

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

**A0941 – October 11, 2009 – Acts 26:1-32 – Paul Before King
Agrippa II**

As we come near the end of Acts we want to remind ourselves of Christ's declaration in Acts 1:8. That declaration is a sovereign declaration of His program for church history prior to the future kingdom of Israel. The declaration centers on the word "witness." Starting with the apostles in the city of Jerusalem, the witness of Christ's resurrection will go forth into all Judea and Samaria and even to the remotest part of the earth. That is, God's sovereign declaration for where history is going, a history that men can adjust to by believing in Christ or rebel against and suffer the consequences. That may bother people but we have approached it as a fact of history that must be dealt with. First, in Acts chapters 2-7 the resurrection witness is to Jerusalem. Second, in Acts chapters 8-9 the resurrection witness is to the regions of Judea and Samaria; and third in Acts chapters 10-28 the resurrection witness is to the remotest part of the earth. It's that third aspect that continues today and it cannot be stopped. As Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." It may be attacked, it may be persecuted, it may be laughed at but it will not be overcome. Christ's plan for history will prevail. Despite even the failings of the men who carry forth the witness, despite their sin, despite their fighting, despite their doing what men do, God the Holy Spirit is able to use all that to bring Acts 1:8 to pass. And this should be a tremendous encouragement to you as a Christian because you also have sin in your life, you fail miserably and yet God the Holy Spirit is still working in your life and He guarantees that you will not be overcome. Finally, in the end you, will prevail and you will be conformed to the image of Christ.

Today again we come into a court of law. And we see Paul give an apologetic as we've seen him give in Acts 14, Acts 17, Acts 22, Acts 23, Acts 24, Acts 25

and now Acts 26. Seven chapters in the book of Acts are devoted to the apologetics of Paul. Now apologetics just means a defense. It's a courtroom word for legal defense. And Paul gave a defense and Christians are commanded to be ready to give a defense. That's 1 Pet 3:15. Sometimes Christians get it in their mind that defending Christianity is for the professionals: Ravi Zacharias or my pastor does that so I leave that to the experts and I just sit back. Scripturally, apologetics is for every Christian; actually it's a command for every Christian. And so if somebody asks you a question about the Christian faith and you sit there and do not have a clue how to answer the question or you give some anti-Scriptural antidote then you're in rebellion. We need to be getting ready every day to be able to give an answer because we don't know when we'll be called to give it. Because my heart just tells me so is not an answer. Christianity is about the God of history who has worked in history and left witness of Himself that all men must account for. And therefore, defending it must be done respecting those criteria. And since Paul is defending for the seventh time by now we ought to have certain principles under our belt about how to do it.

So let's follow in Acts 26 as he defends the faith. The chief guy he's talking to is in v 1, King Agrippa II. We met him last week in Acts 25 when he came to meet the new procurator with his sister Bernice. They were having an affair and they came into the court with great pomp to hear Paul. That's the lovely picture we were left with. The reason Festus is having Agrippa hear Paul is because Festus was playing to the Jewish lobby and he was trying to do them a favor to get his administration off on the right foot and it backfired because Paul used his legal rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. And that put Festus in a corner because Festus didn't have anything to write to Caesar about this Paul character. But here comes King Agrippa II and he is very familiar with Jewish law and Jewish customs so maybe he can help Festus come up with something to write; that's the purpose of this hearing.

King Agrippa II, as we said last week, was a descendent of Herod the Great. Herod the Great was the one in Matt 2 who killed all the little babies in an attempt to kill Jesus Christ. After him came Herod Antipas, the Fox, and he had John the Baptist's head put on a silver platter. Then came Herod Agrippa, not the one here, but the one in Acts 12. He had James the apostle executed, and in that same chapter he dies a horrible death. And now we come to his son, Herod Agrippa II. He was just 17 at the time of Acts 12 and

he started out ruling a little land around the Sea of Galilee, but over time he showed he could rule and he started expanding his empire like his great-great-granddaddy and he's come to rule over Jerusalem. He oversaw the Temple, he appointed the high priest and he was over the priestly vestments. He had intimate knowledge of the Jewish law and Jewish customs. And today he becomes the fourth generation in a line of the Herod family to hear a complete gospel presentation. Four generations of this family had ample information to believe and be saved. Now we come to Herod Agrippa II and he's the last generation of this family and we'll see his response.

