

“One Witness”

Acts 25:13 – 26:32

April 10, 2016

Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus. And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. And when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. But when

Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." And Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him." And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him." And Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense: "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; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. 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; 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. And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 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. Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead? So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 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.

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. While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief

priests, 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. 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.' And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 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; delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 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.'

Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 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. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. 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; 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." 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." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 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. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." And Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." 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."

And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment." And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." ([25:13-26:32](#))

Paul's appeal of his case to the emperor (25:11) had resolved a difficult impasse for Festus. Like his predecessor, Felix, he knew Paul was innocent of the charges leveled against him by the Jewish leaders. But to release the apostle would anger those leaders and possibly provoke riots among the Jews. Seeking above all to keep peace in Judea, Felix and Festus realized they needed the Jewish leaders' cooperation.

Felix's solution was to avoid making a decision, instead allowing Paul to languish in prison for two years (24:22-27). Inheriting Paul's case from Felix, Festus attempted to compromise by placating the Jewish authorities. He proposed a hearing in Jerusalem, promising Paul he would preside over it (25:9). **Realizing that he would not get a fair hearing under any circumstances, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal his case to the emperor.**

That appeal, though resolving an impasse, presented Festus with a fresh difficulty. **As governor Festus was required to send a report along with Paul to Rome, detailing the charges against him. But in Paul's case, those charges were theological** and general in nature. Festus, only two weeks into his term as governor, was unfamiliar with the nuances of Jewish theology. Since he did not understand the charges (cf. vv. 18-19), he could not write a coherent report explaining them to the emperor. Fortunately, aid arrived in the person of Herod Agrippa.

The Consultation Regarding Paul's Testimony

Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and

paid their respects to Festus. And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. And when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." And Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he said, "you shall hear him." ([25:13-22](#))

Several days after Paul's appeal to Caesar, **King Agrippa** (Herod Agrippa II) **and** his consort **Bernice** arrived at **Caesarea**. They had come to pay **their respects** to the new governor, **Festus**.

The last in the line of Herods who figured prominently in New Testament history, Agrippa II ruled the northern part of Palestine during the Roman occupation. His father, Agrippa I, was the Herod who killed James, arrested Peter, and met an untimely end, being eaten by worms after failing to give God glory ([Acts 12:1-23](#)).

His great-uncle, Herod Antipas, figured prominently in the gospels ([Luke 3:1](#)) as the ruler who executed John the Baptist ([Mark 6:14-29](#)), **sought Jesus' life** ([Luke 13:31-33](#)), and later **tried Him** ([Luke 23:7-12](#)). His great-grandfather was Herod the Great, who ruled at the time of Jesus' birth ([Matt. 2:1-19](#); [Luke 1:5](#)) and murdered the children of Bethlehem in an effort to kill the newborn King.

Agrippa's private life was **scandalous; Bernice was not only his consort but also his sister**. (Their sister, Drusilla, was the wife of the former governor, Felix.) **Their incestuous relationship was the subject of gossip in Rome** (where Agrippa had grown up). Bernice would occasionally leave her brother and lover for another man (she had been the mistress of Emperor Vespasian and later of his son Titus), but she always returned. They are inseparable in the Acts narrative (cf. [25:13](#), [23](#); [26:30](#)); she is, as some have suggested, the symbol of Agrippa's vice.

Although he did not rule Judea, Agrippa had been granted control of the temple treasury and the right to appoint the high priest. The Romans considered him an expert on Jewish affairs, as did Paul (26:3). Agrippa tried to prevent the Jewish revolt, but when it broke out in A.D. 66, he sided with the Romans and thus became a traitor to his people.

The nature of the royal couple's state visit required their **spending many days** in Caesarea. That gave Festus opportunity to seek Agrippa's experience and expert advice. He **laid Paul's case before the king, saying** to him, "**There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix.**" Felix had left Paul in prison to placate the Jewish leaders. Festus then reviewed for Agrippa Paul's situation: **When I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. Festus's words throw new light on the Jews' request (25:3). From his perspective, they did not want a fair trial for Paul but a summary judgment of condemnation.** Steeped in the proud tradition of Roman justice, Festus properly **answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges.**

Although Paul had already faced his accusers before Felix (and was not convicted of any crime), Festus wanted to discharge his duty and hear the case himself before rendering a verdict.

Refusing to accede to the Sanhedrin's demands to have the trial in Jerusalem (so that Jews could ambush Paul on the way, [25:3](#)), Festus decided to hold the hearing in Caesarea ([25:4-5](#)). "**And so, he continued, "after they had assembled here, I made no**

delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought" ([25:6](#)). After his return to Caesarea, Festus moved swiftly to try the case. To his surprise, **"when the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting."** Festus had naturally assumed that charges brought against Paul in a Roman court would involve serious violations of Roman law. Instead, he told Agrippa, **"they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive."** Festus did not understand the issue or its implications and so was not qualified to rule on such matters, which in any case did not belong in a Roman court. **The refusal of Gallio, the Roman governor of Achaia, to hear a similar case had established a legal precedent that could have been applied** ([18:12-16](#)).

Knowing that an obviously intelligent, educated man such as Paul would claim that a **dead man** had come **alive** must have especially baffled Festus (cf. [26:24](#)). **Yet it was precisely the issue of the resurrection of Jesus Christ that most clearly set Christianity apart from Judaism and was the cornerstone of the gospel. Festus could not understand the implications of Christ's resurrection because he was ignorant of His life and ministry, and of Scripture.**

Perplexed, and being at a loss how to investigate such matters, Festus had asked Paul whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. Paul, of course, refused. He knew, even if Festus did not, that he would never get a fair trial in Jerusalem (even if he got there alive). As a Roman citizen, he had the right to be tried before the emperor's

representative in a Roman court ([25:10](#)). And since the Jews had presented to Festus no evidence of wrongdoing on Paul's part ([25:10](#)), why bother with another hearing before them?

Having no other recourse, Paul appealed his case to Caesar's court ([25:11](#)). Festus explained to Agrippa that "when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." **Festus's words put the blame for the present dilemma on Paul**; the implication is that had the apostle been willing to go to Jerusalem, the matter could have been settled. Yet it was Festus's obvious desire to do the Jews a favor ([25:9](#)) that forced Paul's appeal. **Had the governor done what justice demanded and released the obviously innocent apostle, no appeal would have been necessary.** In God's providence, Paul was kept in Roman custody as a protection against being assassinated.

The term **Emperor** is an adjective, *Sebastos*, and literally means "the revered or worshiped one." It is the Greek equivalent of the Latin title *Augustus*, which was commonly applied to the emperor. Because of Paul's appeal, Festus was duty-bound to order him **to be kept in custody until he could send him to Caesar.** **Festus needed Agrippa's help to come up with a valid charge against Paul for his report to the emperor.**

No doubt flattered by the appeal to his expertise—and curious—Agrippa said to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." **The imperfect tense of *boulomai* (I would like) suggests Agrippa had been wanting to hear Paul for a long time.**

He undoubtedly knew of Paul and looked forward to hearing the leading spokesman for Christianity in person.

"Tomorrow," Festus assured him, "you shall hear him."

The Circumstances of Paul's Testimony

And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. And Festus said, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

([25:23-27](#))

This scene is one of the most riveting in the New Testament.
On the next day, the day after Festus's consultation with Agrippa about Paul, **Agrippa came, together with Bernice, amid great pomp and entered the auditorium.** *Phantasia (pomp)* appears only here in the New Testament and denotes a grand, showy pageant.

Festus turned Paul's hearing into an occasion to honor Agrippa. Accordingly, Agrippa and Bernice were **accompanied by the commanders** (the five tribunes commanding the five cohorts stationed at Caesarea) **and the prominent men of the city.**

The spectacle must have been breathtaking. **Agrippa would have been decked out in all the trappings of royalty, including a purple robe, golden crown, rings, and perhaps a scepter.** Bernice, though not technically Agrippa's queen, would have been similarly attired. **The five tribunes would have been wearing their full-dress uniforms, the prominent men of the city wearing their finest clothes.** An immaculately dressed honor guard of soldiers undoubtedly escorted the dignitaries into the auditorium.

When everyone was seated, Festus gave the command, and Paul was brought in. The contrast could not have been more striking. Into the midst of the assembly hall, crowded with the most important people in Caesarea, walked a Jew who has been described as short, bald, and physically unimposing (cf. [2 Cor. 10:10](#)).

Murmurs of surprise must have greeted his appearance; many in the crowd probably found it hard to believe that this seemingly unimpressive man was the cause of so much controversy. But appearances can be deceiving. History has judged Paul to be one of the most noble and powerful men who ever lived—and the crowd to be a collection of pompous fools.

The stage was set, and **Festus** opened the proceedings by introducing Paul: "**King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer.**" He then honestly admitted his problem. Festus had heard the Jews' accusations against Paul and concluded that **he had committed nothing worthy of death**. Thus again, this Roman official affirmed Paul's innocence. But Paul, for the reasons noted earlier, had **appealed to the Emperor**, and Festus had **decided to send him**. The governor then got to the crux of his dilemma, admitting, "**I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord.**" Festus did not understand the religious issues at stake. He hoped that the results of this **investigation** would provide him with **something** coherent **to write** in his official report. It was obviously **absurd** (if not dangerous) to send a **prisoner** to Caesar for trial and **not indicate the charges against him**. The emperor would not look favorably on a provincial governor who so wasted his court's time.

Paul was probably not legally bound to attend the inquiry. He had already appealed his case to the emperor, thus

taking it out of Festus's jurisdiction. **But Paul would not think of passing up an opportunity to preach the gospel in such an important setting.** Here is still another example of his courageous commitment to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in every circumstance. **The vehicle for his gospel proclamation was to be the powerful, dramatic testimony...**

The Commencement of Paul's Testimony

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

"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; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. 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; 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. And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 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. Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead? So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 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.

