

ACTS

Chapter 26

Paul's Defense Before Agrippa

So Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” 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. 4 “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? 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.

26:1 *permission to speak.* Agrippa gave the permission because Festus allowed him to have charge of the hearing. (CSB)

made his defense – He did not really have to make a defense, but he would do so for the gospel’s sake. (PBC)

26:3 *especially...are familiar with all the customs...Jews.* Agrippa as king controlled the temple treasury and the investments of the high priest, and could appoint the high priest. He was consulted by the Romans on religious matters. This is one of the reasons Festus wanted him to assess Paul. (CSB)

Agrippa’s great-grandfather Herod the Great was a convert to Judaism (*Ant* 14:403) but ruled Judea ruthlessly. Thus Agrippa would be familiar with the differences between the various religious groups among the Jews. (TLSB)

26:5 Translated “sect” in 24:5; used here simply to designate a group of Jews. (TLSB)

I lived as a Pharisee. Cf. Gal 1:14. (CSB)

Jesus often condemned their self-righteousness (cf Mt 15:1–11; 23:26; Lk 18:10–14). (TLSB)

26:6 *my hope in the promise made by God.* Including God’s kingdom, the Messiah and the resurrection (see v. 8). (CSB)

In this context, Paul specifically means God's promise of the resurrection of the dead, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus (cf 23:6). Jesus is also the ultimate fulfillment of the hope the Jews held and the ultimate fulfillment of the promises of the OT. (TLSB)

26:8 Paul had been speaking to Agrippa but at this point must have addressed others as well, such as Festus and the commanders, who did not believe in the resurrection. Agrippa was also allied with the Sadducees, whom he appointed high priests, and was likely to reject both the resurrection of Christ and resurrection in general. (CSB)

As a whole, the Jews believed in the resurrection of the dead. Hence, it does not follow that Paul should be (unjustly) accused simply for proclaiming that Jesus' resurrection is the basis for the believer's resurrection. (TLSB)

26:10 *put to death*. Paul refers to Christians who were martyred for their faith. Stephen's death at the hands of the Jewish leaders was only the first such death recorded. (TLSB)

I cast my vote against them. Does not necessarily mean that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. He may have been appointed to a commission to carry out the prosecution (see v. 12), where his vote was given. (CSB)

Some argue Paul refers to his membership in the Council, by which he would be allowed to vote in matters of such executions. More likely, Paul acted as an agent for the Council. Even if Paul did not actually cast a vote, his approval to these executions was tantamount to voting. (TLSB)

26:11 *force them to blaspheme*. He tried to force them either to curse Jesus or to confess publicly that Jesus is the Son of God, in which case they could be condemned for blasphemy, a sufficient cause for death (see Mt 26:63–66). (CSB)

Paul attempted to get them to deny their Christian faith or to profess it in a way that Jewish officials would regard as blasphemous.

26:1–11 Paul makes his defense before King Agrippa. He describes his zealous opposition to Jesus and the Gospel message. Because we are born in sin (Ps 51:5), we all have an ungodly past, even if we have never persecuted Christians the way Paul did. Be assured that Christ forgives and delivers us, just as He did Paul. • Jesus, thank You for bearing my sin. Let me see others with the love You have for them, and empower me to share the Gospel of Your love with them. Amen. (TLSB)

Paul Tells of His Conversion

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.’ 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.” 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. 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.” 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.” 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

26:12–18 Cf 9:1–19; 22:6–16. Paul adds more details to the account: (1) everyone with Paul fell to the ground; (2) Jesus spoke in Hbr or Aram; (3) Jesus’ words, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (v 14); and (4) Jesus’ explanation of Paul’s mission (vv 16–18). Paul also omits several details: that it was Jesus of Nazareth speaking, any mention of his blindness, God restoring his sight through Ananias, and the words Ananias spoke. (TLSB)

26:12 *I was going to Damascus.* Again Paul gives an account of his conversion. (CSB)

26:14 *I heard a voice.* Since Paul is speaking to Romans and Gentiles, he adds details about the language he heard. (TLSB)

to kick against the goads. A Greek proverb for useless resistance—the ox succeeds only in hurting itself. (CSB)

Gk proverb. A goad was a pointed stick used to guide or drive certain livestock. Jesus may have meant that Paul’s opposition was futile, or that Paul needed to repent of his sin of opposing Jesus and believe in Him instead. (TLSB)

26:16 *servant.* Paul was to assist Jesus in His divine work (cf 13:5, where this word, translated “assist,” describes John Mark’s work). (TLSB)

I will appear to you. Jesus promises additional appearances to Paul (cf 18:9; 22:17–18; 23:11; 2Co 12:1–10). (TLSB)

26:17 *to whom.* Not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles (see 22:21; Gal 1:15–16). His mission was from God (Gal 1:1). (CSB)