So, we have here the first King that Paul will give the gospel to, King Agrippa II, and we come to v 1, Paul's defense. **Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:** ²**"In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;** the first thing we observe is that Paul enjoys a vigorous defense in a court of law. Some Christians think it's wrong to enjoy this kind of thing but Jesus warned in advance that they would be taken to court and that in that hour He would give them the words to say and here are the words he gave Paul. Therefore I think we can safely say that Paul was filled by the Spirit in this kind of situation and the modern Christian that thinks it's wrong to go to the courts and make a defense is the one that is not filled with the Spirit. We are very justified in following Paul's procedure and considering ourselves fortunate to do so.

So Paul is delighted, and v 3 describes particularly why Paul is delighted, I'm delighted **because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews;** Now this tells us why and this is a little principle that operates again and again for Christians involved in evangelism or discussion of any mature sort and that is that it's a lot easier to talk to someone who shares the same basic categories of thought. You'll find if you go out on the streets and talk to the average pagan or the average untrained Christians these days they are not in tune with the categories you're talking about and you simply can't discuss these things. If you mention the Creator-creature distinction they'll just look at you with a blank stare. And that's simply an indication of how biblically illiterate our society has become, including society behind Church doors. These things really aren't discussed and therefore we

really cannot easily communicate the content of the Scriptures. We're always getting ourselves into these discussions where we're talking right past them and Paul recognized this problem. He kept facing this problem so he says I'm delighted to give my defense before you today Agrippa, because you are an expert, you know what I'm talking about. Commander Lysias didn't know what I was talking about, poor governor Felix didn't know what I was talking about, poor Festus, he didn't know what I was talking about and still doesn't know what I'm talking about. None of these men knew what Paul was saying and why these Jews were so upset with Paul. And it's because they don't share the same basic categories of thought and anytime you live in a society that has trashed the Bible you increasingly face this difficulty. So Paul says, finally here's a guy I can talk to that shares the same basic categories of thought. And so this is quite a day.

Now in Acts 26:4-8 Paul is going to give his credentials, he's giving his background because to King Agrippa who's Paul? He doesn't know Paul. Paul has no credibility before him. And so Paul does what every man should do when he stands before a new audience and that is give your credentials. It's just a short resume so people know who you are, what your background is. One of the stupidest entries is to come into some organization and just start telling everybody what to do. You do this and you do that. And you go rearrange that department. And people say, now wait a minute, just who do you think you are bud? How do I know you know what you're doing? And all they're wanting is some credentials. People like to know who they're following so they know there's something more than a flash in the pan behind it. So very strategically Paul gives his credentials.

Acts 26:4 **“So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem; ⁵since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify,** third class condition, maybe they will testify, maybe they won't testify, but if they will they can tell you **that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.** So from a very young age, about 12-13 years old, Paul says I was in Jerusalem, the center of Jewish thought and life and I was trained in the Pharisaic branch of Rabbinic Judaism. And if you want to check me out Agrippa, there are hundreds of men that I was trained alongside and you can call them one after another and they can testify to **my manner of life.** So there's my character witness.

I've got character and there are men who can vouch for it, so you can't get me on some character flaw. I'm not some kind of a Jewish radical trying to overthrow the Roman Empire. I've got a long history in strict Pharisaic Judaism.

Acts 26:6, **“And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; ⁷the 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.** Now let's look at Paul's tactic in this statement. He's directing the statement to Agrippa. Agrippa is a local Jewish politician. So he's got to maintain a Jewish platform. And the Jewish platform was the OT. He can't risk denying the OT because if he denies the OT then he's going to face political problems with his Jewish subjects. So Paul is going to play this real cool in that he's going to borrow Agrippa's premise, which happens to be his own premise, the OT, and he's going to use that to put Agrippa in a tight situation and he's going to squeeze and squeeze Agrippa 'til by the end of it Agrippa is in a tight situation.

And in v 6 Paul says, **“And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers;”** What Paul is doing there is he is saying that God made a certain promise to the fathers of the Jewish nation. We know he's thinking of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And this big promise, which happens to be the Abrahamic Covenant, encapsulates every other promise of the OT. We have the Abrahamic Covenant and the Abrahamic Covenant promised a land, seed and worldwide blessing. So let's think, what is the **hope** of the Abrahamic **promise**? Jesus insisted in the gospels that this hope was built into the Abrahamic promise. What is it? Well, for one let's think of the land promise: it involves a certain real estate under Jewish control forever, the boundaries of which are defined in Gen 15. It was a promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Did Abraham, Isaac and Jacob ever enjoy all the real estate? And now they're all dead. So how is God going to fulfill his promise to them? Aha, so the land promise includes the hope of resurrection. And there's our hope, the hope of the promise is the hope of resurrection. And so if your premise is the OT then you have to have resurrection.