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. While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 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. 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.' And I said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 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; delivering you from the Jewish people and from

the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 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."
([26:1-18](#))

Agrippa took charge of the proceedings, and, since there were no accusers or accusations, informed **Paul**, "**You are permitted to speak for yourself.**" Taking his cue, **Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense.** Because Agrippa was the key figure, Paul addressed his remarks to him, beginning with the courteous statement "**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.**" That was not flattery; Paul believed that Agrippa, because of his Roman orientation, was not likely to be sympathetic to the Sanhedrin. And his Jewish background made him **an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews**, so that he could grasp the issues. To Paul, then, Agrippa was both objective and knowledgeable—perhaps a prime candidate for conversion.

The primary goal of Paul's testimony was not to exonerate himself, but to convert Agrippa

(cf. 26:28).

The apostle **therefore** did not hesitate to **beg** Agrippa **to listen** to him **patiently**. Paul saw himself as an ambassador, representing Jesus Christ to the world, begging people to be reconciled to God. That was the goal of his ministry, as he wrote to the Corinthians:

Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ([2 Cor. 5:17-20](#))

Paul understood his calling from the very first. In Damascus, shortly after his conversion, Ananias told him, "For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard" ([Acts 9:15](#)). **No matter what his circumstances were, Paul always saw himself as an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Writing from prison in Rome, he could still call himself "an ambassador in chains"** ([Eph. 6:20](#)). Paul cared nothing for his own life; he cared only that Jesus Christ be exalted ([Acts 21:13](#); [Phil. 1:21](#)).

Paul's testimony contains two themes:

1. Jesus Christ's resurrection proves Him to be the Messiah, and
2. Paul's transformed life proves the reality of Christ's resurrection.

He masterfully weaves the saving gospel through this first-person account.

To show how startling and complete the divine transformation of his life was, Paul began his testimony by describing his life before his conversion (**“BC”**). He reminded Agrippa that **"all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem."** Paul was well known to the Jewish authorities; he had been educated in Jerusalem ([Acts 22:3](#)) and later he became the chief persecutor of the Christian faith (cf. [Acts 8:1-3](#); [9:1-2](#)). The Jewish leaders thus had **known about him for a long time**. Further, **if they were willing to testify** to it, they knew **that** Paul had **lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of their religion**. Josephus described the Pharisees as "a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately" ([Wars 1.5.2](#)). When Paul wanted to describe his zeal for the law, it was enough for him to say, "As to the Law, a Pharisee" ([Phil. 3:5](#)). Paul stressed that point to show how remarkable his conversion to the Christian faith was. He had been as zealous and committed as any Jew of

his day (cf. [Gal. 1:13-14](#)) and was **an unlikely prospect for such a conversion.**

As he had in his trial before Felix (cf. [24:14-15](#)), **Paul affirmed his commitment to the teaching of the Old Testament.** He declared to Agrippa, "**I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 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.**" This zealous, orthodox Jew was at that moment standing trial for believing in the hope of the promise made by God to the Jewish fathers. **That hope was the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom** (cf. [1:6](#); [3:22-24](#); [13:23-33](#); [Gal. 3:17-18](#); [4:4](#); [Titus 2:13](#); [1 Pet. 1:11-12](#)) and, specifically, the resurrection connected with His coming. It was that **promise** that was **made by God** throughout the Old Testament: Messiah would come to take away sin and establish His kingdom of righteousness. And it was that very **promise to which** the **twelve tribes** of Israel hoped **to attain as they earnestly served God night and day**. (Paul's mention of the **twelve tribes** shows that the ten northern tribes are not lost [cf. [Matt. 19:28](#); [Luke 22:30](#); [James 1:1](#); [Rev. 21:12](#)].) Yet, incredibly, **it was for proclaiming that very hope fulfilled in Jesus Christ that Paul was being accused by these apostate Jews.**

The incongruity of his being condemned for believing what the Jewish people had always believed caused Paul to exclaim, "**Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?**"

By raising Jesus from the dead, God validated the Old Testament promise of resurrection, at the same time demonstrating that Jesus was Israel's long-awaited Messiah.

But it was just this point that Agrippa, along with many other Jews, was not willing to concede. Most Jews (except for the Sadducees, [Matt. 22:23](#)) accepted the general concept of resurrection (cf. [John 5:28-29](#); [11:24](#)). **What they did not accept was that Jesus Christ rose from the dead and was their Messiah.** When confronted with the undeniable fact of His resurrection, the Jewish leaders had concocted the story that the disciples stole His body. They even bribed the Roman guards to confirm their lie. So while Agrippa no doubt accepted the general Jewish belief in resurrection, he, like the other leaders and the nation, did not accept the resurrection of Christ or His messiahship.

Paul understood that perfectly, having once believed the same way himself. He had once thought that he had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what he did in Jerusalem. Not only did he proceed to lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also, he notes, referring to incidents like the murder of Stephen ([7:58](#)), "when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them."

The Greek phrase translated I cast my vote literally reads "I threw my pebble."

The reference is to the ancient custom of recording votes—a black pebble for conviction and a white one for acquittal. Paul's reference to voting against Christians may indicate he had once been a member of the Sanhedrin.

Paul also **punished Christians often in all the synagogues**, attempting by torture **to force them to blaspheme**. If he could not kill them, he at least wanted to force them to recant. Viewing Christians as dangerous and blasphemous heretics caused Paul to be **furiously enraged at them** (cf. [9:1](#); [Gal. 1:13-14](#)). Not content to cleanse Jerusalem of Christians, he kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.

It was **while thus engaged** that the event took place which transformed his life (and marked a major turning point in history). Paul was **journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests** to arrest any Christians he might find there. Suddenly, **at midday**, he reports, he **saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter even than the brilliant Middle Eastern sun, shining all around him and those who were journeying with him**. After Paul and his fellow persecutors **had all fallen to the ground**, he **heard the voice** of the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord Jesus Christ **saying to him in the Hebrew dialect** (Aramaic), "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? (**“@”**) It is hard for you to kick against the goads." To fight God, as Saul was doing, was to

fight a losing battle. It was as stupid as an ox kicking **against the goads** (sharpened rods used to herd cattle).

Stunned, blinded, and terrified, Saul of Tarsus, the erstwhile persecutor of Christians, says he could only stammer out, "**Who art Thou, Lord?**" The reply "**I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,**" rocked him to the core of his being. The One Saul had hated and despised as a blasphemer and a false teacher threatening the sacredness of Judaism was indeed who He had claimed to be—Israel's Messiah. A murmur of surprised disbelief must have gone through the people in the crowd as Paul related Jesus' words. They believed Jesus to be dead and that His zealous disciples had stolen His body to fake His resurrection. How then could Paul claim to have spoken with Him?

Paul further explains that Jesus **appeared** to him **for a specific purpose: to appoint him a minister and a witness not only to the things which he had seen, but also to the things in which**

Jesus would **appear** to him **(“AD”)** (cf. [Acts 18:9-10](#); [22:17-21](#); [23:11](#); [2 Cor. 12:1-7](#); [Gal. 1:11-12](#)). Knowing Paul would face fierce opposition as he preached the One he had persecuted, the Lord promised to be faithful in **delivering** him **from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles**. It was they to **whom** the Lord was **sending** (*apostellō*, from which the noun *apostolos* ["apostle"] derives) Paul. **This was Paul's commissioning as an apostle.** An apostle had to have been an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ ([Acts 1:21-22](#)), and Paul was (cf. [1 Cor. 9:1](#); [15:8](#)).

As an apostle, Paul was called to proclaim the good news of salvation from judgment through the work of Jesus Christ. That life-giving message would first **open** people's **eyes**.

Jesus characterized unbelievers as blind, led by blind leaders ([Matt. 15:14](#)),

of whom [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) says, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving." The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to open the eyes of the spiritually blind, Jesus taught, by [convicting] the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. ([John 16:8-11](#))

Genuine conviction will result in transformation of life, as those convicted **turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God. The Bible teaches that unbelievers live in spiritual darkness.** Paul described them as being darkened in

their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. ([Eph. 4:18-19](#))

Scripture frequently uses light as a metaphor for salvation ([Matt. 4:16](#); [John 1:4, 5, 7-9](#); [3:19-21](#); [8:12](#); [9:5](#); [12:36, 46](#); [Acts 13:47](#); [26:23](#); [2 Cor. 4:4](#); [6:14](#); [Eph. 5:8-9, 14](#); [1 Thess. 5:5](#); [1 John 1:7](#); [2:8-10](#)). Because of that, salvation can be described as being called "out of darkness into His marvelous light" ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)), and believers can be described as sharers "in the inheritance of the saints in light," who have been "delivered... from the domain of darkness, and transferred... to the kingdom of His beloved Son" ([Col. 1:12-13](#)).

The blessed result of salvation is **forgiveness of sins** ([Matt. 1:21](#); [26:28](#); [Luke 1:77](#); [24:47](#); [Acts 3:19](#); [5:31](#); [10:43](#); [13:38](#); [1 Cor. 15:3](#); [Gal. 1:4](#); [Col. 1:14](#); [Heb. 8:12](#); [9:28](#); [10:12](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#); [3:18](#); [1 John 2:1-2](#); [3:5](#); [4:10](#); [Rev. 1:5](#)). In [Romans 4:7-8](#), Paul wrote, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." Later in that same epistle, he described the complete forgiveness believers experience by asking rhetorically,

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ([Rom. 8:33-34](#))

The apostle John said simply, "I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" ([1 John 2:12](#)).

A final gospel blessing Paul mentions is that believers receive **an inheritance among those who have been sanctified** (cf. [Acts 20:32](#); [Eph. 1:11](#), [14](#), [18](#); [Col. 1:12](#); [3:24](#); [Heb. 9:15](#)). Peter described that inheritance as one that is "imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" ([1 Pet. 1:4](#)). That inheritance is the riches of eternal heaven.