26:18 *from darkness to light.* A figure especially characteristic of Paul (see Ro 13:12; 2Co 4:6; Eph 5:8–14; Col 1:13; 1Th 5:5). (CSB)

A picture of the sinner’s conversion from unbelief to faith, focusing on inner transformation (cf Is 42:16; Eph 5:8; Col 1:12–13; 1Pt 2:9). “The Scriptures flatly call natural man in spiritual and divine things *darkness* (Ephesians 5:8; Acts 26:18)” (FC SD II 10). (TLSB)

from the power of Satan to God. Another way of describing conversion, emphasizing under whose authority one lives. (TLSB)

forgiveness of sins. Received when someone is brought to faith (cf 2:38; 22:16). (TLSB)

are sanctified.† Justified through faith. (CSB)

Expression referring to those who have been converted to faith, i.e., Christians, emphasizing that the object of faith is Jesus. (TLSB)

26:20 *turn to God.* The essence of what Paul (and the other apostles) preached to unbelievers (cf v 18; 3:19; 20:21). (TLSB)

deeds in keeping with their repentance. When people are brought to faith, their actions demonstrate their new standing before God. John the Baptist preached a similar message. (TLSB)

26:22 *the prophets and Moses.* The OT Scriptures (Lk 24:27, 44). (CSB)

26:23 *Christ must suffer.* All of Scripture shows that the Christ would have to suffer to save the world (cf 17:3; Is 53). (TLSB)

the first to rise from the dead. The firstfruits of the dead—to die no more (see 1Co 15:20; Col 1:18). (CSB)

Paul emphasizes that Jesus’ resurrection from the dead ensures the resurrection of believers. (TLSB)

proclaim light. The light of the Gospel, the message of life and salvation, is what Jesus preached (cf 13:47; Is 49:6). (TLSB)

to the Gentiles. Cf. Isa 49:6. (CSB)

26:24 *You are out of your mind.* See Jn 10:20; 1Co 14:23. The governor felt that Paul’s education and reading of the sacred Scriptures had led him to a mania about prophecy and resurrection. (CSB)

Festus recognizes Paul is quite well educated, but he cannot comprehend what Paul is saying (cf 1Co 1:18). Most problematic for Festus would be the idea of a Savior who would die for His people and the concept of a resurrection from the dead. (TLSB)

26:26 *not done in a corner.* This gospel is based on actual events, lived out in historical times and places. The king must himself attest to the truth of what Paul has affirmed. (CSB)

Paul uses another Gk proverb to show that information about Jesus and the proclamation of Him as the Savior were common knowledge. (TLSB)

26:27 *do you believe the prophets?* King Agrippa was faced with a dilemma. If he said “Yes,” Paul would press him to recognize their fulfillment in Jesus; if he said “No,” he would be in trouble with the devout Jews, who accepted the message of the prophets as the very word of God. (CSB)

26:28 *in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?* His question is an evasion of Paul’s question and an answer to what he anticipates Paul’s next question to be. His point is that he will not be persuaded by such a brief statement. (CSB)

Paul’s response (v 29) shows that Agrippa is not yet a believer; he is being sarcastic or making a joke. (TLSB)

26:29 *these chains.* Paul was still bound as a prisoner. (CSB)

Paul wants all his hearers to become Christians. Luther: “This noble word naturally brings with it a burning hunger and unquenchable thirst that can never be filled. Even though many thousands of people believed in it, we would still desire that no person would want for it. Such thirst is ever active and knows no rest, but impels us to speak.... However, this thirst not only is not slaked by its speaking, it is also made worse with gall and vinegar, as was the thirst which Christ experienced on the cross [John 19:29]. St. Paul felt such a thirst, Acts 26 [:29], when he wished that everyone were as he himself—except for his chains.... You too have been given such a thirst for the salvation of your brethren, which is a reliable sign of a genuine faith” (AE 43:62–63). (TLSB)

26:31 Festus and Agrippa agree that Paul is not guilty of the crimes with which the Jews charged him. (TLSB)

26:32 *had not appealed to Caesar* – Once Paul had appealed to the emperor, he became inextricably enmeshed in the Roman legal system and had to see his case through at Rome. But the apostle was not in error at having made the original appeal: at the time, it most likely saved his life. (LL)

Agrippa’s comment implies that Festus should have declared Paul innocent before his appeal to Caesar. (TLSB)

26:12–32 Paul continues his defense before King Agrippa, recounting how the Lord converted him from an ardent persecutor of the faith to an avid apostle. To refuse to listen to God’s clear Word is to remain in—or turn back to—darkness. The Lord turns us from darkness to light when we hear and believe the beautiful message of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. • We give thanks to You, Jesus, for turning us from the darkness of eternal death to Your eternal light. Make us witnesses of what You have done for us and for all people. Amen. (TLSB)