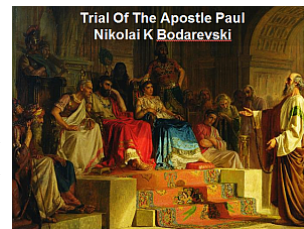


## I. Introduction

Good morning! Last week, when we finished Acts 25, the Apostle Paul was standing before King Agrippa, Bernice, and Governor Festus. All of the important men of the city were gathered after Agrippa said he wanted to hear Paul for himself. This was not a private interview; it was a public event prepared with pomp and ceremony. The stage was set for Paul to share his testimony of faith before the king, the governor, and all of the leading men of the region.



What will Paul say and how will the king respond? The answers are in Acts 26, today's Bible Passage. Let's begin by reading Acts 26:1-11.

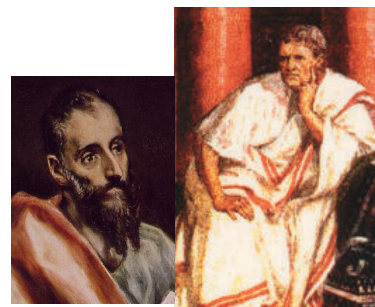
## II. Scripture Reading (Acts 26:1-11, NIV 1984)

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. 4 "The Jews 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 according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. 6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers 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. O king, it is because of this hope that the Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead? 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 saints 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. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

## III. Teaching

**Acts 26:2a "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today...."** Paul considered himself *fortunate*, or in some translations, *happy*, to stand before King Agrippa and make his defense. This makes me think that Paul had probably been praying for King Agrippa for a long time. In 1 Timothy 2:2 Paul urges us to pray for kings and all those in authority, so it seems likely that Paul was in the habit of praying for kings and governors.



Immediately after urging prayer for all, in **1 Timothy 2:3-4**, Paul wrote, **"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."** The heart of God is for all men and women to be saved, and for this reason, Paul urges us to pray for all. We are to pray for good rulers and bad rulers, for honest politicians and dishonest ones, for good people and bad people, for rich and poor, for wise and foolish. We are urged to pray for all, because God loves each and every one and He wants them all to turn from sin and be saved through faith in Jesus.

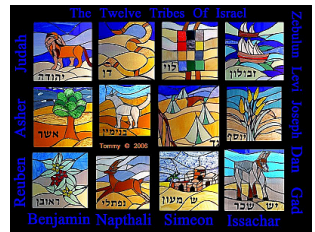
We should pray for all, and we should also be prepared to tell people about Jesus whenever we have an opportunity. **1 Peter 3:15**, says, **"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."** When Paul was summoned to stand before King Agrippa, he was ready. Let us be ready also.

Paul complimented the king on his knowledge of Jewish life and then gave a brief self-introduction, letting the king know that he had been brought up as a Pharisee and that his life story was well-known to all of the Jews. Having made an introduction, Paul went on to connect his situation directly with the prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. Paul spoke of his hope in the things God had promised to the Jewish fathers, a phrase that points back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

This would remind King Agrippa and all who knew the Scriptures of the Lord's promise to Abraham in **Genesis 12:2-3**, **"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."** As Paul continues, he will make it clear that the Lord's promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Jesus, because Jesus opened the way for every tribe, tongue, and nation, to receive forgiveness of sins and resurrection life through faith.



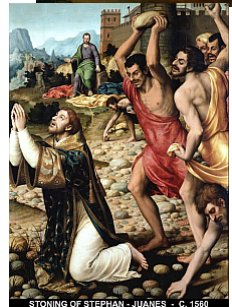
Paul continues in **Acts 26:7a**, saying, **"This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night."** Paul asserts that the same promise given to Abraham is still the foundation of hope for all of the descendants of Jacob, who was renamed Israel. By the way, for those who are interested in such things, it is interesting to note that Paul affirms that all twelve tribes of Israel still have this hope. There have been many books published about the lost tribes of Israel, but Paul clearly does not consider any of the tribes as lost from God's sight.



After reminding King Agrippa and all who were there of the great hope of the Jews in the promises of God, Paul asserts that he was accused only because he believes the promises of God. Paul then challenged his audience in **Acts 26:8**, asking, **"Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"** Paul's question puts the focus on God. If we focus on the idea of resurrection, it may seem impossible. But if we focus on God and remember that He is the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth and the Author of life, then we know that for God all things are possible.



The point Paul makes is that anyone who believes in an all-powerful God should naturally accept that God can raise the dead. But Paul will now shift the focus of the discussion to a specific resurrection, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul approaches this indirectly, speaking first of how he opposed the name of Jesus and persecuted Christians before he met the Lord. **Acts 26:9**, **"I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth."**



King Agrippa's full name was King Herod Agrippa II, and the Herod family had long opposed the name of Jesus. For this reason, Paul could have considered Agrippa an enemy. But instead, Paul chooses to establish common ground between himself and Agrippa by speaking of how he was even more opposed to the name of Jesus than Herod's family. From the time when Stephen was stoned and became the first Christian martyr, Saul, as Paul was known then, was a persecutor of Christians.