The clear teaching of Scripture is that this salvation comes to a person only by faith in Jesus Christ apart from any human works ([John 3:14-17](#); [6:69](#); [Acts 13:39](#); [15:9](#); [16:31](#); [Rom. 3:21-28](#); [4:5](#); [5:1](#); [9:30](#); [10:9-11](#); [Gal. 2:16](#); [3:11](#), [24](#); [Phil. 3:9](#)). Writing to the Ephesians, Paul stated that truth clearly and succinctly when he wrote, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast*" ([Eph. 2:8-9](#)).

Paul's dramatic testimony provides powerful evidence for Christ's resurrection, especially because he had formerly been such a hostile and violent opponent of the Christian faith.

Paul was not seeking to discover whether or not Jesus was the Messiah; he had already decided He was not. Nor had he been persuaded by talking with Christians.

Paul did not talk to Christians—he arrested them and sought their imprisonment and execution. Only the direct, miraculous, supernatural intervention of the risen, living Jesus Himself turned Paul from persecutor of Christians to apostle of Jesus Christ.

The Culmination of Paul's Testimony

Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 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. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. 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; 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." ([26:19-23](#))

The call to the ministry, like the call to salvation, is a sovereign act of God that demands and incorporates human response.

Consequently, Paul **did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision** he had received of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Obedience is the sine qua non of the Christian life. It accompanies true salvation ([Rom. 6:16](#); [1 Pet. 1:14](#)), acknowledges God's authority ([Acts 5:29](#)), is an expression of trust in God ([Heb. 11:8](#)), **and is the proof of believers' love for Him** ([John 14:15](#), [21](#)).

Paul expressed his obedience by **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.** (**Ephesians 2:10 & 1st John 3:18**) That sentence summarizes Paul's ministry, which began in **Damascus** ([Acts 9:20-22](#)), spread to **Jerusalem** ([9:26-29](#)), from which it influenced **Judea**, then finally extended even to the **Gentiles**.

Everywhere he preached, his message was the same: people should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

Metanoia (**repentance**) involves a change of mind that results in a change of behavior. Paul's use of *epistrephō* (**turn**), which frequently describes sinners turning to God ([Luke 1:16-17](#); [Acts 9:35](#); [11:21](#); [14:15](#); [15:19](#); [2 Cor. 3:16](#); [1 Thess. 1:9](#); [1 Pet. 2:25](#)), reinforces that meaning. Those who truly **repent and**

turn to God will perform deeds appropriate to repentance ([Matt. 3:8](#); [7:16](#), [20](#); [James 2:18](#)).

It was for this reason, because of Paul's faithful preaching of the gospel, that some Jews seized him in the temple and tried to put him to death ([21:27ff.](#)). That set all the events in motion that had led to this very moment of encounter with Agrippa.

They were especially irate that he proclaimed the spiritual equality of Jews and Gentiles (cf. [22:21-23](#)). But Paul **obtained help from God**, who had recently delivered him from two plots against his life ([23:12ff.](#); [25:2-5](#)) and who had helped him throughout his ministry ([2 Cor. 1:8-10](#); [2 Tim. 3:11](#); [4:17-18](#)). Because of God's help, Paul could declare to Agrippa, "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."

By placing himself in the line of Moses and the other Old Testament writers, Paul again stressed that Christianity is not heretical but the fulfillment of Scripture.

The Old Testament predicted "that the Christ was to suffer ([Ps. 22](#); [Isa. 53](#)) and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead ([Ps. 16:10](#); cf. [Acts 13:30-37](#)), He should be the first (*prōtos*; **first in preeminence, not chronology**) to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles" (cf. [Isa. 42:6](#); [49:6](#)).

QUOTE:

Paul's testimony may be summarized as follows.

He was a devout, zealous Jew—even to the extreme of persecuting Christians, whom he believed perverted Judaism. Jesus Christ, whose appearance to Paul proves His resurrection, sovereignly changed his life and called him both to salvation and to the ministry. Paul thereafter preached the gospel of grace to the Gentiles, thus placing them on a spiritual par with the Jews. Because of that, some jealous Jews tried to kill him, and that is why he stood before Agrippa that day.

The Consequences of Paul's Testimony

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." But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 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. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do." And Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian." 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." And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment." And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." ([26:24-32](#))

Festus had listened with growing bewilderment as **Paul** continued speaking in **his own defense**. Paul was obviously a learned and brilliant man, so how could he believe what he was saying was really true? Did he really think that Jesus of Nazareth, a man executed under one of Festus's predecessors as governor, Pilate, was alive and had spoken to him? Finally,

Paul's explicit declaration of Christ's resurrection was too much for Festus's rational

sensibilities. Interrupting Paul's speech, he blurted out **in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."** Every intelligent Roman knew that dead men do not come back to life and talk to people; therefore, Paul's mental musings must have caused him to lose touch with reality.

It is not surprising that Paul was accused of being insane; so was Jesus

([Mark 3:21](#); [John 8:48](#), [52](#); [10:20](#)).

The reason for the accusations against both is found in [1 Corinthians 1:18](#): *"For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

But Paul was definitely **not out of his mind**. On the contrary, he spoke **words of sober truth**, from a sound mind, with total control of his senses.

Paul took advantage of Festus's interruption to focus on Agrippa, first speaking of him in the third person, then addressing him directly. Continuing to address Festus, Paul said, **"the king (Agrippa) 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."** Paul called Agrippa as a witness to his sanity, since the Jews believed in resurrection, and the matters of which the apostle spoke (the death of Jesus, and the claim of the Christians that He rose from the dead) were common knowledge in Palestine. **By remaining silent, Agrippa confirmed the truth of what Paul said.**

Then Paul boldly confronted Agrippa directly. **"King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."** The implication was that if he did, he would have to concede that Jesus was the Messiah. **Agrippa was stuck in a quandary. Admitting his belief in the prophets was tantamount to acknowledging Jesus as Messiah. That would make him look foolish before his Roman friends and outrage his Jewish subjects. Yet a Jewish king could hardly disavow the revered prophets of his people. Consequently, he avoided the question**, mockingly replying instead to Paul, **"In a short time**

you will persuade me to become a Christian." The phrase is better translated as a question: "Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?"

Paul's response was gracious and dignified: "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."

No matter how long it took, it was Paul's heartfelt desire that all who heard him would come to know the Lord Jesus Christ.

The scene is again one of startling incongruity. A lowly prisoner in chains tells the gathered political and military leaders and other important figures that he wishes they could be like him.

Their fading, fleeting treasure was here on earth; Paul had "an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys" ([Luke 12:33](#)).

With these words by Paul, the inquiry ended. Agrippa **the king** arose, along with **the governor** and the wicked **Bernice**, and those advisers **who were sitting with them**. After they had drawn aside, they began talking to one another about Paul's case. Whatever their view of Paul's sanity, they all agreed that he was not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment, yet they lacked the courage to release him.

Agrippa summed up the view of all when he **said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."**

The question arises as to why Paul could not be released, since both Festus and Agrippa had found him innocent of wrongdoing. Noted expert on Roman law A. N. Sherwin-White explains:

When Agrippa remarked: "this man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar," this does not mean that in strict law the governor could not pronounce an acquittal after the act of appeal. It is not a question of law, but of the relations between the emperor and his subordinates, and of that element of non-constitutional power which the Romans called *auctoritas*, "prestige," on which the supremacy of the Princeps so largely depended. No sensible man with hopes of promotion would dream of short-circuiting the appeal to Caesar unless he had specific authority to do so. (*Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963])

Once again, Paul had been found innocent of any wrongdoing. He had boldly proclaimed the gospel to some of the most important people in Palestine.

Now, after two years of waiting, it was time for the Lord's promise to Paul to be fulfilled: "Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also" ([Acts 23:11](#)).

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary

Verse 13. *And after certain days, king Agrippa.* This Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, ([Acts 12:1](#)), and great grandson of Herod the Great. His mother's name was Cypros. Josephus' Jewish Wars, b. ii. chap. xi. and was strongly attached to the Romans. When the troubles commenced in Judea which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem, he did all that he could to preserve peace and order, but in vain. He afterwards joined his troops with those of the Romans, and assisted them at the destruction of Jerusalem. After the captivity of that city, he went to Rome with his sister Bernice, where he ended his days. He died at the age of seventy years, about A.D. 90. His manner of living with his sister gave occasion to reports respecting him very little to his advantage.

And Bernice. She was sister of Agrippa. She had been married to Herod, king of Chalcis, her own uncle by her father's side. After his death, she proposed to Polemon, king of Pontus and part of Cilicia, that if he would become circumcised she would marry him. He complied, but she did not continue long with him. After she left him, she returned to her brother Agrippa, with whom she lived in a manner such as to excite scandal. Josephus directly charges her with incest with her brother Agrippa. Antiq. b. xx. chap. vii. _ 3.

To salute Festus. To show him respect as the governor of Judea.

(*) "certain days" "some"

Verse 14. *Festus declared Paul's case.* He did this, probably, because Agrippa, being a Jew, would be supposed to be interested in the case. It was natural that this trial should be a topic of conversation, and perhaps Festus might be disposed to ask what was proper to be done in such cases.

Left in bonds. Greek, "a prisoner"-δεσμιος. He was left in custody, probably in the keeping of a soldier, [Acts 24:23,27](#).

(*) "bonds" "left a prisoner"

Verse 15. *About whom, etc.* [Acts 25:1-5](#).

To have judgment against him. Thome have him condemned.

