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Paul's Witness before Agrippa

26: 1-32

59 AD

Paul's witness before Agrippa DIG: Why might Agrippa be in a position to help Paul? From 23:6, 24:21 and 26:6-8, what is the issue Paul continually says is the real source of his conflict with the Jewish leaders? Why do his adversaries never directly bring this out (see 18:15)? How does his conviction about the resurrection differ from that of the Pharisees, who believed in a general resurrection as well? Compare 26:20 with 20:21. How could you tell someone what it means to be a believer from these two verses? Would you describe Paul's speech as a legal defense or a personal testimony? How are the two related? Do you think Paul's primary goal in this speech is to convince Agrippa of his innocence, or of the truth of the gospel? Why? From 25:19 and 26:24, how much conviction does Festus have regarding the resurrection of Yeshua? How might Paul's response in verses 25-27 surprise Festus? Up to this point the Romans considered believers and Jews as being one and the same. Within five years, Emperor Nero became aware enough of the differences to persecute believers in Rome. From this speech, what might the Romans begin to see as some of the differences?

REFLECT: How does verse 18 fit as a description of your spiritual journey? What other images describe what being saved was like for you besides, "Opening your eyes?" In verse 14, Paul adds a comment not found in his conversion story in Chapters 9 or 22. Before being saved, has God ever pointed out to you that your struggle has been against Him all along? How has he redirected you since then? Paul considered himself a servant and a witness. In what ways is God's call to you similar to His call to Paul? How is it different? What difference does it make to you that the events in Jesus' life were public knowledge - not done in a corner? How does that fact negate charges some people make today that the disciples made up all those stories about Him? How has Messiah brought light into your life? How can you pass it on to someone this week? If someone asked you to hear your best defense of the gospel and of Christ's impact on your life, what are some of the things you would point to? What are the main differences in believing something

and knowing something? How has Yeshua become a “known” reality to you?

Paul's speech before **Agrippa** is the culmination and climax of **Paul's** defense in **chapters 21-26**. It brings together, and presents in final form, all the themes of the previous five chapters. It started in **his** speech before the crowd in the Temple Compound (**to see link click Cp - Paul's Testimony on the Steps of Fort Antonia**) and was repeated in the speech here before **Agrippa**. **He** wanted everyone to know of **his** commitment to the risen **Christ**. (**26:19-23**). The theme of the resurrection, which began with the divided **Sanhedrin (23:6-10)**, and continued to remain a major issue in **Paul's** defense (**24:15** and **21, 25:19**) was now given its fullest form (**26:6-8, 23**).

The parallels to the suffering of **Messiah** which began with **Paul's** journey to **Jerusalem** (see **Ck - Paul Went on to Jerusalem Despite Warnings**) likewise reach their high point here. Like **Jesus**, **Paul** appeared before not only **the Roman governor** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lo - Jesus Before Pilate**), but **the Jewish king** as well (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lp - When Herod Saw Jesus, He Was Greatly Pleased**) and as in **Yeshua's** trial both **governor** and **king** found **him** innocent (**Acts 26:31ff; Luke 23:14ff**).

One final emphasis of this chapter should not be overlooked. The testimony before **Agrippa** was the fulfillment of **Messiah's** commission to **Paul** that **he** would be **His choice instrument to carry My name before nations and kings and the sons of Isra'el (9:15)**, and of **the Lord's** promise to **His disciples** that **the Holy Spirit will reveal to you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. It will not be you speaking, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11; Luke 21:15)**. As a result, **Paul** did not hesitate to extend an invitation - even to **the king himself**.⁵⁹³

Introduction: **Festus** turned the authority to conduct an inquiry over to **Agrippa** who **said to Paul, "It is permitted for you to speak for yourself" (26:1a)**. But here is the irony . . . there we no charges to respond to! **Festus** had already admitted that **he** found that **Paul** had done nothing criminal. So since there were no charges to respond to, all **he** could do was give **his** testimony of salvation in **Yeshua**, which **he** did admirably. **His** hearers saw **him** as a prisoner, but **he** saw **himself** as the bearer of Good News.



Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense (26:1b). This was a customary form of dignified public speaking, designed to show the earnestness of the speaker, not like earlier attempts to quiet the Jewish mob on the steps of Fort Antonia. **Concerning all I am accused of by the Judean leaders, I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa that I am about to make my defense today - since you are not only Jewish by birth, but especially knowledgeable about all Jewish customs and issues. His father, Agrippa I,** wasn't but **his** mother Mariamne was the Hasmonean princess and second of Herod the Great's ten wives. **Therefore I beg you to listen patiently to me (26:2-3).** Since **Paul** was talking to a fellow **Jew**, **he** knew **he** could dispense with the sort of detailed explanation that would be necessary to be understood by pagans. Yet **Paul** knew that **he** would be able to hold the attention of **Festus** and the rest of the assembly because when **the king** pays close attention, they would also. **Paul's** introduction, which was complimentary, yet free of fabricated flatteries sets the tone for the rest of the speech.⁵⁹⁴ As stated above, this is the most detailed of all of **Paul's defenses.**

Sha'ul the zealous Pharisee: Now all the Jewish people have known my manner of life ever since my youth, starting from the beginning in my own nation and also in Jerusalem. They have known about me for a long time - if they were willing to testify - that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee (26:4-5). **Paul** had been born a true **Jew**, raised as a true **Jew**. Trained in the strictest **Pharisaic** viewpoint of **Judaism**, and still remained a true **Jew**.

Now to the heart of the matter: **Yet now I stand here being judged for the hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It is the [Messianic] promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain** (there are no lost tribes of Isra'el), as they earnestly worship night and day. **And for this [Messianic] hope I am accused by Jewish people, O King!** This is the irony. **The Messianic hope** is a **Jewish hope**; yet on this issue **the Jews** were attacking **him!** And turning from **Agrippa** to the whole Gentile assembly, **he** said: **Why is it judged incredible by any of you that God**

raises the dead (26:6-8)? The resurrection of **Messiah** is the cornerstone of **Paul's** case for the truth of the gospel (**Acts 17:19-31**). Our faith is not a blind faith, but is grounded in fact.

Sha'ul the zealous persecutor of Yeshua Messiah: In fact, I myself thought it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Yeshua ha-Natzrati. And that is what I did in Jerusalem. Not only did I lock up many of the kedoshim in prisons by the authority I received from the ruling kohanim, but I cast (Greek: *katenemka*, meaning to bring down) my vote (*psiphon*, meaning a small smooth pebble) against them when they were being condemned to death. People in ancient times often voted by casting stones. A white stone meant "yes" and a black stone "no." As a member of the Sanhedrin, he agreed with the actions taken. I tried to cause them to blaspheme, that is, trying to make them denounce Yeshua, by punishing them often in the synagogues by death. This shows that the early Jewish believers continued to worship in the synagogues, so Sha'ul had to go from synagogue to synagogue to find them. But because they wouldn't renounce their trust in Messiah, he was furious rage against them. This became an emotional issue with Paul. And as a result, he continually persecuted them even in foreign cities (26:9-11).⁵⁹⁵ This was a heresy hunt.

Sha'ul confronted by Yeshua Messiah: This is the third time in the book of Acts that Paul recalls his Damascus road salvation experience, the others being in 9:3-19 and 22:5-16. Some details in the reports differ. In Chapter 9 the light is said to have flashed around Sha'ul and his companions; in the other renderings it surrounded him. In Chapter 9 his companions stood speechless, hearing the voice of the Speaker; and here in Chapter 26, they fell to the ground. Each telling, having its own purpose and being directed to a particular audience, emphasizes different aspects of what happened. Here is a composite consistent with all three versions. This is Luke's way of emphasizing the importance of Paul's conversion and it actually ends up being eight percent of the entire book!⁵⁹⁶