But one day, Saul the persecutor had an experience that forced him to change his thinking and led him to become Paul the apostle. Let's read Acts 26:12-23.

#### IV. Scripture Reading (Acts 26:12-23, NIV 1984)

12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 About noon, O king, 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 goats.' 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 of me and what I will show you. 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.'

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 to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But I have had God's help to this very day, and 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 Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."

## V. Teaching

Paul's testimony affirmed that Jesus had risen from the dead and explained how Paul knew this for certain. Instead of just saying that Jesus was alive, Paul told the dramatic story of how the resurrected Lord appeared to him on the Damascus Road and gave him a mission. In **Acts 26:17-18**, the Lord told Paul, **"I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them 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."**



Paul explained to King Agrippa that all that he had suffered, unjust accusations, beatings, and imprisonment, was the result of his obedience to the mission the Lord had given him. Paul preached Jesus to Jew and Gentile alike, and for this he was hated. They plotted to kill him more than once, but their plots had all failed. And so, Paul declared in **Acts 26:22-23**, **"But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen - that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."**

Once again Paul asserts that the Good News is for all, small and great alike, and that the coming of Jesus was in accord with the Old Testament Scriptures. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus fulfilled dozens of prophecies, but here are just two of the prophecies that Paul might have had in mind.

First, here is one of the prophecies about the resurrection of Jesus. **Psalm 16:9-10**, **"Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."** Jesus died and He was buried. But He was not abandoned to the grave and His body did not decay, because on the third day He rose from the dead.

Second, here is a prophecy that speaks of the death of Jesus and of how it paid the penalty for our sins. **Isaiah 53:5-6**, **"But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

We are like lost sheep, but Jesus, the Great Shepherd comes and searches for each of us to lead us home to salvation. How do you think Paul's audience responded to his words?



In 1875, the famous Russian artist, Vasily Surikov, painted the scene like this. In the painting, King Agrippa and Governor Festus look angry, but Bernice



just looks bored. Of course, we do not know for sure what their actual emotions were, but I am sure that Paul's words must have had a big impact on all who were listening. We do have some idea of their response from the last part of Acts 26. Let's read Acts 26:24-32.

#### VI. Scripture Reading (Acts 26:24-32, NIV 1984)

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." 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 God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

30 The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. 31 They left the room, and while talking with one another, they said, "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."

#### VII. Teaching

Everyone who had authority over Paul agreed that he was innocent, but each time there was some reason that Paul could not actually be set free. This time the reason is Paul's appeal to Caesar, which could not be retracted. So Paul will go to Rome in chains, but this too will be used by the Lord for the salvation of many. The important thing is not whether we are in chains or in luxury, the important thing is to trust Jesus and remain faithful in every circumstance.



King Agrippa and Governor Festus were convinced of Paul's innocence before the law. But that does not mean that they accepted everything that Paul had said. On the contrary, they rejected Paul's message, at least at that time. **Acts 26:24** gives us Festus' personal response. **"At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. 'You are out of your mind, Paul!' he shouted. 'Your great learning is driving you insane.'"** The Roman governor, Festus, probably knew little about Jesus or about the Old Testament prophecies. To him, Paul's testimony was foolishness. But Paul reminded him that the things he spoke of were not, *"done in a corner,"* and that King Agrippa was familiar with these things.

**Acts 26:28** tells us how King Agrippa responded, **"Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?'"** Some translations have Agrippa saying, *"Almost you persuade me."* The nuance seems to be that Agrippa is moved by Paul's testimony, but that he refuses to make a quick decision. Unfortunately, as far as we know, Agrippa never chose to believe in Jesus. Perhaps he was a man who was moved by passionate testimony to the truth, but who found it easy to forget the things he had heard when he returned to his daily life. Churches, sadly, are also full of people who are moved by the message, but who quickly forget the things they have learned.

#### VIII. Conclusion

Paul challenged Festus and Agrippa to consider his words. To Festus, **(Acts 26:25), "Paul replied. 'What I am saying is true and reasonable.'"** And to the king, Paul said, **(Acts 26:27), "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."**



When we share the Good News of Jesus with someone who, like Festus, does not know the Bible, we need to let them know that our faith is true and reasonable. We need to tell them about the historical evidence for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and about the prophecies Jesus fulfilled. And, we also need to let them know about how Jesus has changed our lives and the lives of many believers.

On the other hand, when we share with someone who knows the Scriptures and the basic facts about Jesus, someone like King Agrippa, we often need to challenge them through our testimony to stop procrastinating and make a decision about their own response to Jesus. Paul says that he knows that Agrippa believes the prophets and Agrippa does not deny this. Agrippa was not held back from faith by a lack of knowledge; he was simply immobilized by his love for his sinful life.

In our individual journeys of faith, at one time or another, most of us have been disinterested like Bernice, lacking information like Festus, or rebellious against the truth like Agrippa. But by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, I pray that each of us would trust in Jesus and become more and more like Paul. I pray that we would be confident in our salvation, bold in our testimony, and diligent in praying for others.

Let's pray.

IX. Prayer