(*) "when I was at Jerusalem" [Acts 25:2,3](#)

(*) "informed me" "laid an information"

Verse 16. *It is not the manner, etc.* He here states the reasons which he gave to the Jews for not delivering Paul into their hands. In [Acts 25:4,5](#), we have an account of the fact that he

would not accede to the requests of the Jews; and he here states that the reason of his refusal was, that it was contrary to the Roman law. Appian, in his Roman history, says, "It is not their custom to condemn men before they are heard." Philo Deuteronomy Preesi. Rom. says the same thing. In Tacitus (Annul. ii.) it is said, "A defendant is not to be prohibited from adducing all things, by which his innocence may be established." It was for this that the equity of the Roman jurisprudence was celebrated throughout the world. We may remark, that it is a subject of sincere gratitude to the God of our nation, that this privilege is enjoyed in the highest perfection in this land. It is the privilege of every man here to be heard; to know the charges against him; to be confronted with the witnesses; to make his defence; and to be tried by the *laws*, and not by the passions and caprices of men. In this respect our jurisprudence surpasses all that Rome ever enjoyed; and is not inferior to that of the most favoured nation of the earth.

To deliver. To give him up as a favour-*χαρίζεσθαι*-to popular clamour and caprice. Yet our Saviour, in violation of the Roman laws, was thus given up by Pilate, [Matthew 27:18-25](#).

Have the accusers face to face. That he may know who they are, and hear their accusations, and refute them. Nothing contributes more to justice than this. Tyrants suffer men to be accused without knowing who the accusers are, and without an opportunity of meeting the charges. It is one great principle of modern jurisprudence, that the accused may know the accusers,

and be permitted to confront the witnesses, and adduce all the testimony possible in his own defence.

And have license. Greek, "Place of apology," may have the liberty of defending himself.

(++) "manner" "custom"

Verse 17. *Therefore, when they were come hither*, etc. See [Acts 25:6](#).

(*) "when they" [Acts 25:6](#)

Verse 18. *None accusation*, etc. No charge as I expected of a breach of the peace; of a violation of the Roman law; of atrocious crime. It was natural that Festus should suppose that they would accuse Paul of some such offence. He had been arraigned before Felix; had been two years in custody; and the Jews were exceedingly violent against him. All this, Festus would presume, must have arisen from some flagrant and open violation of the laws.

(*) "none accusation" "No"

Verse 19. *But had certain questions.* Certain inquiries, or litigated and disputed subjects; certain points of dispute in which they differed. *ζητηματατινα.*

Of their own superstition. *δεισιδαιμονιας.*

This word properly denotes the worship or fear of demons; but was applied by the Greeks and Romans to the worship of their gods. It is the same word which is used in [Acts 17:22](#), where it is used in a good sense. [Acts 17:22](#). There are two reasons for thinking that Festus used the word here in a good sense, and not in the sense in which we use the word superstition.

(1.) It was the word by which the worship of the Greeks and Romans, and therefore of Festus himself, was denoted, and he would naturally use it in a similar sense in applying it to the Jews. He would wish simply to describe their worship in such language as he was accustomed to use when speaking of religion.

(2.) He knew that Agrippa was a Jew. Festus would not probably speak of the religion of his royal guest as *superstition*, but would speak of it with respect. He meant, therefore, to say

simply that they had certain inquiries about their own *religion*; but accused him of no crime against the Roman laws.

And of one Jesus, which was dead. Gr., "Of one dead Jesus." It is evident that Festus had no belief that Jesus had been raised up; and in this he would expect that Agrippa would concur with him. Paul had admitted that Jesus had been put to death; but he maintained that he had been raised from the dead. As Festus did not believe this, he spoke of it with the utmost contempt. "They had a dispute about one dead Jesus, whom Paul affirmed to be alive." In this manner a Roman magistrate could speak of the glorious truth of the Christian religion; and this shows the spirit with which the great mass of philosophers and statesmen regarded its doctrines.

(*) "But had certain" [Acts 18:15](#)

(*) "certain" "some"

(*) "superstition" "Religion"

[Verse 20.](#) *And because I doubted of such manner of questions.* See the margin. Because I hesitated about the right way of disposing of them; because I was ignorant of their nature and bearing, I proposed to go to Jerusalem, that the matter might be there more fully investigated. It is obvious, that if Paul was not found guilty of any violation of the laws, he should have been at once discharged. Some interpreters understand this as affirming

that he was not satisfied about the question of Paul's innocence, or certain whether he ought to be set at liberty or not.

(*) "doubted" "Or, I was doubtful how to inquire hereof"

Verse 21. *But when Paul had appealed.* [Acts 25:11](#).

To be reserved. To be kept; not to be tried at Jerusalem, but to be sent to Rome for trial.

Unto the hearing. Margin, "the judgment." That Augustus might hear and decide the cause.

Of Augustus. The reigning emperor at this time was Nero. The name Augustus-[σεβαστου](#)-properly denotes that which is venerable, or worthy of honour and reverence. It was first applied to Cæsar Octavianus, who was the Roman emperor in the time when our Saviour was born, and who is usually called Augustus Cæsar. But the title continued to be used of his successors in office, as denoting the veneration or reverence which was due to the rank of emperor.

(*) "the hearing of Augustus" "judgment"

Verse 22. *Then Agrippa said, etc.* Agrippa doubtless had heard much of the fame of Jesus, and of the new sect of Christians; and probably he was induced by mere curiosity to hear what Paul could say in explanation and defence of the doctrine of Christianity. This wish of Agrippa gave occasion to the noblest defence which was ever made before any tribunal, and to as splendid eloquence as can be found anywhere in any language. See [Acts 26](#).

Verse 23. *With great pomp.* Gr., "With much phantasy"- *φαντασίας*-, with much show, parade, and splendour, it was an occasion on which he could exhibit much of the splendour of royalty, and he chose to do it.

Into the place of hearing. The court-room, or the place where the judges heard and tried causes.

With the chief captains. Gr., The chiliarchs; the commanders of a thousand men. It means here that the military officers were assembled.

The principal men of the city. The civil officers, or the men of reputation and influence.

(*) "pomp" [Ezekiel 7:24](#) (**) "chief captains" "commanders"

(*) "Paul" [Acts 9:15](#)

Verse 24. *Have dealt with me.* Have appeared before me, desiring me to try him. They have urged me to condemn him.

Crying out, etc. [Acts 22:22](#). They had sought that he should be put to death.

(*) "all the multitude" [Acts 25:3,7](#)

(*) "with me" "Applied to me"

(*) "that he ought" [Acts 22:22](#)

Verse 25.

(*) "nothing worthy" [Acts 23:9,29](#), [26:31](#)

(*) "appealed to Augustus" [Acts 25:11,12](#)

Verse 26. *Of whom*. Respecting his character, opinions, manner of life, and respecting the charges against him.

No certain thing. Nothing definite, and well established. They had not accused Paul of any crime against the Roman laws; and Festus professes himself too ignorant of the customs of the Jews to inform the emperor distinctly of the nature of the charges, and the subject of trial.

Unto my lord. To the emperor; to Cæsar. This name *lord* the emperors Augustus and Tiberius had rejected, and would not

suffer it to be applied to them. Suetonius (Life of Augustus, v. 53) says, "The appellation of Lord he always abhorred as abominable and execrable." See also Suetonius' Life of Tiberius, [v. 27](#). The emperors that succeeded them, however, admitted the title, and suffered themselves to be called by this name. Nothing would be more satisfactory to Nero, the reigning emperor, than this title.

I might have somewhat to write. As Agrippa was a Jew, and was acquainted with the customs and doctrine of the Jews, Festus supposed that, after hearing Paul, he would be able to inform him of the exact nature of these charges, so that he could present the case intelligibly to the emperor.

(*) "lord" "Our sovereign"

[Verse 27](#). *For it seemeth to me unreasonable*, Festus felt that he was placed in an embarrassing situation, he was about to send a prisoner to Rome to be tried, who had been tried by himself, and who had appealed from his jurisdiction; and yet he was ignorant of the charges against him, and of the nature of his offences, if any had been committed. When prisoners were thus sent to Rome to be tried before the emperor, it would be proper that the charges should be all specified, and the evidence stated by which they were supported. Yet Festus could do neither; and it is not wonderful that he felt himself perplexed and embarrassed; and that he was glad to avail himself of the desire which

Agrippa had expressed to hear Paul, that he might be able to specify the charges against him.

Withal. Also; at the same time.

To signify. To specify, or make them known. In concluding this chapter, we may observe:

(1.) That in the case of Agrippa, we have an instance of the reasons which induce many men to hear the gospel, he had no belief in it; he had no concern for its truth or its promises; but he was led by *curiosity* to desire to hear the minister of the gospel of Christ. Curiosity thus draws multitudes to the sanctuary. In many instances they remain unaffected and unconcerned in regard to its provisions of mercy. They listen, and are unmoved, and die in their sins. In many instances, like Agrippa, they are almost persuaded to be Christians, [Acts 26:28](#). But, like him, they resist the appeals; and die uninterested in the plan of salvation. In some instances, they are converted; and their curiosity, like that of Zaccheus, is made the means of their embracing the Saviour, [Luke 19:1-9](#). Whatever may be the motive which induces men to desire to hear, it is the duty of the ministry cheerfully and thankfully, like Paul, to state the truth, and to defend the Christian religion.

(2.) In Festus we have a specimen of the manner in which the great men, and the rich, and the proud, usually regard Christianity. They esteem it to be a subject of inquiry in which they have no interest; a question about "one dead Jesus," whom Christians affirm to be alive. Whether he be alive or not, whether Christianity be true or false, they suppose, is an inquiry which does not pertain to them. Strange that it did not occur to Festus that if he *was* alive, his religion was true; and that it was possible that it *might* be from God. And strange that the men of this world regard the Christian religion as a subject in which *they* have no personal interest, but as one concerning which Christians *only* should inquire, and in which they alone should feel any concern.

