

Woodland Baptist Church
August 14, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word
Acts 25:23-26:32 - Paul vs. Herod Agrippa

1) OPENING REMARKS

- a) Following his three epic journeys Luke describes the five trials Paul had to endure.
 - i) Jewish crowd at the northwest corner of the temple area (22:1)
 - ii) Supreme Jewish Council in Jerusalem (23:1)
 - iii) Caesarea before Felix (24:1)
 - iv) Caesarea before Festus (25:1)
 - v) Caesarea before King Herod Agrippa (26:1)
- b) **Luke 21:13-15** - 12 But before all this [the very end] they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. 13 This will be your opportunity to bear witness. 14 Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, 15 for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.

2) Transitions:

- a) **25:23-27** - Agrippa and Bernice come with Festus into the court to hear Paul's case.
- b) **26:1-3** - Agrippa tells Paul that he has freedom to speak and Paul begins to give his defense by thanking Agrippa for being there and asks for him to be patient while Paul speaks.
- c) **4-8** - Paul explained his upbringing and Jewishness.
- d) **9-11** - Paul explains his vicious persecution of Christianity.
- e) **12-18** - Paul explains his conversion on the road to Damascus
- f) **19-23** - Paul explains his obedience to the mission Christ gave him.
- g) **24-32** - Final debate between Paul, Festus and Agrippa until the proceedings are over.

3) READ ACTS 25:23-26:32

4) Verses 1 - Paul is brought to King AGRIPPA'S Court to TESTIFY

a) **23 So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish people petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But I found that he had done nothing deserving death. And as he himself appealed to the emperor, I decided to go ahead and send him. 26 But I have nothing definite to write to my lord about him. Therefore I have brought him before you all, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write. 27 For it seems to me unreasonable, in sending a prisoner, not to indicate the charges against him."**

i) What does it mean to come with great POMP? [phantasia] - spectacle or show - everyone dressed elaborately in their finest outfits, music playing as they walked to announce their entrance...etc. Almost like a parade.

(1) *Military tribunes* - legionnaires - military commanders in charge of 1,000 soldiers.

(2) *Prominent men of the city* - political men, magistrates, major business men and others in similar roles plus their spouses/concubines.

(3) *Paul came in last* - probably not dressed very well, by himself accompanied by a couple of guards, while wearing manacles and chains.

ii) The contrast between the prisoner's clothes and condition and the ostentation of those gathered to hear him must have been stark [Pillar NT].

iii) It is a grand occasion, a meeting of "royals" with the Romans. Luke 21:12 is fulfilled as is Acts 9:15 [Bock].

b) Festus states the purpose of the meeting:

i) He has been petitioned by the Jews in Jerusalem and Caesarea to kill Paul

ii) He had found that there was no evidence for the death penalty.

iii) Based on Paul's appeal, he plans to send him to Caesar ASAP

iv) He needs some form of report to send with Paul to the emperor explaining the situation, as he does not know how to describe it at this point.

v) He hopes King Agrippa, who is very knowledgeable about Jewish traditions and laws, can help him develop a credible letter to send to Emperor Nero.

- c) Tannehill observes that 'Roman officials are quite willing to recognize Paul's innocence when they can do so cheaply, that is, when it has no effect on Paul's legal status and no political consequences [Pillar NT].
- d) As noted previously, Agrippa's knowledge of Judaism and his good standing in Rome would have been helpful in compiling such a report. Festus apparently fears that, without a reasonable report on Paul, his own competence as a judge and provincial administrator will be called into question [Pillar NT]

5) **Verses 26:1-3 PAUL begins his TESTIMONY**

a) So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself."

