

Paul was not on trial here. When he had appealed to Caesar (25:11) he had guaranteed that his next trial would be before the emperor. This was just a hearing designed to acquaint Agrippa with Paul's case so that Agrippa could give Festus help in understanding it and communicating it to the emperor.¹

This testimony of Paul is not a defense of himself. It is a declaration of the gospel with the clear purpose of winning Agrippa and the others present to Christ. This is a dramatic scene, and this chapter is one of the greatest pieces of literature, either secular or inspired.²

How did Paul start his defense before Agrippa (vv. 2-3)? When given his cue by Agrippa, Paul stretched out his hand and began a stirring recital of his Christian experience. First, he expressed gratitude that he was permitted to present his case before one who, being a Jew, was familiar with the customs and questions which prevailed among the Jewish people. His introduction was not mere flattery; it was a statement of Christian courtesy and simple truth.³ He urged the king to listen patiently. He did not promise a short defense.

What do vv. 4-8 describe? Paul's early life in Judaism. And the heart of the controversy surrounding Paul's ministry and teaching. Which was the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel, namely, salvation through a Messiah whom God would both anoint and resurrect from the dead which is exactly what the Hebrew prophets had predicted. Paul's conclusions concerning that Savior were the basis for the Jews' antagonism against him. Paul said that it was because of his Jewish heritage, not in spite of it, that he believed and preached what he did.⁴

What was Paul's message (vv. 4-5)? As to his early life, Paul was an exemplary Jew/Pharisee.

What was Paul's message (vv. 6-7)? He was on trial for no greater crime than the fact that he had clung to the hope of the promise made by God to the Jewish fathers in the Old Testament.⁵ **What was that promise?** Both the promise of a Messiah and the promise of resurrection to eternal life

What was Paul's message (v. 8)? He believed that God would fulfill His promise to the fathers by raising them from the dead. What was so incredible about this?.... Paul asked Agrippa and all those who were with him.⁶

What do vv. 9-11 describe? Paul's zeal in opposing Christianity. Paul told of the brutal crusade he waged against the followers of Jesus of Nazareth. On the authority of the chief priests, he put many of the Christians in prison. When they stood trial before the Sanhedrin and were sentenced to die, he cast his vote against them without fail. Paul's hate campaign against the disciples of Jesus had even extended beyond Jerusalem to include foreign cities.

What do vv. 12-18 describe? Paul's conversion and his commission. Paul was on an official trip to Damascus to arrest the Christians and bring them back to Jerusalem for punishment. Then around noon, he was overcome by a light from heaven brighter than the midday sun. After he had fallen to the ground, he heard a voice asking this probing question: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" He had encountered the Living Christ!

What did the Lord mean by "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (v. 14)? Goads were sharply pointed instruments used to force stubborn animals to move ahead. The figure of kicking against the goads was a common rural metaphor that describes opposing the inevitable (like banging your head against a wall). Such action only hurts the one doing it, not the object of his hostility.⁷

What question did Paul ask (v. 15)? Paul asked, "Who are You, Lord?"

How did the Lord respond? He replied, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." *Jesus?* How could that be? Hadn't Jesus been crucified and buried? Hadn't His disciples stolen His body and laid it away in some secret place? How then could Jesus be speaking to him now? The truth quickly dawned on Paul's soul. Jesus had indeed been buried,

but He had *risen* from the dead! He had ascended back to heaven, from where He was now speaking to Paul. In persecuting the Christians, Paul had been persecuting their Master, the Messiah of Israel, the very Son of God.⁸

What was Paul's commission (vv. 17-18)? To carry the Gospel message to the Gentiles. to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Through faith in the Lord Jesus, they would receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith.⁹

What do vv. 19-23 describe? Paul's ministry after his conversion. Paul explains to Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. Both in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout Judea, and then to the Gentiles, he preached to men that they should repent and turn to God, doing works that proved the reality of their repentance. He continued to testify to all, both small and great, preaching the message which the prophets and Moses prophesied in the Old Testament that the Messiah would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and that He would proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

How did Festus respond to Paul's arguments (vv. 24-26)? Being a Gentile, Festus had probably failed to track the logic of Paul's argument. He accused Paul of being crazy as the result of his much learning. Without losing his cool, Paul calmly denied the charge and stated that his words were both true and reasonable. He then stated with certainty that King Agrippa knew the truth of what he had been saying. Paul's life and testimony had not been a secret. The Jews knew all about it, and doubtless the reports had reached Agrippa.

How did Paul address King Agrippa (v. 27)? Paul asked him, "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?" Then Paul answered his own question, "I know that you do believe." The force of the argument is unmistakable. Paul was saying in effect, "I believe all that the prophets said in the Old Testament. You, too, believe their testimony, don't you, Agrippa? How then can the Jews accuse me of a crime deserving of death? Or how could you condemn me for believing what you yourself believe?"¹⁰

How did Agrippa respond (v. 28)? Agrippa was now on the spot. If he agreed with Paul, he would have lost face with Festus and the other Romans present. Festus had just said that he thought Paul was mad. On the other hand, if Agrippa said that he did not believe the prophets, his influence over his Jewish hearers and subjects would have been damaged greatly.¹¹ In his response, he was evading the pressure of the apostle's words with a joke.

How did Paul answer (v. 29)? Paul expressed the fervent wish that, whether with little persuasion or with much, both Agrippa and all the others present might become Christians, that they might share all Paul's privileges, that they might become like him, except for the chains.¹² And so, Paul's defense came to a conclusion.

What did the King, the governor and Bernice do next (vv. 30-32)? They left the room to confer privately. They were all forced to admit that Paul had done nothing deserving of death or chains. Perhaps with a tinge of regret, Agrippa said to Festus that if Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he might have been set free.

We wonder if the appeal to Caesar could have been cancelled. But God's sovereign plan was for Paul to go to Rome.

¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 477.

² Ibid.

³ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1659.

⁴ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 478.

⁵ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1659.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 480.

⁸ William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1660.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Acts, 2022 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), 482.

¹² William MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments*, ed. Arthur Farstad (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1661.