(3.) In Paul we have the example of a man unlike both Festus and Agrippa. He felt a deep interest in the subject-a subject which pertained as much to them as to him. He was willing not only to look at it with curiosity, but to stake his life, his reputation, his all, on its truth, he was willing to defend it everywhere, and before any class of men. At the same time that he urged his rights as a Roman citizen, yet it was mainly that he might preach the gospel. At the same time that he was anxious to secure justice to himself, yet his chief anxiety was to declare the truth of God. Before any tribunal, before any class of men, in the presence of princes, nobles, and kings, of Romans and of Jews, he was ready to pour forth irresistible eloquence and argument in defence of the truth. Who would not rather be Paul than either Festus or Agrippa? Who would not rather be a *prisoner* like him, than invested with authority like Festus, or

clothed in splendour like Agrippa? And who would not rather be an honest and cordial believer of the gospel like Paul, than, like them, to be cold contemners or neglecters of the God that made them, and of the Saviour that died, and rose again?

(*) "it seemeth" [Proverbs 18:13](#) (++) "crimes" "charges"

Acts Chapter 26

Verse 1. *Then Paul stretched forth the hand.* [Acts 21:40](#). This was the usual posture of orators or public speakers. The ancient statues are commonly made in this way, with the right hand extended. The dress of the ancients favoured this. The long and loose robe, or outer garment, was fastened usually with a hook or clasp on the right shoulder, and thus left the arm at full liberty.

And answered for himself. It cannot be supposed that Paul expected that his defence would be attended with a release from confinement; for he had himself appealed to the Roman emperor, [Acts 25:11](#). This design in speaking before Agrippa was, doubtless,

(1.) to vindicate his character, and obtain Agrippa's attestation to his innocence, that thus he might allay the anger of: the Jews;

(2.) to obtain a correct representation of the case to the emperor, as Festus had desired this, in order that Agrippa might enable him to make a fair statement of the case, ([Acts 25:26,27](#);) and,

(3.) to defend his own conversion, and the truth of Christianity, and to preach the gospel in the hearing of Agrippa and the attendants, with a hope that their minds might be improved by the truth, and that they might be converted to God.

Verse 2. *I think myself happy.* I esteem it a favour and a privilege to be permitted to make my defence before one acquainted with Jewish customs and opinions. His defence, on former occasions, had been before *Roman* magistrates, who had little acquaintance with the opinions and customs of the Jews, who were not disposed to listen to the discussion of the points of difference between him and them, and who looked upon all their controversies with contempt. See [Acts 24](#), [Acts 25](#). They were, therefore, little qualified to decide a question which was closely connected with the Jewish customs and doctrines; and Paul now rejoiced to know that he was before one who, from his acquaintance with the Jewish customs and belief, would be able to appreciate his arguments and motives. Paul was not now on

his trial; but he was to defend himself, or state his cause, so that Agrippa might be able to aid Festus in transmitting a true account of the case to the Roman emperor. It was his interest and duty, therefore, to defend himself as well as possible; and to put him in possession of all the facts in the case. His defence is, consequently, made up chiefly of a most eloquent statement of the *facts* just as they had occurred.

I shall answer. I shall be permitted to make a statement, or to defend myself.

Touching, etc. Respecting.

Whereof I am accused of the Jews. By the Jews. The matters of the accusation were-his being a mover of sedition, a ringleader of the Christians, and a profaner of the temple, [Acts 24:5,6](#)

[Verse 4.](#) *My manner of life.* My opinions, principles, and conduct.

From my youth. Paul was born in Tarsus; but at an early period he had been sent to Jerusalem for the purpose of education in the school of Gamaliel, [Acts 22:3](#).

Which was at the first. Which was from the beginning; the early part of which, the time when the opinions and habits are formed.

Know all the Jews. It is not at all improbable that Paul was distinguished in the school of Gamaliel for zeal in the Jewish religion. The fact that he was early entrusted with a commission against the Christians, ([Acts 9](#)), shows that he was known. Comp. [Philippians 3:4-6](#). He might appeal to them, therefore, in regard to the early part of his life; and, doubtless, to the very men who had been his violent accusers.

(*) "manner of life" [2 Timothy 3:10](#)

[Verse 5](#). *Which knew me.* Who were well acquainted with me.

From the beginning. [ανωθεν](#). Formerly, or from the very commencement of my career. Who were perfectly apprized of my whole course.

If they would testify. If they would bear witness to what they knew.

That after the most straitest. The most rigid, the most strict; not only in regard to the written law of God, but the traditions of the elders. Paul himself elsewhere testifies, [Philippians 3:4-6](#), that he had enjoyed all the advantages of birth and training in the Jewish religion, and that he had early distinguished himself by his observance of its rites and customs.

Sect. Division, or party.

I lived a Pharisee. I lived in accordance with the rules and doctrines of the Pharisees. [Matthew 3:7](#). The reasons why Paul here refers to his early life are:

(1.) As he had lived during the early period of his life without crime; as his principles had been settled by the instruction of the most able of their teachers, it was to be presumed that his subsequent life had been of a similar character.

(2.) As he, at that period of his life, evinced the utmost zeal for the laws and customs of his country, it was to be presumed that he would not be found opposing or reviling them at any subsequent period. From the strictness and conscientiousness of his past life, he supposed that Agrippa might argue favourably respecting his subsequent conduct. A virtuous and religious

course in early life is usually a sure pledge of virtue and integrity in subsequent years.

(*) "straitest" "According to the strictest"

(*) "Pharisee" [Acts 22:3](#), [Philippians 3:5](#)

[Verse 6](#). And now I stand. I stand before the tribunal. I am arraigned.

And am judged. Am tried with reference to being judged. I am undergoing a trial on the point in which all my nation are agreed.

For the hope. On account of the hope; or because, in common with my countrymen, I had entertained this hope, and now believe in its fulfillment.

Of the promise, etc. See the references in the margin. It is not quite certain whether Paul refers here to the promise of the Messiah, or to the hope of the resurrection of the dead. When he stood before the Jewish sanhedrim, [Acts 23:6](#), he said that he was called in question on account of holding the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. But it may be observed, that in Paul's view, the two things were closely united. He hoped that the

Messiah would come, and he hoped therefore for the resurrection of the dead. He believed that he had come, and had risen; and therefore he believed that the dead would rise. He argued the one from the other. And as he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he had risen from the dead, and had thus furnished a demonstration that the dead would rise, it was evident that the subject of controversy between him and the Jews involved everything that was vital to their opinions and their hopes. See [Acts 24:8](#).

Made of God. Made by God. See the marginal references. The promises had been made to the fathers of a Messiah to come, and that embraced the promise of a future state, or of the resurrection of the dead. It will help us to understand the stress which Paul and the other apostles laid on the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, to remember that it involved the whole doctrine of the separate existence of the soul, and of a future state. The Sadducees denied all this; and when the Pharisees, the Saviour, and the apostles opposed them, they did it by showing that there would be a future state of rewards and punishments. See the argument of the Saviour with the Sadducees explained: [Luke 20:27-38](#).

Unto our fathers. Our ancestors, the patriarchs, etc.

(*) "I stand" [Acts 23:6](#)

(*) "promise made of God" [Genesis 3:15](#), [22:18](#), [49:10](#), [Deuteronomy 18:15](#), [2 Samuel 7:12](#), [Isaiah 4:2](#), [7:14](#), [9:6,7](#), [Jeremiah 23:5](#), [33:14-16](#), [Ezekiel 34:23](#), [Daniel 9:24](#), [Micah 7:20](#), [Zech 13:1,7](#), [Mal 3:1](#), [Acts 13:32](#), [Galatians 4:4](#)

[Verse 7](#). *Unto which promise*. To the fulfillment of which promise, they hope to come; i.e., they hope and believe that the promise will be fulfilled, and that they will partake of its benefits.

Our twelve tribes. This was the name by which the Jews were designated. The ancient Jewish nation had hoped to come to that promise; it had been the hope and expectation of the nation. Long before the coming of the Messiah, ten of the twelve tribes had been carried captive to Assyria, and had not returned, leaving but the two tribes of Benjamin and Judah. But the name, "the twelve tribes," to designate the Jewish people, would be still retained. Comp. [James 1:1](#). Paul here says that the hope had been that of the Jewish nation. Except the comparatively small portion of the Sadducees, the great mass of the nation had held to the doctrine of a future state. This Agrippa would well know.

Instantly. Constantly; with intensity; with an effort—[ἐν ἐκτενείᾳ](#)—with zeal. This was true; for, amidst all the sins of the nation, they observed with punctuality and zeal the outward forms of the worship of God.

Serving God. In the ordinances and observances of the temple. As a nation, they did not serve him in their hearts; but they kept up the outward form of religious worship.

Day and night. With unwearied zeal; with constancy and ardour, [Luke 2:37](#). The ordinary Jewish services and sacrifices were in the morning and evening, and might be said to be performed day and night. Some of their services, as the paschal supper, were prolonged usually till late at night. The main idea is, that they kept up the worship of God with constant and untiring zeal and devotion.

For which hope's sake. On account of my cherishing this hope in common with the great mass of my countrymen. See [Acts 23:6](#). If Paul could convince Agrippa that the main point of his offence was that which had been the common belief of his countrymen, it would show to his satisfaction that he was innocent. And on this ground Paul put his defence: that he held only that which the mass of the nation had believed, and that he maintained this in the only consistent and defensible manner—that God had, *in fact*, raised up the Messiah, and had thus given assurance that the dead should rise.

(*) "serving God" [Luke 2:37](#), [1 Thessalonians 3:10](#)

(*) "day and night" "night and day"

(*) "hope to come" "to attain in its fulfillment" (++) "hope's sake" "concerning which hope"

[Verse 8](#). *Why should it be thought*, etc. The force of this question will be better seen by an interrogation point after *why*, τι. "What! Is it to be thought a thing incredible?" etc. It intimates surprise that it should be thought incredible; or implies that no

reason could be given why such a doctrine should be unworthy of belief.

A thing incredible. A doctrine which cannot be credited or believed. Why should it be regarded as absurd?