- i) The speech before Agrippa is strikingly parallel to Paul's speech before the temple mob, as on both occasions Paul gave a testimony of his personal experience in Christ: his thoroughly Jewish upbringing (vv. 4–8; cf. 22:3), his persecution of the Christians (vv. 9–11; cf. 22:4–5), his conversion (vv. 12–15; cf. 22:6–11), and his commission from the risen Lord (vv. 16–18; cf. 22:17–21) [Polhill].

b) Paul speaks:

- i) **Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: 2 "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.**

- (1) Paul stretched out his hand - Paul uses body language in addition to words to grab the attention of the listeners. This is very common when speaking about something important. People use all type of gestures - pointing, waving, clinched fists, open palms...etc.
- (2) King Agrippa is an asset to Paul - Paul seems very encouraged that King Agrippa is there to hear his case and Paul lets us know why - "you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews."

- (a) It is noteworthy that Luke consistently referred to Agrippa throughout chaps. 25–26 as simply "Agrippa," never by his full title "Herod Agrippa." This Agrippa always appears in a favorable light, not at all like his father, the hated "Herod" of chap. 12. [Polhill]

(3) He prepares King Agrippa for a lengthy speech - "I beg you to listen to me patiently."

c) **Paul's Jewish Credentials -**

(1) Since Paul was bound to appear before Caesar, he must have shared the concern of Festus to have a proper interpretation of the case prepared and sent with him [Pillar NT]

ii) **"My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. 5 They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, 7 to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! 8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?"**

(1) Paul sets forth his life story, his resume and begins by making two points:

- (a) All his life he has been a Jew (Gal 1:13-14) and he grew up in Jerusalem as a Jew.
- (b) He was a pious Pharisee, a group known for its strictness.

(2) Now Paul speaks of the reason he is on trial, which is no reason at all:

- (a) My hope in the promise made by **God** to our fathers
 - (i) What promise? The Abrahamic promise that was fulfilled in the coming of Christ Jesus - book of Galatians explains.
- (b) The twelve tribes hope to attain - all twelve tribes of Israel
 - (i) **Jacob/Israel - Genesis 49:1** - Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphatali, Joseph, Benjamin

(c) As they worship night and day

iii) **And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! 8 Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?**

- (1) Central to the hope is that God gives life to the dead [Bock]
- (2) Here is the irony - the coming and preaching of the very resurrection hope that Jews should respond to as the goal of their worship is why they charge Paul with sedition. Sadly, they could not be more blind [Bock].

d) Paul's obsession/persecution of Christianity -

- i) **9 "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.**

- (1) Saul the Pharisee was convinced that it was his solemn duty to oppose the name and claims of Jesus of Nazareth as those of an imposter. Moreover, he had the courage of his convictions [Stott].

- (a) Locked up many in prison

- (b) He made it known he approved of putting them to death

- (c) He punished them in the synagogues...

- (i) Tried to beat them into recanting Christ, blaspheming - no evidence that he was successful.

- (ii) Viciously pursued them outside Jerusalem, regardless of where they went.

- ii) In his letter to the emperor Trajan of the early second century, the Roman governor Pliny told how it was impossible for him to force any "true" Christian to curse the name of Christ. Paul's description of his fervor as persecutor finally reached its peak: he even pursued them in the cities outside of Jerusalem (v. 11b). One immediately recalls Damascus. That city was likely the limit of his persecutions. It was also where they ended. [Polhill]

e) Paul's experience with the resurrected Christ -

- i) **12 "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I**

heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you 18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

(1) In this connection [persecuting to foreign cities], I journeyed to Damascus..

(a) **Christ confronted me** - 13 At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.

