense, it is a declaration of the gospel. - McGee

***Act 26:2-3 "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, 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.***

When given his cue by Agrippa, Paul stretched out his hand and began a stirring recital of his Christian experience. First, he expressed gratitude that he was permitted to present his case before one who, being a Jew, was conversant with the customs and questions which prevailed among the Jewish people. His introduction was not mere flattery; it was a statement of Christian courtesy and simple truth. – Believers Bible Commentary

## **Acts 26 – Pauls Preaches to rulers and kings**

***Act 26:4-5 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know. 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.***

As to his early life, the apostle was an exemplary Jew. The Jews would have to admit, if only they were willing to testify, that Paul had followed a pathway of the strictest orthodoxy, being a consistent Pharisee. – Believers Bible Commentary

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

Now he was on trial for no greater crime than the fact that he clung to the hope of the promise made by God to the Jewish fathers in the OT. The flow of Paul's argument here seems to be as follows: In the OT God made various covenants with the leaders of Israel, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Solomon. The principal covenant had to do with the promise of the Messiah, His coming to deliver the nation of Israel and to reign over the earth. The patriarchs of the OT died without seeing the fulfillment of this promise. Does this mean that God would not carry out the terms of the covenants? He would most assuredly do so! But how could He do it when the fathers were already dead? The answer is, "By raising them from the dead." Thus, in a very direct way, the apostle links the promises made to the OT saints with the resurrection of the dead. – Believers Bible Commentary

***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.***

The apostle pictured the twelve tribes of Israel as earnestly and ceaselessly serving God, hoping to see the promise fulfilled. This reference to the twelve tribes is important in view of the current teaching that ten of the tribes of Israel have been "lost" since the captivity. Though they were scattered among the Gentile nations, the Apostle Paul saw them as a distinct people, serving God and looking for the promised Deliverer. – Believers' Bible Commentary

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

This then was Paul's crime! He believed that God would fulfill His promise to the fathers by raising them from the dead. What was so incredible about this? Paul asked Agrippa and all those who were with him. – Believers' Bible Commentary

***Act 26:9-11 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 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. 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."***

Reverting to the story of his life, Paul recounted the savage and unremitting campaign he waged against the followers of the Christian faith. With all his strength he opposed the name of Jesus of Nazareth. With authority from the chief priests, he imprisoned many of the Christians in Jerusalem. When they stood trial before the Sanhedrin, he cast his vote against them consistently. Over and over again he arranged punishment for those whom he found in every synagogue, and he did all he could to force them to deny their Lord. (When it says that he compelled them to blaspheme, it does not mean he was successful, but he tried to do it.) Paul's hate campaign against the disciples of Jesus had overflowed from Jerusalem and Judea to foreign cities. - Believers' Bible Commentary

**Note: God has a way of using those that worked in total darkness in powerful ways to shows His power and glory through their redemption. For example, there is a former witch doctor now that has turned many to Christ on multiple continents and has an amazing book (*Deliverance from Demonic Covenants & Curses by Dr. James A Solmon*)**

***Paul Tells of His Conversion***

## Acts 26 – Pauls Preaches to rulers and kings

**Act 26:12-14** *“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 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. 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.’*

It was while he was on one of these foreign expeditions that a great transforming experience occurred in his life. He was en route to Damascus, equipped with official papers authorizing him to arrest the Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. At midday he was overcome by a vision of glory. A light from heaven shone upon him, brighter than the midday sun. After he had fallen to the ground, he heard a voice asking this probing question: “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” The voice also added the revealing words, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Goads were sharply pointed instruments used to force stubborn animals to move ahead. Paul had been kicking against the goad of his own conscience, but even more important, against the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit. He had never been able to forget the poise and grace with which Stephen had died. He had been fighting against God Himself. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

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

Paul asked, “Who are You, Lord?” The voice replied, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” Jesus? How could that be? Hadn't Jesus been crucified and buried? Hadn't His disciples stolen His body and laid it away in some secret place? How then could Jesus be speaking to him now? The truth quickly dawned on Paul's soul. Jesus had indeed been buried, but He had risen from the dead! He had ascended back to heaven, from where He was now speaking to Paul. In persecuting the Christians, Paul had been persecuting their Master. And in persecuting Him, he had been persecuting the Messiah of Israel, the very Son of God. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

**Note:** You can talk all about Christ to someone, but once that they actually have an experience with the Lord in a personal and real way, they come away changed forever. This was true with Paul and holds true today for us, even if our conversions are not as dramatic.

**Act 26:16-18** *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. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 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.’*

Next Paul gives a condensed summary of the commission which was given him by the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He was told by the Lord to rise and stand on his feet. He had had this special revelation of Christ in glory because he was appointed to be a servant of the Lord and a witness of all he had seen that day, and of all the great truths of the Christian faith which would yet be made known to him.