And that's why you have him conclude verse 8 with by raising the question, **“Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise**

the dead?” And obviously the Pharisees would say it's not incredible. The resurrection is absolutely credible. Alright then, King Agrippa, why are these people upset with me? I haven't said one thing out of line with the OT. If the OT promises include resurrection so God can fulfill the Abrahamic promise, then why are you all bent out of shape because I'm saying that the Messiah rose from the dead? You have no place to base your objection to what I'm teaching, not one. So that's the basic introduction of what Paul taught and that lays the platform for everything that follows.

Now in Acts 26:9 Paul begins to declare actions on his part that sound completely contradictory to what he just said. He's just said we all have these OT promises, and the OT promises include resurrection, and on the basis of my Pharisaic convictions I believed in the resurrection and yet what he says here is that he did not believe in the resurrection. And the obvious question is why? Why didn't Paul believe Jesus was resurrected? Obviously he didn't, look at verse 9, **“I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.** And just look at what Paul did to those who believed in Jesus. V 10, **not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons,** that's arrest and imprisonment. Paul didn't read you the Miranda rights; he just cuffed you and stuffed you. And not only that **but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them.** So, here we have the court in session and so and so Christian is on the stand and here's Paul, who is a voting member, and each member had a white pebble and a black pebble and they'd cast their pebble and every time a Christian was on the stand Paul cast a black pebble, guilty, execute them, guilty, execute them. We don't know how many Paul voted to execute. And also v 11, this is what Paul did to your brothers and sisters in Christ, **“And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme;** imperfect voice, I tried and I tried and I tried to get them to blaspheme the name of Jesus and the implication in the text is they wouldn't do it, they wouldn't blaspheme. Later, when Caesar worship became Roman Law Pliny the Younger reported to Emperor Trajan, that if a person was suspected of being a Christian and blasphemed Christ that person was not really a Christian because real Christians cannot possibly be made to blaspheme (Epistle x.96). And so Paul started this procedure that went on for centuries. And when he failed to get them to **blaspheme** it says **being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities.** It's a vivid picture of a hunter pursuing prey. So you'd have some

Christians go out from Jerusalem like a tentacle and Paul would go out and cut it off. Another tentacle of Christianity would go out and Paul would go and cut it off. And he was chopping off the tentacles of Christianity. Now, I try to make you mad at Paul because I want you to see a fantastic truth. Don't ever write anyone off from the Christian faith. Oh, they'll never believe, they're too far gone. Oh really? What do you do about Paul? Paul hated Christians. Paul arrested Christians. Paul murdered Christians. So is anyone beyond God's reach? With God all things are possible.

Alright, what could cause this kind of hatred toward Jesus? Jesus is resurrected. Paul as a good Pharisee believed in resurrection. What's the problem? Well, Paul obviously had contact with Jews in Jerusalem who believed Jesus was resurrected. Stephen was one of them and there were getting to be more and more of these and early Acts describes that probably half of the population of Jerusalem believed Jesus was resurrected and was the Messiah. And yet Paul says I don't believe it. Turn to Matt 28:11 to see why. Paul kept company with the upper echelons of Jewish scholarship. Paul was surrounded by Sadducees and Pharisees. He himself was a Pharisee but the Sanhedrin was controlled by the Sadducees at this point so he has contact with Sadducees on a daily basis. And one of the beliefs of the Sadducees was they did *not* believe in the resurrection. And yet they had control of the Sanhedrin; the chief priest himself was a Sadducee and so who controlled the information? Pharisees or Sadducees? Sadducees. And they're able to use their political power to control the information. We'd say they controlled the media and here's one of the situations where the Sadducees manipulated the media and began to propagate it down through the seminary. V 11 **Now while they were on their way, some of the guard came into the city,** these are the Roman guards that were put over Jesus' tomb. Jesus is gone from the tomb so they're freaking out because they had a commission to guard that tomb and now the contents are missing, so it says they came **and reported to the chief priests all that happened.** Who got the report? The chief priests, Sadducees. Who controls the information? These guys. Do they believe in the resurrection? No. And so they have their little consultation and it says **they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers,** so what's going on? They're corrupt officials, they control the media, they've got money to fund their conspiracy, so they buy the Roman soldier's silence, and here's the story, v 13, **“You are to say, ‘His disciples came by night and stole Him away while we were asleep.’ And if this should come to the**

governor's ears, that's Pontius Pilate, if he hears, we will win him over and keep you out of trouble." Verse 15, **And they took the money and did as they had been instructed; and this story was widely spread among the Jews, and is to this day.** So this is the story that went out and it became the popular way of handling the claim that Jesus was resurrected.

