

# Acts of the Apostles

## Week 32: Acts 25:23-26:32

### Festus Presents Paul to Agrippa (25:23-27).

- Agrippa and Bernice make a great show of arriving at Festus's court room in order to hear Paul.
- Festus presents Paul to Agrippa and Bernice in a way that flatters Agrippa and downplays his own responsibility in the matter.
  - o He notes how angry the Jews are with Paul (v 24).
  - o He notes that he has found Paul free of wrongdoing (v 25).
  - o He implies he might have let Paul go except for the fact that Paul appealed to Caesar (v 25).
  - o He asks Agrippa for help in figuring out what he should write to Caesar about Paul (v 27).

### Paul's Defense to Agrippa (26:1-23)

- Paul begins his defense by expressing gratitude for Agrippa (vv 2-3).
  - o He views Agrippa's Jewish faith (even if compromised) as an asset.
  - o Agrippa will be able to follow the theological argument even as he maintains an understanding of Roman law.
  - o Paul explains that he is on trial because of his belief in the resurrection, a belief Paul sees as completely consistent with his Pharisaical Judaism (v 8).
- Paul describes his life before becoming a Christian as one of intense zeal for the Jewish faith.
  - o Paul spent the early part of his life in opposition to "the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (v 9).
  - o He actively persecuted the church and approved of their deaths at the hands of the high priests (v 10).
  - o He actively sought them out in order to persecute them (v 11).
- Paul then recounts his conversion experience (vv 12-28).
  - o This is the third time Paul's conversion story is reported.
  - o In this account, Paul omits Ananias's role in the story placing the emphasis upon his encounter with Jesus.
  - o This account emphasizes the role of light (26:13, 18, 23). Here Paul speaks of a light that is brighter than the sun and knocks him to the ground.
  - o Paul recounts that the Lord spoke to him in Aramaic.
    - He said "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" The question implies that Paul's persecution of Christians is the same as persecuting Christ himself.
    - He also said, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads."
      - Goads were pointed sticks that encouraged an animal to give into the farmer's control.
      - The phrase was an ancient idiom that meant it is useless to resist your destiny.

- When Paul asked who the voice belonged to, Jesus confirmed that it was he (v 15).
- Jesus then gave Paul a specific mission.
  - Christ was appointing him as a servant and a witness (v 16).
  - Jesus would rescue Paul from the “your own people” implying Paul would have trouble with the Jews (v 17).
  - Jesus was sending Paul to the Gentiles to preach a gospel of repentance to them so they may be rescued from darkness to light, be rescued from Satan, and receive both forgiveness of sins and a place among the people of God (vv 17-18).
- Paul assures King Agrippa that his life since that point has simply been an attempt to be obedient to this heavenly vision.
  - Paul preached to Jews in Damascus, Jerusalem, and to all Judea.
  - Then he preached to the Gentiles.
- It is the mission to the Gentiles that has angered the Jews.
  - Paul affirms his calling to the Gentiles by noting two things.
    - God has granted him success by preventing the Jews from stopping him (v 22).
      - This has been one of the themes of the book of Acts.
      - As Gamaliel said of Peter and John, “If their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. If it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39).
    - What Paul has done echoes that which Moses and the Prophets spoke about: God would send a suffering Messiah who would be a light to the Jews and Gentiles alike (vv 22-23).

## Festus and Agrippa resist Paul’s evangelistic efforts (26:24-32)

- Festus interrupts Paul and declares him insane. He finds the intricacies of Jewish theological debate impossible to follow (v 24).
- Paul declares both his sanity and that what he is talking about is “true and reasonable” (v 25).
- Paul turns the conversation to Agrippa, appealing to his belief in the prophets.
- Agrippa resists Paul’s appeal with a question, “Do you think that you can persuade me to be a Christian in so short a time?”
  - We do not know the tone of Agrippa’s question.
  - The word Christian had a negative connotation at that time.
  - Agrippa would likely not want to be associated with the group.
- Paul expresses his desire for everyone to become a Christian (v 29).
- Agrippa agreed with Festus that Paul had done nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.
- Agrippa argues that Paul could have been released had he not appealed to Caesar (v 32).
- What they see as a foolish move on Paul’s part will help facilitate Paul’s mission to preach in Rome what he has preached in Jerusalem (see 23:11).

## Sources

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