

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

God Continues in Plan A Paul’s Defense of the Gospel Before Agrippa

Chapter Twenty-six

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Acts 26:1 And Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:

Stretching out his hand is a symbol of respect and salutation, not a sign for the people to be quiet to listen to him. Paul could be absolutely at ease now for he was not on trial. He could just relax and speak of what the Lord had done in his life as he gave his witness.

Acts 26:2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;

Acts 26:3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

Paul began his witness, not in a manner to flatter Agrippa, but to let him know that he knew he was talking to someone well acquainted with the ways of the Jew. He asked Agrippa to listen patiently to his witness so that he could learn of the manner of the Way. He now presents a detailed overview of his life and a defense of the Gospel.

Acts 26:4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem;

Acts 26:5 since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

Acts 26:6 "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;

Acts 26:7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

Acts 26:8 "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?

His background as a Pharisee was well known among all the Jews. He had previously also probably been a member of the Sanhedrin. As a Pharisee he did believe in the final resurrection of the dead. It is not a large leap to also consider that God could raise the dead whenever He pleased. At this time he just did not believe that Jesus had been resurrected and that He was the promised Messiah. He could not believe that Jesus was

the Messiah and have approved the stoning death of Stephen. At this point in his life he viewed The Way as a cancer on the Jewish religion and it had to be destroyed before more serious damage was done. He probably mainly wanted the followers of The Way to recant their belief rather than to be martyred but he was not successful in getting them to deny that Jesus was the Messiah and their Lord.

Acts 26:9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Acts 26:10 "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.

Acts 26:11 "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

Acts 26:12 "While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,

Acts 26:13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

Acts 26:14 "And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Acts 26:15 "And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

The expression “hard to kick against the goads” referred to an implement used by the shepherds to herd their sheep in a particular direction. Some have thought that perhaps Jesus was saying that Paul was having second thoughts about what he was doing and so it was hard to try to stop the new direction of the followers of Jesus. However there is no indication of this line of thought in Paul in any of his other writings. So Jesus was probably telling Paul that his efforts were fruitless since He was the leader of this movement and certainly Paul could not adversely affect the direction of God in the building of His church. Later Paul would also say that there was nothing that could stop him from preaching the Gospel when he became an apostle.

1Cor 9:16 “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.”

Acts 26:16 'But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

Acts 26:17 delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

Acts 26:18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

Paul receives his commission similar to how Jeremiah and Ezekiel received their commissions.

Jer 1:7 "But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak.

Jer 1:8 "Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you," declares the Lord.

Jer 1:9 Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.

Jer 1:10 "See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant."

Ezek 2:1 "Then He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!"

Ezek 2:2 And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me.

Ezek 2:3 Then He said to me, "Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against Me; they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

Ezek 2:4 "And I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children; and you shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God.'

Ezek 2:5 "As for them, whether they listen or not-- for they are a rebellious house-- they will know that a prophet has been among them.

Ezek 2:6 "And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house.

Ezek 2:7 "But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious."

Paul remembered his commission throughout his life.

Col 1:12 "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Col 1:13 For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

Col 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Gal 1:1 "Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),"

Eph 3:1 "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--

Eph 3:2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you;

Eph 3:3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

Eph 3:4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Eph 3:5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;

Eph 3:6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

Eph 3:7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power.

Eph 3:8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

Eph 3:9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things;

Eph 3:10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.”

Paul was also clear in his other writings about our war against the dominion of Satan:

Col 1:13 “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

Col 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Eph 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Isaiah 42:6 “I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations,

Isaiah 42:7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.”

Acts 26:19 "Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

Acts 26:20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

Note Paul’s emphasis on works for faith without works is dead.

James 2:17 “Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

From this point in time until his death Paul knew but one master whom he served faithfully as evidenced by his many works. God has prepared good works for all of His children:

Eph 2:10 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Acts 26:21 "For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.