And so come back to Acts 26:10. Here's Paul and he's seeing all these believers in Jesus in Jerusalem and he doesn't believe in all that, he says I got the inside scoop, I got the real story from my associates, they're the highest guys in the land, the Sanhedrin, they've got three or four Ph.D.'s each, and they say the whole thing is a farce: that Jesus' disciples came and stole the body. Obviously they've got the truth. Paul's bought into the popular media coverage and it's a lie. And there's a principle here - beware of getting your information from the popular media because they always manipulate, they manipulate the data to fit their preconceived notion.

Now I suspect from Acts 2-Acts 9 Paul was under growing conviction that he'd been fed a line of bull. For one thing, you've got thousands and thousands of Jews in Jerusalem believing Jesus was resurrected. For two, many of the Pharisees were beginning to believe Jesus was resurrected; we have mention of them in Acts 6. For three, Stephen's defense before Paul really shook Paul up. Fourth, the way Stephen was able to sit there with 100 pound rocks getting dropped on his chest and quote from Scripture Isaiah and the Psalms bothered him. And five, when Paul went into these synagogues and repetitively tried to get Christians to blaspheme the name of Christ, repeatedly to no avail; it must have really bothered him.

And then the final straw comes on the Damascus Road so let's pick up in v 12. In v 12 he goes into his conversion on the Damascus road and we've been over it in Acts 9 and Acts 22, so I'm not going to go into all of it again, I've covered it three or four times and so I'll just comment on a few things and one thing in particular that hasn't been related but is powerful evidence for the details I've just related. Verse 12, **"While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,** he's going to arrest Christians, these guys that gave him the **authority** are the very guys from Matt 28 who made up the theft story to cover the resurrection. Verse 13, it was **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.** ¹⁴**"And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul,**

Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So they all fell to the ground, they all saw the light but only Paul understood the voice, it came in the Jewish Aramaic, **Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?** And we've shown the significance of that statement for the Church, the body of Christ. Somehow the Christians are connected to Christ because Christ says you are persecuting Me. But I thought I was persecuting Christians. Yeah, but the Christians are connected to Me. And that's the concept of the Church. And then the second statement, this is the one we've never covered before. **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.** Now you say, what's that? If you work with animals you know what it is. A **goad** is a pointed rod used to urge an animal to move it, get with the program. And obviously Jesus is saying move it, get with the program. See, up to this point on the Damascus road Paul was like a very stubborn animal and you're poking him with three or four goads and the thing is still fighting it. And the point is that Paul was under deep conviction that the Christian case was true. Stephen's arguments were perhaps more cogent than Paul allowed himself to admit. And all of Paul's persecuting was kicking against his conviction that he knew indeed Jesus was risen. And so finally, on the Damascus Road, about two miles outside of Damascus the risen Lord appears to Him. V 15, **"And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But get up 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; ¹⁷rescuing you from the Jewish 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 dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'** So let's ask Paul a question: Paul, is it really true that you've opened the eyes of the Gentiles to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God? Suppose we could have a conversation today, in 2009, Paul is that true? And what would Paul say? Look at church history; what has gone on in the 19 centuries? Have people become Christians from every nation, from every continent? They sure have. So verse 18 has come to pass; it's still coming to pass in our day through Paul's writings. So what we've got in verse 18 is a prophecy that is now being fulfilled in front of our face.

Acts 2:19, **"So, King Agrippa, now you see clearly this defense was particularly for Agrippa, So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,** and then he goes on to describe again the circumstances involved, **²⁰but 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. ²¹“For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. He comes to verse 22 and he summarizes his message. Verses like verse 22 are useful to us because it shows us the issues that early Christians stressed. You notice some issues that they don’t stress? They don’t stress, hey, is your life in bad shape; you can pep it up with Jesus. They don’t say, are you feeling depressed, we’ve got a new religious aspirin, His name is Jesus. What does he stress? History. Watch. V 22, **“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; ²³that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”** Now this is a negative argument in v 22. And he’s doing something very important. Roman law said there were certain religions that were legitimate. Judaism was one of them. And Judaism was the Prophets and Moses. Now Paul says, I state nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said. Therefore Christianity is coming straight out of Judaism and it, too, is therefore a legal religion. And so what he’s saying is I have not introduced a new element into what Judaism says, I stand in the historic continuity of the OT.