While journeying to Damascus in pursuit of Jewish believers, with the authority and commission of the ruling kohanim, at midday, O King, I saw on the road a light from heaven, the Sh'khinah glory (see the commentary on [Isaiah Ju - The Glory of the LORD Rises Upon You](#)), brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me. When we had all fallen to the ground, (the natural response of being in the presence of God) I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, **Sha'ul, Sha'ul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against goads (26:12-14)!** The rabbis taught that when God speaks in heaven, "the daughter of His voice" the

bat-kol, or an echo, is heard on earth. After the last of the prophets, it was considered that God provided the *bat-kol* to continue to give guidance to the people (Tractate Yoma 9b). Here is the smoking gun about Paul's name: When Paul recalls this conversion, he specifically notes that Yeshua was saying to him in the Hebrew language: **Sha'ul, Sha'ul, why are you persecuting Me?** Paul draws attention to how Messiah addressed him in his Hebrew name, and makes no mention that it is now abandoned.

Then I said: **Who are you, Lord?** Here Paul telescoped what Yeshua said to him directly on the Damascus road, and what Messiah told him in Damascus through Ananias. Therefore, some of the things that Paul was telling his audience didn't happen all at the same time, but was all true. **And the Lord said: I am Yeshua - whom you are persecuting. But get up, and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose - to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things you have seen as well as to the things I will yet reveal to you. I will rescue you from your own people (Romans 1:16), and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes - so they may turn from spiritual darkness to spiritual light and from the power of satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness from sins as well as a place among those who are made holy through trusting in Me (26:15-18).**

Paul the zealous preacher of Yeshua Messiah: Therefore, in light of what Messiah commanded me, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision on the Damascus road. Rather, I kept declaring - first to those in Damascus, and then, after three years, Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also the Gentiles - that they should repent and turn to God, performing good works consistent with that repentance (26:19-20). The B'rit Chadashah in general, and Paul in particular, are sometime thought to proclaim an easy and painless salvation that makes no demands on the individual. However this verse shows that Paul expected followers of Yeshua not merely to assent to a creed but to do good works because **faith without works is dead (James 2:26).**⁵⁹⁷ This is a summary of Paul's ministry to the Jews first, and then to the Gentiles (Romans 1:16). It did not always go easily. Ultimately, because of his testimony for Messiah, some Judeans seized me in the Temple and tried to put me to death (26:21).

Now Paul centered on the key to all of this, the means of enlightenment, forgiveness, and salvation, are all realized - **the death and resurrection of Messiah. Since I have had God's help, to this day I have stood here testifying to both small and great. Then he provided them with the scriptural base for their understanding of His death and resurrection. I am saying nothing but what the Prophets and Moses [the Torah]**

said was going to happen - that the Messiah was to suffer and that, being the first to rise from the dead (as seen in the Festival of First Fruits or Sfirat ha-Omer), He would proclaim light of salvation both to our Jewish people and to the Gentile nations (26:22-23).

Paul's appeal to Agrippa: With the theme of the resurrection, Paul had come to the high point of his speech. But it was too much for Festus and he could no longer contain himself. After all the talk about the Jewish Scriptures, the references to the resurrection was the last straw. He had already expressed to Agrippa his own total incomprehension concerning Paul's claim that Yeshua had risen from the dead (25:19). With a loud voice, he cried out: You're crazy, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane (26:24)! Paul had not even been talking to him, but to Agrippa, whom he had addressed no less than four times. But Festus, being so troubled by the gospel message itself, attempted to blunt its impact by discrediting the speaker. This same tactic is often used today by hearers of the gospel, both Jewish and Gentile, who would rather relate seriously to it. But Paul's calm and measured reply makes Festus sound like the crazy one!

But Paul declared: I am not insane, most noble Festus! Rather I am speaking the sober truth. For the king knows about these things, and I speak freely to him, since I am convinced that none of these things escape his notice - for this was not done in a corner (26:25-26). 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 leaders of Philippi and before the proconsul Gallio in Corinth. He had preached to the crowd in the Temple Compound and spoken before the Jewish Sanhedrin. His case had been heard by the Roman governors Felix and Festus, and by now the Jewish king himself.⁵⁹⁸

But on this particular occasion it was not the governor but the king with whom Paul was most concerned. Then Paul turned from Festus and addressed the king directly, saying: King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do believe! Agrippa was a nominal Jew, therefore he would have to admit publicly that he did believe in the prophets. And being in charge of the Temple also committed him to at least say that he believed in the prophets. As a result, if he truly believed in the prophets, he would see that Yeshua was really the Messiah (26:27). This put him in an awkward position.

Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time you are trying to persuade me to be a Christian" (Greek: *Christianos*). The word Christian referred to Gentile believers, since the Jewish believers were called Nazarenes (24:5). Agrippa's remark shows that he has become aware of Paul's evangelistic purpose. But his use of the word Christian instead of

a **Nazarene** may carry an offensive overtone. It was if **Agrippa** was saying, "You're trying to convince me to become a **Gentile** as well as a believer in **Yeshua**?" This is a response heard to this day from **Jewish** people who are presented with the gospel. No Messianic **Jew** wants an unbelieving **Jew** to stop being **Jewish** and become a **Gentile**. The believer only wants the unbelieving **Jew** to come to trust in **Yeshua**. This is what **Paul** implies in **his** response; refusing to relate to **Agrippa's** term *Christianos*, **he** instead points with earnest intensity to **himself** as an example of the kind of faith **he** covets for **Agrippa** and for all the rest of **his** audience.⁵⁹⁹

Most of us 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 **Agrippa's** reply. **He** left the invitation open. Playing on the words of **the king**, **he** indicated that the timing of the decision made little difference to **him**, whether **in a short time or a long time**. **His** real prayer was not just **Agrippa**, but everyone in the audience room would become a believer. At this point **Paul** may have several gestures, turning and directly addressing all in the room, then glancing down and perhaps lifting **his** wrists: **And Paul** said: Either way **I would pray to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today would be such as I am - a believer in Yeshua- except for these chains (26:28-29)!**

Agrippa had listened to **Paul's** witness politely, even with interest; yet **he** remained unpersuaded. **He** might have even been intellectually convinced, but **he** still refused to step over the line from knowledge to faith (see the commentary on **Hebrews [A1](#) - How Shall We Escape If We Ignore So Great a Salvation**). That was the tragedy of **the Jews** in **Acts**. **They were God's people; the prophets were their prophets; Yeshua was their Messiah; His resurrection fulfilled their hopes**. Still, in large part, **they** were not persuaded. This is the tragic story in **Acts**, and this tragedy continues until this very day.⁶⁰⁰

The verdict: **Then the king stood up**, concluding the hearing, **as well as Festus the governor, Bernice, his sister/wife, and those sitting with them**. **When those in attendance had withdrawn** from the counsel room, **they began talking among themselves**, saying: **This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains**. **Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar" (26:30-32)**. So, here we see **Roman** men failing to do the right thing because of pressure from **the Jewish leadership**. This was the case with **Pontus Pilate** with **Yeshua**, and it was the case with **Felix, Festus and Agrippa** with **Paul**.⁶⁰¹

This is now the fifth time **Paul's** innocence had been declared: first by **the Pharisees (23:9)**, then the **by the Roman commander Lysias (23:29)**, then twice by the governor

Festus (25:18ff). In a private conversation with **Festus**, **Agrippa** went even further: If **Paul** had not made **his** appeal to **Caesar**, **he could have been set free**. The reader knows what **Agrippa** did not know - how **Festus** had wanted to do **the Jews** a favor and how **Paul** had felt forced to appeal to save **his** life (25:9-11).

Then the question rises about why, with this opinion from **the Jewish king**, **Paul** was not then set free. The answer seems to be, just as **Agrippa's** remark indicates, that it would be no easy matter to stop the appeal process. For **Festus** to do so would have been an affront to the emperor and an implicit admission of **his** own ineptitude in allowing the process to be set in motion. Nevertheless, **Festus** now had what **he** had been seeking from **Agrippa**, an opinion to write up in **his** formal report to the emperor. Evidently in this instance it was the opinion that **Paul** was innocent of any breach of **Roman** law. The reminder of **Jesus'** own experience is stark. **Governor** and **king** together declared **his** innocence (**Luke 23:14ff**), and still **he** went to the cross. **Governor** and **king** declared **Paul** innocent likewise, and still **he** was on **his** way to **Rome in chains**.⁶⁰²

Good investigators ask certain questions: who? what? where? when? how? The context of **Acts 26** shows what we, as believers, already know: Who is in control and even what **God's** doing and where **He's** leading - but we'll rarely guess when and how! Let's take **the Jewish leaders** and **Paul** as examples of our inability to know these things.