With you. This is in the plural number; and it is evident that Paul here addressed not Agrippa alone, but those who were with him. There is no evidence that Agrippa doubted that the dead could be raised; but Festus, and those who were with him, probably did; and Paul, in the ardour of his speech, turned and addressed the entire assembly. It is very evident that we have only an outline of this argument, and there is every reason to suppose that Paul would dwell on each part of the subject at greater length than is here recorded.

That God should raise the dead. Why should it be regarded as absurd that God—who has all power, who was the Creator of all, who was the Author of the human frame—should again restore man to life, and continue his future existence. The resurrection is no more incredible than the original creation of the human body, and it is attended with no greater difficulties. And as the perfections of God will be illustrated by his raising up the dead; as the future state is necessary to the purposes of justice in vindicating the just, and punishing the unjust; and as God is a righteous moral Governor, it should not be regarded as an

absurdity that he will raise up those who have died, and bring them to judgment.

(*) "Why" [1 Corinthians 15:12,20](#)

Verse 10. *Which thing I also did*, etc. [Acts 8:3](#).

And many of the saints, etc. Many Christians, [Acts 8:3](#).

And when they were put to death. In the history of those transactions there is no account of any Christian being put to death, except Stephen, [Acts 7](#). But there is no improbability in supposing that the same thing which had happened to Stephen, had occurred in other cases. Stephen was the first martyr; and as he was a prominent man, his case is particularly recorded.

I gave my voice. Paul was not a member of the sanhedrim, and this does not mean that he *voted*, but simply that he joined in the persecution; he approved it; he assented to the putting of the saints to death. Comp. [Acts 22:20](#). The Syriac renders it, "I joined with those who condemned them." It is evident also that Paul instigated them in this persecution, and urged them on to deeds of blood and cruelty.

(*) "did in Jerusalem" [Acts 8:3](#), [Galatians 1:13](#)

(*) "authority" [Acts 9:14](#) (++) "my voice" "vote"

[Verse 11](#). *And I punished them oft*, etc. See [Acts 22:19](#).

And compelled them to blaspheme. To blaspheme the name of Jesus, by denying that he was the Messiah, and by admitting that he was an impostor. This was the object which they had in view in the persecution. It was not to make them blaspheme or reproach God, but to deny that Jesus was the Messiah, and to reproach him as a deceiver and an impostor. It is not necessarily implied in the expression, "and *compelled* them to blaspheme," that he succeeded in doing it; but that he violently endeavoured to make them apostatize from the Christian religion, and deny the Lord Jesus. It is certainly not impossible that a few might thus have been induced by the authority of the sanhedrim, and by the threats of Paul to do it; but it is certain that the great mass of Christians adhered firmly to their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

And being exceedingly mad. Nothing could more forcibly express his rage and violence against the Christians. He raged like a madman; he was so indignant that he laid aside all appearance of reason; and with the fury and violence of a maniac, he endeavoured to exterminate them from the earth. None but a madman will persecute men on account of their religious opinions; and all persecutions have been conducted like this, with the violence, and fury, and ungovernable temper of maniacs.

Unto strange cities. Unto foreign cities; cities out of Judea. The principal instance Of this was his going to Damascus; but there is no evidence that he did not intend also to visit other cities out of Judea, and bring the Christians there, if he found any, to Jerusalem.

(*) "oft in every" [Acts 22:19](#) (++) "strange" "foreign"

Verse 12. [Acts 9:5](#) (*) "went to Damascus" [Acts 9:3](#)

Verse 14. [Acts 9:5](#)

Verse 15. [Acts 9:5](#)

Verse 16. *But rise*, etc. The particulars mentioned in this verse and the two following are not recorded in the account of Paul's conversion in [Acts 9](#). But it is not improbable that many circumstances may have occurred which are not recorded. Paul dwells on them here at length, in order particularly to show his authority for doing what he had done in preaching to the Gentiles.

To make thee a minister. A minister of the gospel; a preacher of the truth.

And a witness. [Acts 22:15](#).

Which thou hast seen. On the road to Damascus; that is, of the Lord Jesus, and of the fact that he was risen from the dead.

And of those things, etc. Of those further manifestations of my person, protection, and will, which I will yet make to you. It is evident from this, that the Lord Jesus promised to manifest himself to Paul in his ministry, and to make to him still further displays of his will and glory. Comp. [Acts 22:17,18](#). This was done by his rescuing him from destruction and danger; by the intimation of his will; and by the growing and expanding view which Paul was permitted to take of the character and perfections of the Lord Jesus. In this we see that it is the duty of ministers to bear witness not only to the truth of religion in general, or of that which they can demonstrate by argument; but more especially of that which they experience in their own hearts, and which they understand by having themselves been the subjects of it. No man is qualified to enter the ministry who has not a personal and practical and saving view of the glory and perfections of the Lord Jesus, and who does not go to his work as a *witness* of those things which he has felt. And no man enters the ministry with these feelings, who has not, as Paul had, a promise that he shall see still brighter displays of the perfections of the Saviour, and be permitted to advance in the knowledge of him and of his work. The highest personal consolation in this work is the promise of their being admitted to ever-growing and expanding views of the glory of the Lord Jesus, and of experiencing his presence, guidance, and protection.

(*) "make thee" "Appoint"

(*) "minister" [Ephesians 3:7](#), [Colossians 1:23,25](#)

(*) "witness" [Acts 22:15](#)

Verse 17. *Delivering thee from the people.* From the Jewish people. This implied that he would be persecuted by them, and that the Lord Jesus would interpose to rescue him.

And from the Gentiles. This also implied that he would be persecuted and opposed by them — a prospect which was verified by the whole course of his ministry. Yet in all he experienced, according to the promise, the support and the protection of the Lord Jesus. This was expressed in a summary manner in [Luke 9:16](#).

Unto whom now I send thee. [Acts 22:21](#). As the opposition of the Jews arose mainly from the fact that he had gone among the Gentiles, it was important to bring this part of his commission into full view before Agrippa, and to show that the same Saviour who had miraculously converted him, had commanded him to go and preach to them.

(*) "unto whom" [Acts 22:21](#), [Romans 11:13](#)

Verse 18. *To open their eyes.* To enlighten or instruct them. Ignorance is represented by the eyes being closed, and the instruction of the gospel by the opening of the eyes. See [Ephesians 1:18](#).

And to turn them from darkness to light. From the darkness of heathenism and sin, to the light and purity of the gospel. Darkness is an emblem of ignorance and of sin; and the heathen nations are often represented as sitting in darkness. [Matthew 4:16](#); [John 1:4](#); [John 1:6](#).

And from the power of Satan. From the dominion of Satan. Comp. [Colossians 1:13](#), [1 Peter 2:9](#); [John 12:31](#); [John 16:11](#). Satan is thus represented as the prince of this world; the ruler of the darkness of this world; the prince of the power of the air, etc. The heathen world, lying in sin and superstition, is represented as under his control; and this passage teaches, doubtless, that the great mass of the people of this world are the subjects of the kingdom of Satan, and are led captive by him at his will.

Unto God. To the obedience of the one living and true God.

That they may receive forgiveness of sins. Through the merits of that Saviour who died; that thus the partition wall between the

Jews and the Gentiles might be broken down, and all might be admitted to the same precious privileges of the favour and mercy of God. [Acts 2:38](#).

And inheritance. An heirship, or lot, ([κληρον](#);) that they might be entitled to the privileges and favours of the children of God. [Acts 20:32](#).

Which are sanctified. Among the saints; the children of God. [Acts 20:32](#).

(*) "open their eyes" [Isaiah 35:5](#), [42:7](#), [Ephesians 1:18](#)

(*) "turn them" [Luke 1:79](#), [John 8:12](#), [2 Corinthians 4:6](#), [1 Peter 2:9](#)

(*) "power of Satan" [Colossians 1:13](#)

(*) "forgiveness of sins" [Luke 1:77](#), [Ephesians 1:7](#), [Colossians 1:14](#)

(*) "inheritance" [Ephesians 1:11](#), [Colossians 1:12](#), [1 Peter 1:4](#)

(*) "sanctified" [John 17:17](#), [Acts 20:32](#), [1 Corinthians 1:30](#), [Revelation 21:27](#)

(*) "faith" [Ephesians 2:8](#), [Hebrews 11:6](#)

Verse 19. *Whereupon.* Whence, [οθεν](#). Since the proof of his being the Messiah, and of his resurrection, and of his calling me

to this work, was so clear and plain, I deemed it my duty to engage without delay in the work.

I was not disobedient. I was not incredulous or unbelieving; I yielded myself to the command, and at once obeyed. See [Acts 9:6](#); Comp. [Galatians 1:16](#).

To the heavenly vision. To the celestial appearance; or to the vision which appeared to me manifestly from heaven. I did not doubt that this splendid appearance [Acts 26:13](#) was from heaven; and I did not refuse to obey the command of Him who thus appeared to me. He knew it was the command of God his Saviour; and he gave evidence of repentance by yielding obedience to it at once.

Verse 20. See [Acts 9:20-23](#). The 20th verse contains a summary of his labours in obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus. His argument is, that the Lord Jesus had from heaven commanded him to do this, and that he had done no more than to obey his injunction.

(*) "shewed" "declared"

(*) "first" [Acts 9:19](#)

(*) "works" [Matthew 3:8](#)

(*) "meet for" "worthy of"

Verse 21. *Caught me in the temple.* [Acts 21:30](#).

And went about, etc. Endeavoured to put me to death.

(*) "Jews" [Acts 21:30](#) (++) "caught" "seized"

Verse 22. *Having therefore obtained help of God.* Paul had seen and felt his danger. He had known the determined malice of the Jews, and their efforts to take his life. He had been rescued by Lysias, and had made every effort to avoid the danger, and to save his life; and at the end of all, he traced his safety entirely to the help of God. It was not by any power of his own that he had been preserved; but it was because God had interposed and rescued him. Those who have been delivered from danger, if they have just views, will delight to trace it all to God. They will regard his hand; and will feel that whatever wisdom they may have had, or whatever may have been the kindness of their friends to aid them, yet that *all this also* is to be traced to the superintending providence of God.