(i) **I fell to the ground and received a revelation from Christ** -

(ii) He spoke to me - 14 And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

1. “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” - The following expression (“It is hard for you to kick against the goads” ’) also occurs only here. A goad was a sharp-pointed stick used to move animals in a particular direction. The image of kicking against the goads is found elsewhere in ancient literature, and Bruce observes that it is ‘the kind of saying that might be current in any agricultural community’. Such imagery expresses not only the intense struggle Paul experienced before turning to Christ but also the overwhelming power of the Lord to draw him to himself and transform his situation. This is not a reference to Paul’s guilty conscience, but a way of speaking about the Lord ‘prodding him in another direction which he had no choice but to follow—the path of proclaiming this same Jesus he had been attacking’. Perhaps the saying was included in this particular account as a warning to Agrippa and others present. ‘Paul’s plan to exterminate the church was doomed to fail

because he was “kicking against” the irresistible purpose of God.’⁴⁰ By implication, the opposition of Jewish and Roman officials to Christianity could not ultimately succeed [Pillar NT]

(iii) I answered Him - 15 And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

(iv) He gave me a mission - 16 But rise and stand upon your feet, [Ezekiel 2:1-3] for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to **appoint you as a servant and witness** to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 **delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles**—to whom I am sending you 18 **to open their eyes**, so that they may **turn from darkness to light** and from the **power of Satan to God**, that they may receive **forgiveness of sins** and **a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.**’

1. Paul is appointed as a servant and witness of the revelation Christ gave him
2. Christ will deliver/protect you from your people and Gentiles
3. You will open their eyes...
 - a. Turn from darkness to light
 - b. Turn from Satan to God
 - c. Receive forgiveness of sins
 - d. Receive a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

ii) Of the three accounts the conversion proper is told with the least detail here. Paul’s blindness is not related, and the visit of Ananias is not mentioned. All the emphasis is on Paul’s commission from Christ, which in chap. 9 was connected with Ananias’s visit (9:15f.) and in Paul’s account before the temple mob with his vision in the temple (22:17–21). Here Paul greatly telescoped the experience, relating the commission from the risen Christ closely with the appearance on the Damascus road. In this way Paul communicated to Agrippa and the Gentile audience what was the ultimate significance of the Damascus road experience—his call to bring the light of Christ to all people. In this account the emphasis is decidedly less on Paul’s personal experience and more on his commission. [Polhill]

f) Paul’s Obedience to Christ’s Commission -

i) **19 “Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. 21 For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. 22 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”**

(1) I was not disobedient to the vision -

(2) I declared the message in Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea and to the Gentiles

(a) They should repent and turn to God

(b) Performing deed in keeping with their repentance

(3) This is why the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me

ii) **22 To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”**

(1) To this day God has helped me

(2) I am before you testifying to small and great...

(i) It was before “small and great alike.” Just as there were no geographical or racial boundaries in Paul’s ministry (v. 20), so there were no social barriers. It was the same gospel for all, and Paul bore his witness to all without discrimination, whether to the peasant farmers of Lystra or the Jewish king himself. [Polhill]

(b) About what Moses and prophets said would come to pass

(i) that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

- iii) In the summary of Paul's speech before Agrippa, the explicit texts are not cited; but one is already familiar with them from Peter's sermons at Pentecost (2:24–36) and before the temple crowd (3:17–26) and from Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:32–39). This tradition began with Jesus' instruction of the disciples in the upper room (Luke 24:44–49; cf. also 24:25–27, 32). [Polhill].
- iv) In the Old Testament it is the servant psalms which most clearly point to Christ's sufferings, and that Paul had them in mind is indicated by his speaking of the proclaiming of "light to his own people and to the Gentiles." That was the role of the servant (Isa 42:6f.; 49:6; cf. v. 18). Paul was a servant of the Servant (cf. v. 16). In fulfilling his commission to be a witness to Christ, he was enabling Christ to fulfill his role as a light to the nations. He was enabling all who responded in faith to share in the resurrection life. [Polhill]

g) Governor Festus Interrupts Paul

- i) **24 And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind." 25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. 26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner.**

(1) Festus interrupts Paul as he is speaking and accuses him of being crazy:

- (a) Festus - "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind."
 - (i) You have been consumed by your learning and you have gone nuts; in today's language we might say, "he went off the deep end."
 - (ii) **1 Corinthians 1:18 - 18 *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***
 - (iii) All your learning, all your searching of the Scriptures, has lifted you out of the real world" (author's paraphrase). It was an offhanded compliment. Festus was showing a genuine respect for Paul's learning. Still, he was showing the kind of popular prejudice often directed against scholars: "Too much learning alters the perspective, puts one out of touch with the real world. People don't rise from the dead. Any sensible Greek or Roman knows that" (cf. 1

Cor 1:18–25). Paul would not be put off by the governor’s remark. Politely, addressing the governor with full deference as “most excellent Festus,” Paul firmly asserted that he was in possession of his faculties. [Polhill]

(b) Paul - “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words. 26 For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, **for this has not been done in a corner.**

(i) The expression “not in a corner” is often found in Greek philosophical writings, particularly in contexts where philosophers are accused of withdrawing into their “ivory towers” and not confronting the larger society in the markets and streets. This meaning well fits Paul’s situation. His witness had been fully public. He had met the Athenians in the marketplace and addressed them on the Areopagus. He had stood before the magistrates of Philippi and before the proconsul Gallio in Corinth. He had preached to the crowd in the temple square and spoken before the Jewish Sanhedrin. His case had been heard by the Roman governors Felix and Festus and now by the Jewish king himself. Paul’s activity was certainly no affair done in a secluded corner but open to full public view. But more than that, his witness was worthy of the serious consideration of all the world, of Jew and Greek, of small and great. [Polhill]

h) Paul addresses King Agrippa directly -

**i) 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”
28 And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” 29 And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”**

(1) 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.”

(a) The court gasps. Has any prisoner ever before presumed to address His Royal Highness with such impertinence? Agrippa is unhorsed. Too embarrassed to give Paul a direct answer to a direct question, and

too proud to allow him to dictate the topic of their dialogue he takes evasive action with an ambiguous counter question [Stott].

(2) 28 And Agrippa said to Paul, “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?”

(a) The court gasps again. That was a clever comeback, by which the king regained the initiative. A murmur went around the audience as people discussed exactly what he meant. It was ‘variously represented as a trivial jest, a bitter sarcasm, a grave irony, a burst of anger, and an expression of sincere conviction.’ How would Paul respond? [Stott]

(3) 29 And Paul said, “Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

(a) With those words Paul lifted his hands and rattled the chains which bound him. He was sincere, the prisoner Paul. He really believed what he was talking about. He wanted everybody to be like him, including the king - everybody a Christian, but nobody a prisoner. you could not help admiring his integrity. There was also a finality about his statement, for his judges had nothing more to say. [Stott]

(4) Paul gave an object lesson in bold witness at this point. Most Christians would have trouble even witnessing to a king, but to persist when once put off is remarkable. Paul failed to be daunted for a minute by the king’s reply. He left the invitation open. Playing on Agrippa’s words, he indicated that the timing of the decision made little difference to him, whether long or short. His real prayer was that not just Agrippa but everyone in the audience room would become a Christian believer [Polhill].

i) King Agrippa’s and Festus’ Reaction

i) 30 Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them. 31 And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.”

(1) They were all agreed about that. The prisoner may have been mad, but he was certainly not a criminal. Their private verdict of ‘not guilty’ was unanimous. Agrippa then had the last word, though what he said only increased the governor’s dilemma. [Stott]

ii) **32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."**

(1) Agrippa was quite right in theory. But to acquit Paul now would be to short circuit his appeal, and so to invade the Emperor's territory. No provincial judge would dare to do that. [Stott]

6) CLOSE

a) Paul the defendant teaches us that evangelism is not about results but about faithfully delivering the message. It is like being a paperboy. The paper arrives at the front door because the witness brings it. But to enjoy the benefit of the paper, the person at home must open the door, read the news, and understand it. Paul shows us that the message can be naturally brought forth in a variety of settings and circumstances. He also demonstrates that the personal nature of that story is often the most compelling. Paul makes clear that the results are God's business; we are merely the means of delivery. [Bock]