Now verse 23 is somewhat of an enigma and recently scholars have come up with an ingenious solution to this enigma, and it’s one of those little pearls that even if it’s not totally right will go a long way to helping you visualize how to carry out in your life 1 Pet 3;15 which is to “be ready to give an answer to every man that asks a reason of the hope that is in us.” We said that there’s a certain strategy in Acts 26 that Paul follows, but when he comes to verse 23, when you read it, at least in all the major translations, it reads as declarative sentences²³**that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”** Now, that looks like a reasonable statement, except when you’re a Greek student, and you begin to look at the Greek text and you say hey, what is going on, because verse 23 in the Greek is raised as questions. It reads this way, literally: “Should Christ suffer? Should He be the first to rise from the dead? Is He about to show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles?” All three are questions. Well, for years and years translators couldn’t understand verse 23 so they translated it declaratively; surely that must be what the sense of the passage is, that he’s just... these are topics that he’s covering. And they were right. These are topics he’s discussing but that still doesn’t explain why in the Greek text they are phrased as questions. And then along came somebody with a brilliant answer to this. In the NT there are traces of documents that existed before the NT.¹ And they said, what we have here is a series of verse

lists to answer these three questions. The first question, “Should Messiah suffer?” And then there was a whole series of verses from the OT that Christians could pull up and say, yes, the Messiah should suffer, and go bang, bang, bang through the verses.

So the first question. Should the Messiah suffer? And you can guess the verses that answered this. Isa 53; Psalm 22 and so on. The Christians would train in this stuff and then they’d go out and they’d be walking down the sidewalk and someone would say, I’m a Jew but I don’t believe in Jesus because I don’t believe the Messiah should suffer, the Messiah should reign, not suffer. And the Christian would say, so the question is should the Messiah suffer? And if he was trained then he would start going through the verse list, bang, bang, bang. What do you do with that?

Another question would come up about resurrection. The actual question here is mistranslated; the translators in the NASB put first down with proclaim, first goes with dead. The first dead to rise. Or we’d say the question is about the order of resurrection, “Should the Messiah be the first to rise from the dead?” The problem wasn’t resurrection, will the Messiah be resurrected, the problem was will he be the first to be resurrected and then everyone else will follow, separated out in time? And that was a debate. So they had verses to prove yes, He would be first, for example, Psalm 16. And they’d go citing that and others.

And the third question was whether He was about to go on a universal mission, that’s what modern words would mean. Is Messiah to go proclaim light to Jews and Gentiles? To all men? A universal mission? Well, I don’t want to become a Christian, the Messiah is only for the Jewish people. Oh no, lots of OT verses say that He’s going to be a witness to the world. Isa 42:6; 49:6; 60:1-3 and they’d hit them with those. So there were these questions that had chain references linked to them as answers and that’s what Paul is doing in verse 23. They had lots of these and they set them up for the common objections of the day and we could do the same; Luke is just abbreviating the list by citing the questions they asked.

So, it’s that kind of thing that got men thinking in terms of chain references. They were literally able to go into one part of that OT text and just machine gun down right through, one end to the other, verse after verse after verse after verse after verse. And that’s what Paul’s doing. Why? Not because of Festus in the courtroom, not because of the other people in the courtroom, but because of only one man, Herod Agrippa the Jew. And so now watch what happens. He goes through the list in verse 23, and he’s rapidly pulling out all these questions.

This must have been what he was doing because look in verse 24 at what happens. Remember he's talking to Agrippa. But lo and behold, Festus speaks up, and Festus can't believe it because he doesn't know the OT and this is just so much information to him, he's just a good old pagan, so he hears all this and he's thinking what is going on, this Paul is a nut. **24While 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."** And that's the response of someone who is just overwhelmed by the amount of content. Christianity is full of content. And today the sad thing is that if you give a sermon with any content the Christians fall to pieces - oh, I can't understand, it's too much. Oh, I can't understand, it's too much. You're crazy to go into all that.