Witnessing. Bearing testimony to what he had seen, according to the command of Christ, [Acts 26:16](#).

To small. To those in humble life; to the poor, the ignorant, and the obscure. Like his Master, he did not despise them, but regarded it as his duty and privilege to preach the gospel to the poor.

And great. The rich and noble; to kings, and princes, and governors. He had thus stood on Mars' Hill at Athens; he had borne testimony before the wise men of Greece; he had declared the same gospel before Felix, Festus, and now before Agrippa. He offered salvation to all. He passed by none because they were poor; and he was not deterred by the fear of the rich and the great from making known their sins, and calling them to repentance. What an admirable illustration of the proper duties of a minister of the gospel!

Saying none other things, etc. Delivering no new doctrine; but maintaining only that the prophecies had been fulfilled. As he had done this only, there was no reason for the opposition and persecution of the Jews.

Should come. Should come to pass; or, should take place. Paul here evidently means to say, that the doctrine of the atonement, and of the resurrection of Christ, is taught in the Old Testament.

- (*) "witnessing" "testifying"
- (*) "the prophets" [Luke 24:27,46](#)

[Verse 23](#). *That Christ*. That the Messiah expected by the Jews should be a suffering Messiah.

Should suffer. Should lead a painful life, and be put to death. [Acts 17:3](#). Compare [Daniel 9:27](#), [Isaiah 53](#).

And that he should be the first, etc. This declaration contains two points: (1.) That it was taught in the prophets that the Messiah should rise from the dead. On this, see the proof alleged in [Acts 2:24-32](#); [Acts 13:32-37](#).

(2.) That he should be the first that should rise. This cannot mean that the Messiah should be the first dead person who should be restored to life, for Elijah had raised the son of the Shunammite, and Jesus himself had raised Lazarus and the widow's son at Nain. It does not mean that he should be the first *in the order of time* that should rise, but *first in eminence*, the most distinguished, the chief, the head of those who should rise from the dead. [πρωτοξεξαναστασεωζνεκρων](#). In accordance with this he is called [Colossians 1:18](#) "the beginning, the first-born from the dead;" having, among all the dead who should be raised up, the rights and pre-eminence of the primogeniture, or

which pertained to the first-born. In [1 Corinthians 15:20](#), he is called "the first-fruits of them that slept." This declaration is, therefore, made of him by way of eminence:

(1.) As being chief, a prince among those raised from the dead;

(2.) as being raised by his own power, [John 10:18](#)

(3.) as, by his rising, securing a dominion over death and the grave, ([1 Corinthians 15:25,26](#);) and,

(4.) as bringing, by his rising, life and immortality to light. He rose to return to death no more. And he thus secured an ascendancy over death and the grave, and was thus, by way of eminence, *first* among those raised from the dead.

And should shew light unto the people. To the Jews. Should be their instructor and prophet. This Moses had predicted, [Deuteronomy 18:15](#).

And to the Gentiles. This had often been foretold by the prophets, and particularly by Isaiah, [Isaiah 9:1,2](#). Compare

[Matthew 4:14-16](#) [Isaiah 11:10](#), [42:1,4](#), [44:3](#), [60:3,5,11](#), [61:6](#), [62:2](#), [66:12](#).

(*) "the first" [1 Corinthians 15:23](#)

Verse 24. *Festus said with a loud voice.* Amazed at the zeal and ardour of Paul. Paul doubtless evinced deep interest in the subject, and great earnestness in the delivery of his defence.

Thou art beside thyself. Thou art deranged; thou art insane. The reasons why Festus thought Paul mad were, probably,

(1.) his great earnestness and excitement on the subject.

(2.) His laying such stress on the gospel of the despised Jesus of Nazareth, as if it were a matter of infinite moment. Festus despised it; and he regarded it as proof of derangement that so much importance was attached to it.

(3.) Festus regarded, probably, the whole story of the vision that Paul said had appeared to him, as the effect of an inflamed and excited imagination; and as the proof of delirium. This is not an uncommon charge against those who are Christians, and

especially when they evince any unusual zeal. Sinners regard them as under the influence of delirium and fanaticism; as terrified by imaginary and superstitious fears; or as misguided by fanatical leaders. Husbands often thus think their wives deranged, and parents their children, and wicked men the ministers of the gospel. The gay think it proof of derangement that others are serious, and anxious, and prayerful; the rich, that others are willing to part with their property to do good; the ambitious and worldly, that others are willing to leave their country and home, to go among the Gentiles to spend their lives in making known the unsearchable riches of Christ. The really sober and rational part of the world-they who fear God, and keep his commandments; who believe that eternity is before them, and who strive to live for it-are thus charged with insanity by those who are really deluded, and who are thus living lives of madness and folly. The tenants of a madhouse often think all others deranged but themselves; but there is no madness so great, no delirium so awful, as to neglect the eternal interest of the soul for the sake of the poor pleasures and honours which this life can give.

Much learning. It is probable that Festus was acquainted with the fact that Paul had been well instructed, and was a learned man. Paul had not, while before him, manifested particularly his learning. But Festus, acquainted in some way with the fact that he was well educated, supposed that his brain had been turned, and that the effect of it was seen by devotion to a fanatical form of religion. The tendency of long-continued and intense

application to produce mental derangement, is everywhere known.

Doth make thee mad. Impels, drives, or excites thee [περιτρεπει](#) to madness.

[2 Kings 9:11](#)

[Verse 25.](#) *I am not mad.* I am not deranged. There are few more happy turns than that which Paul gives to this accusation of Festus. He might have appealed to the course of his argument; he might have dwelt on the importance of the subject, and continued to reason; but he makes an appeal at once to *Agrippa*, and brings him in for a witness that he was not deranged. This would be far more likely to make art impression on the mind of Festus, than anything that Paul could say in self-defence. The same reply, "I am not mad," can be made by all Christians to the charge of derangement which the world brings against them. They have come, like the prodigal, [Luke 15:17](#) to their right mind; and by beginning to act as if there were a God and Saviour, as if they were to die, as if there were a boundless eternity before them, they are conducting [themselves] according to the dictates of reason. And as Paul appealed to Agrippa, who was not a Christian, for the reasonableness and soberness of his own views and conduct, so may all Christians appeal even to sinners themselves, as witnesses that they are acting as immortal beings *should* act. All men *know* that if there

is an eternity, it is right to prepare for it; if there is a God, it is proper to serve him, if a Saviour died for us, we should love him; if a hell, we should avoid it; if a heaven, we should seek it. And even when they charge us with folly and derangement, we may turn at once upon *them*, and appeal to their own consciences, and ask them if all our anxieties, and prayers, and efforts, and self-denials, are not right? One of the best ways of convicting sinners, is to appeal to them just as Paul did to Agrippa. When *so* appealed to, they will usually acknowledge the force of the appeal; and will admit that all the solicitude of Christians for their salvation is according to the dictates of reason.

Most noble Festus. This was the usual title of the Roman governor. Comp. [Acts 24:3](#).

Of truth. In accordance with the predictions of Moses and the prophets; and the facts which have occurred in the death and resurrection of the Messiah. In proof of this he appeals to Agrippa, [Acts 26:26,27](#). Truth here stands opposed to delusion, imposture, and fraud.

And soberness. Soberness ([σωφροσύνης](#), *wisdom*) stands opposed here to madness, or derangement, and denotes sanity of mind. The words which I speak are those of a sane man, conscious of what he is saying, and impressed with its truth. They were the words, also, of a man who, under the charge of

derangement, evinced the most perfect self-possession and command of his feelings; and who uttered sentiments deep, impressive, and worthy of the attention of mankind.

(*) "soberness" "a sound mind"

Verse 26. *For the king.* King Agrippa.

Knoweth. He had been many years in that region, and the fame of Jesus and of Paul's conversion were probably well known to him.

These things. The things pertaining to the early persecutions of Christians; the spread of the gospel; and the remarkable conversion of Paul. Though Agrippa might not have been fully informed respecting these things, yet he had an acquaintance with Moses and the prophets; he knew the Jewish expectation respecting the Messiah; and he could not be ignorant respecting the remarkable public events in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, and of his having been put to death by order of Pontius Pilate on the cross.

I speak freely. I speak openly, boldly. I use no disguise; and I speak the more confidently before him, because, from his situation, he must be acquainted with the truth of what I say. Truth is always bold and free; and it is an evidence of honesty when a man is willing to declare everything without reserve before those who are qualified to detect him if he is an impostor. Such evidence of truth and honesty was given by Paul.

For I am persuaded. I am convinced; I doubt not that he is well acquainted with these things.

Are hidden from him. That he is unacquainted with them.

For this thing. The thing to which Paul had mainly referred in this defence, his own conversion to the Christian religion.

Was not done in a corner. Did not occur secretly and obscurely; but was public, and was of such a character as to attract attention. The conversion of a leading persecutor, such as Paul had been, and in the manner in which that conversion had taken place, could not but attract attention and remark. And although the Jews would endeavour as much as possible to conceal it, yet Paul might presume that it could not be entirely unknown to Agrippa.

Verse 27. *King Agrippa.* This bland personal address is an instance of Paul's happy manner of appeal. He does it to bring in the testimony of Agrippa to meet the charge of Festus that he was deranged.

Believest thou the prophets? The prophecies respecting the character, the sufferings, and the death of the Messiah.

I know that thou believest. Agrippa was a Jew; and, as such, he of course believed the prophets. Perhaps, too, from what Paul knew of his personal character, he might confidently affirm that he professed to be a believer. Instead, therefore, of waiting for his answer, Paul anticipates it, and says that he knows that Agrippa professes to believe all these prophecies respecting the Messiah. His design is evident. It is

(*) to meet the charge of derangement, and to bring in the testimony of Agrippa, who well understood the subject, to the importance and the truth of what he was saying.

