

Acts of the Apostles - Chapter 26 (NIV)

26:1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 2 "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

King Agrippa allows Paul to give a defense for himself. This is the fourth time that Paul has given a defense since returning to Jerusalem after his third missionary journey. Paul feels fortunate/happy about giving a defense to King Agrippa because he is a Jew. In this trial, Paul has the opportunity to share the Gospel message with:

- a. Governor Festus
- b. King Agrippa
- c. Bernice
- d. Roman commanders
- e. prominent leaders of Caesarea.

This must be at least a partial fulfillment of Jesus' promise to Ananias in Damascus. The Lord told Ananias that Paul would be his "*chosen instrument*" to the Gentiles, and their kings and to the people of Israel." (Acts 9:15)

26:4 "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. 5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee.

Paul covers his early years which led him to become not just a good Jew but a Pharisee . Paul is setting a foundation that says anyone that knew him before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus would say that he was a Jew's Jew. King Agrippa would have recognized that as a Pharisee, Paul was a devout Jew. Paul would have known everything about being Jewish.

26:6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. 7 This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

Paul wants King Agrippa to know that he was a faithful Jew. As a Jew, Paul has studied the prophecies about the Messiah who was promised to his ancestors.

There are numerous prophecies in the Old Testament about the Messiah.

- f. Micah 5:2 - He would be born in Bethlehem.
- g. 2 Samuel 7:12-16 - He will be born in the lineage of David.
- h. Malachi 3:1 - A messenger will prepare the way.
- i. Isaiah 42:6 - The Messiah will be for Jew and Gentile.
- j. Isaiah 53:4-6 - The Messiah would bear our sins and suffer in our place.
- k. Psalm 16:9-10 - The Messiah would be raised from the dead.

Why should it be thought incredible that God can do *anything*? As Jesus said, *with God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26). Yet it should be especially easy for Agrippa to believe that God raises the dead, given some clear statements in the Old Testament (such as Job 19:25-27), the nature of God, and the intuitive grasp of the eternal among mankind.” (Guzik)

26:9 *“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.*

Paul continues his defense by taking them through his persecution of the Christians and how he opposed those that believed in Jesus of Nazareth. He is quick to point out that his authority for putting many of the Lord’s people in prison, and putting some to death came from the Chief priests. He tells King Agrippa that he was obsessed with persecuting them.

26:12 *“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’*

15 *“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’*

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. 16 ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. 17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 18 to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

Up to now, King Agrippa has to be puzzled as to why Paul needs to defend himself. All of that is about to change because Paul is moving on to his conversion experience.

“As I journeyed to Damascus: This is Paul’s fullest account yet of his experience on the Damascus Road. He first noted that he went on his mission of hate and persecution with the *authority and commission* of the same religious leaders who now accused him.” (Guzik)

These are the same words used in Acts 9:3-6 to describe the interaction between Paul and the Lord. Paul tries to explain in words what changed his life and how his life was changed forever on the road to Damascus. Paul explains that he received his commission from Jesus to:

- l. Go to the Gentiles
- m. to open their eyes
- n. turn them from darkness to light
- o. Turn them from the power of Satan to God
- p. So that they may receive forgiveness of sins
- q. Receive a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

26:19 “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

Paul is telling Agrippa that because of this vision of Jesus, his life changed and he had to obey the heavenly commission. Whether they understand it or not, Paul is sharing the Gospel with everyone listening. He tells them that they “*must repent of their sins and turn to God—and prove they have changed by the good things they do. (NLT)*” The NASB says “*performing deeds appropriate to repentance*” and the NKJV says “*and do works befitting repentance.*”

26:21 That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

Paul explains that it is the Gospel message that the Jewish leaders have rejected and ultimately makes them want to kill him.

“Having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great: During his more than two years of confinement, Paul *did* receive help from God. Yet to that point it wasn’t help that released him; it was help that gave him opportunity and ability to speak to small and great about who Jesus is and what Jesus had done.” (Guzik)

In verse 22, Paul returns to his Jewish roots to say that everything that he has been teaching has come from Moses and the Prophets. It is nothing new except that he gives a name to the Messiah. Above we have looked up in the Scriptures these very facts, which Scripture reference fits Paul’s statement.

- r. The Messiah would suffer, Isaiah 53:4-6
- s. Be the first to rise from the dead, Psalm 16:9-10
- t. Announce God’s light to Jews and Gentiles alike. Isaiah 42:6

26:24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

25 “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

Governor Festus’ response to Paul’s defense was to ask if Paul had lost his mind. Paul answers Festus with what sounds to me like “To a Roman, it may sound crazy but to a Jew like the King, it is true and reasonable (NIV).

“Paul’s message was characterized by truth and reason, because it was based on *historical events* (such as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus), things which were *not done in a corner*, but open to examination.” (Guzik)

26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

29 Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

Paul asks King Agrippa to weigh in to the argument about what Paul has said. Based on his Jewish background he should be able to better understand Paul’s defense. Trying to keep the line of king Herods straight is a difficult thing to do. Acts 12:1-4 talks about King Herod (Agrippa I), that King Herod was the grandson of Herod the Great. Herod the Great ordered the slaughter of young boys in an attempt to kill Jesus. The uncle of King Agrippa I was Herod Antipas. Herodias was the granddaughter of Herod the Great. She married two of her father’s brothers, Herod Philip I and Herod Antipas. She told her daughter to ask Herod Antipas to behead John the Baptist. Agrippa I had the apostle James killed, imprisoned Peter and persecuted the Christian church in Jerusalem. This King Agrippa was King Agrippa II. Drusilla – Daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her husband was Governor Felix.

Instead of answering Paul’s question about his beliefs, Agrippa asked if Paul was trying to convert him to Christianity in a short time. Paul says that time is not important as long as you become like me. In Romans 1:1, Paul calls himself *“a servant of Jesus Christ.”*

“In front of Agrippa was Paul – a strong man, a noble man, and man of wisdom and character – but a man in chains. Did Agrippa say, “Well, if I became a Christian, I might end up in chains like Paul; or at the least, I would have to associate with him. We can’t have that – I’m an important person.” (Guzik)

“O that men were wise enough to see that suffering for Christ is honour, that loss for truth is gain, that the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul.” (Spurgeon)

26:30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 After they left the room, they began saying to one another, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”

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

After they left the auditorium, King Agrippa and his wife Bernice say that Paul is innocent. They tell Governor Festus that Paul could be set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.

“Some people believe it was a bad thing, and that Paul was trusting in the power of the Roman legal system instead of in the power of God. They say that Paul might have been set free by Agrippa if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

“However, we should see the fulfillment of God’s plan through all these events. By his appeal to Caesar, Paul will have the opportunity to preach to the Roman Emperor the way he had to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, thus fulfilling the promise that Paul would *bear My name before...kings* (Acts 9:15).“ (Guzik)