First, neither Paul nor the Jewish leaders understood when. **Paul** didn't know when **ADONAI** would fulfill **His** promise. **Paul** knew who had called **him** and what **Messiah** had called **him** to do. **He** even knew where: **God** was going to send **him** to **Rome**. But **Paul** might never have guessed **he** would still be sitting in jail two years after the promise. That's why **he** probably asked **the LORD** many times - When? Time means so much to you and me. When **Ha'Shem** sheds light on ministries **He** wants us to fulfill our promises **He** plans to keep, we usually assume **He** means right now! A study of the **Jewish** patriarchs, however, proves that years may separate **YHVH's** promise and its fulfillment. Not one minute is wasted, but **God** rarely seems to fulfill **His** revealed plan when we expect.

Likewise, **the Jews** didn't know when **God** would fulfill **His** promise. **They** believed **the LORD** would send **Messiah**. That was the answer to who. **They** also knew what **He** would come to do: bring salvation. **They** were certain where: **Isra'el**, then to all parts of the world. But **they** didn't understand when. **They** were still looking for a **Messiah**, even though **He** had already come. Sometimes we can keep asking **ADONAI** is going to do something **He's** already done it!

Second, neither Paul nor the Jewish leaders understood how. **God** had assured **Paul**

that **He** was sending **him** to **Rome**, but **Paul** would never have guessed how. In **Acts 25:25** **Festus** announced: **And when he himself appealed to His Majesty the Emperor, I decided to send him (25:25)**. Actually, it was **YHVH** who had decided to send **Paul** to **Rome**, but **He** was about to use **Festus** as the vehicle. **Paul** may have wondered over and over how **he** would ever get to **Rome** while under arrest. **He** probably asked **his** team members many times to pray for **his** release so **he** could fulfill **his** calling to go to **Rome**. I wonder if **Paul** ever imagined **his** arrest would be the tool **God** would use to give **him** an all-expense paid trip to **his** destination.

God is **the Deliverer**, but we never know how **He** might deliver us. We see that **Ha'Shem** always fulfills **His** promises, just not always in the way we imagine. If **Paul** was occasionally shocked by how **the Lord** fulfilled **his** promises, **he** was not the only one. **God** had assured **the Jews** that **He** would send **the Messiah**, but **they** never would have guessed how. **They** were expecting great pomp to accompany **their** king's arrival. **They** were not expecting someone who looked so ordinary, so common. They unfortunately wanted a prestigious king more than a **servant Savior**.

Praise **ADONAI**, **He** gives us what we need, not what we want. If **Christ** came and immediately wore **His** crown, we would be hopeless lost. A crown of thorns and a splintered cross had to precede a crown of jewels and a sacred throne. If they hadn't, **Yeshua** would still have a throne, but no earthly subjects to approach it. Therefore, **God** calls us to be good investigators. We don't have to be at a loss on how to investigate such matters. When we don't know what, when, where, or how, we can trust in **Who**. We don't always find our answers, but we can always find our **Lord** when we seek **Him** with all our hearts (**Jeremiah 29:13**). And **He** will love and comfort us until the answers come.

ADONAI**, may it be said of me that **my heart is not proud, not my eyes lofty, nor do I go after things too great or too difficult for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul - like a weaned child with his mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Isra'el, put your home in ADONAI from this time forth and forever (Psalm 131:1-3). For I know that You, Lord, are the God of all flesh. Is anything too difficult for You (Jeremiah 32:27)? Of course not, I trust You, wholeheartedly.⁶⁰³