(2.) To press on the conscience of his royal hearer the evidence of the Christian religion, and to secure if possible his conversion. "Since thou believest the prophecies, and since I have shown that they are fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, that he corresponds in person, character, and work with the prophets, it follows that his religion is true." Paul lost no opportunity of pressing the truth on every class of men. He had such a conviction of the truth of Christianity, that he was deterred by no rank, station, or office; by no fear of the rich, the great and the learned; but everywhere urged the evidence of that religion as indisputable. In this lay the secret of no small part of his success. A man who *really* believes the truth, will be ready to defend it. A man who truly loves religion, will not be ashamed of it anywhere.

Verse 28. *Then Agrippa said unto Paul.* He could not deny that he believed the prophets. He could not deny that the argument was a strong one, that they had been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. He could not deny that the evidence of the miraculous interposition of God in the conversion of Paul was overwhelming. And instead, therefore, of charging him as Festus had done with derangement, he candidly and honestly avows the impression which the proof had made on his mind.

Almost. Except a very little. **ενολιγω**. Thou hast nearly convinced me that Christianity is true, and persuaded me to embrace it. The arguments of Paul had been so rational; the appeal which he had made to his belief of the prophets had been so irresistible, that he had been nearly convinced of the truth of Christianity. We are to remember,

(1.) that Agrippa was a Jew, and that he would look on this whole subject in a different manner from the Roman Festus.

(2.) That Agrippa does not appear to have partaken of the violent passions and prejudices of the Jews who had accused Paul.

(3.) His character, as given by Josephus, is that of a mild, candid, and ingenuous man. He had no particular hostility to Christians; he knew that they were not justly charged with sedition and crime; and he saw the conclusion to which a belief of the prophets inevitably tended. Yet, as in thousands of other cases, he was not *quite* persuaded to be a Christian. What was included in the "almost"-what prevented his being *quite* persuaded-we know not. It may have been that the evidence was not so clear to his mind as he would profess to desire; or that he was not willing to give up his sins; or that he was too proud to rank himself with the followers of Jesus of Nazareth; or that, like Felix, he was willing to defer it to a more convenient season. There is every reason to believe that he was never *quite* persuaded to embrace the Lord Jesus; and that he was never nearer the kingdom of heaven than at this moment. It was the *crisis*, the turning point in Agrippa's life, and in his eternal destiny; and, like thousands of others, he neglected or refused to allow the full conviction of the truth on his mind, and died in his sins.

Thou persuadest me. Thou dost convince me of the truth of the Christian religion, and persuadest me to embrace it.

To be a Christian. On the name Christian, [Acts 11:26](#). On this deeply interesting case, we may observe,

(1.) that there are many in the same situation as Agrippa—many who are almost, but not altogether, persuaded to be Christians. They are found among

(*) those who have been religiously educated;

(*) those who are convinced by argument of the truth of Christianity;

(*) those whose consciences are awakened, and who feel their guilt, and the necessity of some better portion than this world can furnish.

(2.) Such persons are deterred from being altogether Christians by the following, among other causes:

(*) By the love of sin—the love of sin in general, or some particular sin which they are not willing to abandon.

(*) The fear of shame, persecution, or contempt, if they become Christians.

(*) By the temptations of the world—its cares, vanities, and allurements—which are often prosecuted most strongly in just this state of mind.

(*) The love of office, the pride of rank and power, as in the case of Agrippa.

(*) A disposition, like Felix, to delay to a more favourable time the work of religion, until life has wasted away, and death approaches, and it is too late; and the unhappy man dies

ALMOST a Christian.

(3.) This state of mind is one of peculiar interest, and peculiar danger. It is not one of safety; and it is not one that implies any certainty that the "almost Christian" will ever be saved. There is no reason to believe that Agrippa ever became *fully* persuaded to become a Christian. To be almost persuaded to do a thing which we ought to do, and yet not to do it, is the very position of guilt and danger. And it is no wonder that many are brought to *this* point—the turning point, the *crisis* of life—and then lose their anxiety, and die in their sins. May the God of grace keep us from resting in being almost persuaded to be Christians. And may every one who shall read this account of Agrippa be admonished by his convictions, and be alarmed by the fact that he then paused, and that his convictions there ended! And may every one resolve, by the help of God, to forsake *everything* that prevents his becoming an entire believer, and without delay embrace the Son of God as his Saviour!

Verse 29. *I would to God.* I pray to God; I earnestly desire it of God. This shows

(1.) Paul's intense desire that Agrippa, and all who heard him, might be saved.

(2.) His steady and constant belief that none but God could incline them to become altogether Christians. Hence he expressed it as the object which he earnestly sought of God, that they might be true believers. Paul knew well that there was

nothing that would overcome the reluctance of the human heart to be an entire Christian, but the grace and mercy of God. He had addressed to them the convincing arguments of religion; and he now breathed forth his earnest prayer to God that these arguments might be effectual. So prays every faithful minister of the cross.

All that hear me. Festus, and the military and civil officers who had been assembled to hear his defence, [Acts 25:23](#).

Were both almost, and altogether, etc. Paul had no higher wish for them than that they might have the faith and consolations which he had himself enjoyed. He had so firm a conviction of the truth of Christianity, and had experienced so much of its consolations and supports amidst all his persecutions and trials, that his highest desire for them was, that they might experience the same inexpressibly pure and holy consolations. He well knew that there was neither happiness nor safety in being almost a Christian; and he desired, therefore, that they would give themselves, as he had done, entirely and altogether to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Except these bonds. These chains. This is an exceedingly happy and touching appeal. Probably Paul, when he said this, lifted up his arm with the chain attached to it. His wish was, that they might be partakers of the pure joys which religion had conferred on him; that in all other respects they might partake of

the effects of the gospel, *except those chains*. Those he did not wish them to bear. The persecutions, and unjust trials, and confinements which he had been called to suffer in the cause, he did not desire them to endure. True Christians wish others to partake of the full blessings of religion. The trials which they themselves experience from without, in unjust persecutions, ridicule, and slander, they do not wish them to endure. The trials which they themselves experience from an evil heart, from corrupt passions, and from temptations, they do not wish others to experience. But even *with* these, religion confers infinitely more pure joy than the world can give; and even though others should be called to experience severe trials for their religion, still Christians wish that all should partake of the pure consolations which Christianity alone can furnish in this world and the world to come.

(*) "would to God" [1 Corinthians 7:7](#)

[Verse 31](#). *This man doeth nothing worthy of death*. This was the conclusion to which they had come, after hearing all that the Jews had to allege against him. It was the result of the whole investigation; and we have, therefore, the concurring testimony of Claudius Lysias, [Acts 23:29](#), of Felix, [Acts 24](#) of Festus, [Acts 25:26,27](#), and of Agrippa, to his innocence. More honourable and satisfactory testimony of his innocence Paul could not have desired. It was a full acquittal from all the charges against him; and though he was to be sent to Rome, yet he went there with every favourable circumstance of being acquitted there also.

Verse 32. *Then said Agrippa unto Festus, etc.* This is a full declaration of the conviction of Agrippa, that Paul was innocent. It is an instance also where boldness and fidelity will be attended with happy results. Paul had concealed nothing of the truth. He had made a bold and faithful appeal [Acts 26:27](#) to Agrippa himself, for the truth of what he was saying. By this appeal, Agrippa had not been offended. It had only served to impress him more with the innocence of Paul. It is an instance which shows us that religion may be commended to the consciences and reason of princes, and kings, and judges, so that they will see its truth. It is an instance which shows us that the most bold and faithful appeals may be made by the ministers of religion to their hearers, for the truth of what they are saying. And it is a full proof that the most faithful appeals, if respectful, may be made without offending men, and with the certainty that they will feel and admit their force. All preachers should be as faithful as Paul; and whatever may be the rank and character of their auditors, they should never doubt that they have truth and God on their side, and that their message, when most bold and faithful, will commend itself to the consciences of men.

- Barnes' Notes on the New Testament.

“One Witness”

Acts 25:13 – 26:32

April 10, 2016

INTRO: What role does repetition play in your life?

- For GOOD?
- For BAD?

What role does repetition play in the Bible?

- Creator Christ
- Creation’s Corruption
- Christ’s-coming
- Christ-crucifixion (and resurrection)
- Christ’s Church
- Christ-coming again

With that question in mind... watch this...

VIDEO: ***“Normal Church for Normal People”*** (short)

T/S: Friends, in the Bible, repetition means emphasis!

- The same is true today...
- I am repeating because God is...
- Today we will cover Acts 25-26...
- They have Paul’s 4th & 5th “witness”

A. Context: Paul's 4th & 5th defense (aka "witness")

B. Outline:

1. Ch. 25:13ff retells 1-12 to Agrippa

2. Ch. 26:1-23 = Paul's witness...

a. **B.C.** (26:9-11)

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.

b. **@**

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, ¹⁷delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to 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.'

VIDEO: *Ravi Z. - "Truth & Witness"*

c.A.D.

¹⁹"Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰but 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. ²¹For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

vv.21-23 = Proclamation, Power, Prince, & People

22To 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: 23that 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.”

3. Ch. 26:24-28 = Responses to Paul

a. Festus (you're crazy)

b. Agrippa (avoidance)

T/S: Don't ever underestimate the power of 1 witness!

- Korah led a grumbler's rebellion
- David inspired giant slayers...

*** Remember the 7 letters to the 7 churches ***

VIDEO: *“One Witness” – Mary Begley*

T/S:

**Truth in love shared thru loving truth-tellers
has a will and a want...
to change the world for Christ...
one soul at a time!**

Listen to how Paul closed out his witnessing time...

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

Paul shared his Christ-like heart & hope...

That reminded me a lot of Mary...

Amen.

Let's Pray