Acts 26:25, **But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.** Actually **sober** is not an adjective modifying **truth**, they are two nouns; he's saying "I utter words of rationality and truth." I'm not a madman speaking insane. I speak a rational system of thought that is true. And then look how he directs Festus over to the king in v 26, **"For the king knows"** I know Festus, you're having problems following me but right now I'm not talking to you Festus, I'm talking to the king over there, old Agrippa, **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.** And that's a classic verse in the NT - that last part of v 26 is something you want to remember as a Christian. I'm sure you could use this one against something on the history channel every week. Anytime you have someone saying, well, that stuff in the Bible has no historic value, it's all just story stuff. When someone says that you remember Acts 26:26, one day in a Roman courtroom the Apostle Paul got up and challenged that courtroom to authenticate, there were records, he said, this thing is a public matter.

And so Paul said two things: he said there are OT prophecies and there's the NT data and that data is public data, and at that time it was public. You could have looked at the Roman records, you could have seen the trial records, and it was all there, Pontius Pilate, Joseph of Arimathea. You say well, we don't have the records today, we can't use those. Yes, you can, and here's how: because in the first century the Christians quoted from these records and the church fathers did it repeatedly. They say you don't believe that Jesus was tried in the past; go check it out in the records. So we know the records did exist for some time afterwards and that the enemies of the Christian faith never were able to undermine. They never were able to and

the Christians just flaunted it, go ahead, who's name is on there. It's all in the record. So we can use it, even though we don't have the records now we know the records did exist and were used, at least for a century after Jesus Christ's time.

Now he puts the squeeze on Agrippa and the squeeze operates this way and for this reason. You see, Agrippa is a Jewish politician. Whether Agrippa personally believed the prophets or not isn't the issue. The issue is that he dared not say he didn't because you can imagine that here's the only Jewish politician in the hierarchy and everybody is looking to Agrippa as the Jewish model and so Paul sticks it to him right in the court. Why King Agrippa, I've been quoting all these OT verse references, and **you do believe the Prophets? Don't you? I know that you do.** You have to keep up your political image. If Agrippa says no then he's just wrecked his political career with the Jewish population. But if he says yes, well then you're going to become a Christian, right? So Paul's put him in a corner and you'll see how he worms his way out of the corner. Paul is so clever. It reminds you of how Christ handled the opposition. They'd get their slickest lawyers together and they'd formulate a hard question and they'd ask the question and Jesus would come back with a more difficult question. And they'd say well if we say this he'll get us over here, if we say that, he'll get us over there. We better not talk to this guy. It's just brilliant stuff. And Paul is brilliant. He goes in the court on the defense; he comes out on the offense. He's turned the whole thing around to which Agrippa replies in v 28, this is his way out, **"In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."** But that's not the sense of it. The sense of it is you're trying to get me to play the Christian; you're trying to get me over to your side but I'm not coming. This, while it looks in the English like he was close to becoming a Christian, what it is in the original text is saying I'm not going to become a Christian. It's not that he doesn't know it to be true. He's heard Paul go over the chain of references from the OT and he knows all this to be true. It's just that his political office is more important than the gospel of Jesus Christ. So this is a rejection of Jesus Christ. This is the fourth generation of Herod's to reject Jesus Christ. That's the sense of it.

Acts 26:29, And Paul said, **"I would wish 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."** What does Paul mean

that he wishes they might become such as him? As one who feared God and not men. As one who pleased God and not men. Agrippa feared the Jews. The others, they were all playing the game men play; please men to win their approval and get promoted by men. Paul says I wish you were like me, except for these chains. And then notice the response of the king. He doesn't say a thing, he just gets up with his sister, Bernice, with whom he's having incestual relationship and walks out of the room. Verse 31, **and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."** And thus, for about the fifth time in the book of Acts we have legal official confirmation that the Christian faith was not some sort of a threatening movement to the Roman system. Paul is innocent.

Finally, in verse 32 the ironic conclusion. You'd think the chapter would end with verse 31 but it doesn't, and it doesn't end with verse 31 to show you Acts 1:8, Acts 23:11 must come to pass, **"This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."** But Paul is now going to Rome because God said you're going to Rome. And so, verse 32 occurs at the end to remind us that in the midst of the human governments, in the midst of the courts, in the midst of the opposition God's plan will come to pass. And it's a nice reminder that we can trust God's promises to us, they come true every time without faith.

ⁱ For example in 1 John we have John saying things like, "this is the message" "and you all know," know what? The message. What is the message. And from the early church fathers we gather there was sort of collection of teachings that were something like Christianity 101, what every Christian should know and it was a series of doctrines.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2009