The promise that Paul would be delivered from the Jewish people and the Gentiles must be understood as meaning deliverance in general until his work was done. Paul would be sent especially to the Gentiles to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Through faith in the Lord Jesus, they would receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified. H. K. Downie shows how verse 18 is an excellent summary of what the gospel does:

1. It relieves us from darkness.
2. It releases from the power of Satan.
3. It remits sins.
4. It restores a lost inheritance.

## Acts 26 – Pauls Preaches to rulers and kings

**Notice:** The Lord has one flock with are all grafted in as children of Abraham. Jesus came to unify not divide the Jew and the gentile and fulfill his promises which always included Abraham blessing all nations. In *Genesis 15:6 Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness*. We are no different, belief, as demonstrated in actions, results in righteousness from God that we can't earn. Abaraham is asked to demonstrate this faith with Isaac, and we too are mentioned in God's response.

*Genesis 22:15-18 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."*

**Act 26:19-23** *"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 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. For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 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— 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."*

Having been thus commissioned, Paul explains to Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Both in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all ... Judea, and then to the Gentiles he preached to men that they should repent and turn to God, doing works that prove the reality of their repentance. This is what he was doing when the Jews seized him in the temple and tried to kill him. But God had given him protection and help, and he continued to testify to all with whom he came in contact, preaching the message which the prophets and Moses preached in the OT. The message was that the Messiah would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and that He would show light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. – Believers' Bible Commentary

**Note:** Paul accurately proclaims that God saved him and simply in this case worked through the Romans to accomplish it. Do you, like Paul, give God the Glory promptly and publicly?

**Act 26:24-26** *Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. 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."*

Being a Gentile, Festus had probably failed completely to follow the flow of the apostle's argument. Thoroughly unable to appreciate a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit, he impetuously accused Paul of being crazy as the result of his much learning. With no trace of irritation or temper, the apostle quietly denied the charge and emphasized that his words were those of truth and reason. He then expressed confidence that the king knew the truth of what he had been saying. Paul's life and testimony had not been a secret. The Jews knew all about it, and doubtless the reports had reached Agrippa. – Believers' Bible Commentary

**Note:** Whenever testifying, the enemy will always try to discredit the Word of the Lord, but remember, like Paul, we have the power of the Holy Spirit and should approach this from victory to victory.

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

It is possible to believe the facts without them being meaningful to you. You may know the facts of the gospel—that Jesus died for your sins and rose again—but your relationship to these facts is the thing that is essential. - McGee

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

## Acts 26 – Pauls Preaches to rulers and kings

That Agrippa felt the force of the argument is indicated by his words, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” However, there is considerable disagreement as to exactly what Agrippa meant. Those who follow the King James tradition feel that the king had actually been brought to the threshold of decision for Christ. They feel that Paul's answer in verse 29 substantiates this. Others think that Agrippa was using irony, asking Paul, as it were, “Do you think that with a little persuasion, you can make me a Christian?” In other words, he was evading the pressure of the apostle's words with a joke. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

**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."**

Whether Agrippa was speaking in sincerity or in jest, Paul answered with deadly earnestness. He expressed the fervent wish that, whether with little persuasion or with much, both Agrippa and all the others present might enter into the joys and blessings of the Christian life, that they might share all Paul's privileges, that they might become like him, except for the chains. Morgan writes:

He would die to save Agrippa, but he would not put his chains upon Agrippa. That is Christianity. Magnify it, multiply it, apply it. The sincerity that persecutes is not Christian. The sincerity that dies to deliver, but will not impose a chain, is Christianity. – Believers’ Bible Commentary

Agrippa was an intelligent man. He answered, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Friend, do you know that you can almost be a Christian and then be lost for time and eternity? How tragic that is! “Almost” will not do. It must be all or nothing. Either you accept Christ, or you don't accept Christ. No theologian can probe the depths of salvation and its meaning. Yet it is simple enough for ordinary folk like most of us to understand. Either you have Christ, or you don't have Christ. Either you trust Christ, or you don't trust Christ. Either He is your Savior or He is not your Savior. It is one of the two. There is no such thing as a middle ground. It cannot be almost. It must be all.....

Since Jesus is back from the dead, there is another and coming judgment. There is another throne, and Jesus is seated upon it. And there is another prisoner—the prisoner is you or me. Either you have bowed to Him and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, or you will be accountable to Him on that day. The Resurrection is very important to the unsaved man as well as the saved man. – McGee

**Note: Paul proclaimed Christ in chains, so in light of that, what is our excuse for not proclaiming the Lord?**

**Act 26:30-32 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 gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."**

The king, the governor, Bernice, and the other officials left the room to confer privately. They were all forced to admit that Paul had done nothing deserving of death or chains. Perhaps with a tinge of regret, Agrippa said to Festus that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he might have been set free.

We naturally wonder why the appeal to Caesar could not be canceled. Whether or not such an appeal was unalterable, we do know that it was God's purpose that the apostle to the Gentiles should go to Rome for trial before the Emperor (Act\_23:11), and there find the fulfillment of his desire to be made conformable to the death of his Lord. – Believers’ Bible Commentary