"For this reason" goes back to his work in Ephesus. His proclaiming of a law-free gospel had the effect of removing the barriers between the Jews and the Gentiles since the Jews bragged that they were the ones given the law. Such a situation was totally unacceptable to the Jews for it removed their bragging rights. Although God did choose the Jews to whom to give the Law, He did not intend for them to keep it to themselves. It was to be proclaimed throughout the nations. The Jews had used their birthright to keep themselves on a platform above the Gentiles.

Acts 26:22 "And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;

Acts 26:23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles. "

Luke does not give us all of the details but Paul probably told them the Old Testament scriptures showing that Jesus was the fulfillment of prophecies pointing to the coming of the Messiah. So the Jews should rejoice upon the fulfillment of those prophecies. The light to the people was foretold by Isaiah.

Isaiah 49:6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Acts 26:24 "And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."

Acts 26:25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.

Acts 26:26 "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

Acts 26:27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

Acts 26:28 And Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."

Acts 26:29 And Paul said, "I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.""

The world today also says that we are insane. In Sweden if a physician states that he believes that Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead and lives today he would have

his medical license taken away from him and he would not be allowed to practice medicine. Here and now they say that we are ignorant and misled but what is next here? Since Agrippa knew more about the Jewish way, Paul said that he should understand the truth of his statements. Agrippa was put into a corner. He could not agree or disagree without getting into trouble. So, like many people today, he turned it aside with a smile and a funny saying such as someone I know who said "I did not leave industry to go into academics for the money. Ha Ha!"

Certainly it was Paul's hope that all would come to Christ. But only those whom God has renewed their heart can really understand and commit to a life for Christ Jesus. Because Paul's presentation was so clearly given, if someone could be argued into becoming a Christian Agrippa would have joined Paul.

Acts 26:30 "And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

Acts 26:31 and when they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

Acts 26:32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.""

At this point I have often thought why in the world did he appeal to Caesar for if he had not done so he would have been set free. But remember that Agrippa is not king of this province so his opinion would have just been that and of no ruling benefit. It would have been up to Festus to make a statement that he was innocent and remembering all that went on before this it is very unlikely that Festus would have done so. Certainly at the time when Paul appealed to Caesar there seemed no other way for him to keep from going on the road to Jerusalem that would probably have led to his death. So I have to not try to second guess Paul from 2000 years distant. Paul was a great man with a great insight into the politics of the time and he certainly was the chosen disciple of Jesus and thus led by the Holy Spirit.

The imperial policy toward Christians turned very hostile about A.D. 62, which was the year of the loss of Nero's major advisors who helped him have a "golden age" during his first five years of reign. This is also the year that he divorced Octavia and married Poppaea who was a friend of the Jews. Josephus called Poppaea a "god fearer" and she many have helped Nero turn against the Christians. Now Christianity became viewed as not just a subset of Judaism and thus subject to protection by Rome. But now they became an object of persecution by the imperial police. After the fire of A.D. 64 great actions against Christians began. But of course Paul had no way of knowing what he was getting into with his appeal to Caesar. During the destruction of Jerusalem King Agrippa let many Christians have refuge in his kingdom and I cannot help but suspect that God used Paul's defense of the Gospel before Agrippa as a way to soften his heart so that he would protect them. The destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem led to the final complete separation of the Jewish religion from Christianity and the Christians who escaped to Agrippa became the foundation of the new church in Jerusalem.

Timeline:

A.D. 60 Paul arrived in Rome and met with the Jews

A.D. 61-62 Paul preached the gospel without hindrance in his rented home.

A.D. 62 Paul is released from prison.

A.D. 63-64 Paul has further missionary work involving probably his visit to Spain.

A.D. 64-65 The great fire in Rome and major persecution of Jews and Christians.

A.D. 65 Paul's second imprisonment in Rome and his Martyrdom before Nero. Also the beginning of the Jewish revolt against Rome.

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