
Acts 25:1-26:32 ~ Teacher's Lesson Paul Before Festus & Agrippa

Review: At the end of his third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem. While there, some visiting, Asian Jews saw Paul and rioted, assuming he had brought Gentiles into the Temple. The local Roman garrison intervened to restore order. Since he was a Roman citizen, he was tried in a Roman, rather than a Jewish, court. His first trial was before a corrupt Roman governor named Felix. Felix wanted a bribe to release Paul, which never came. So, Paul remained in prison for the next two years. Finally, around A.D. 60, Felix was replaced by a new governor named Festus.

Even though Felix' time as governor over, he left Paul in prison (24:27); why? Felix was not a man concerned with justice. At first, he failed to do justice for Paul because Paul did not give him money, then he left Paul in jail in order to do the unbelieving Jews a favor. Paul's imprisonment was about politics, not justice. Paul was a political pawn.

******What favor did the Jews ask of the new governor, Festus (25:1-5)?** When Festus was visiting Jerusalem, they asked him to summon Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem, presumably for a trial. Unlike Felix, history records that Festus was a wise and honorable governor.¹

1. What was their true motive in asking Festus to transfer Paul to Jerusalem (25:1-5)?

They were planning to ambush him on the way and kill him, 25:3! Absolutely amazing—two years had passed and their hatred for Paul and the cause of Christ had not dimmed in the least. These men were hardened in their sin. The year is around A.D. 60. Rejecting the true Messiah, they instead followed false Messiahs and just 8 years after this revolted against Rome. Final judgment fell in A.D.70.

Why didn't Festus grant their request (25:4)? The reason given was that Festus was going back to Caesarea shortly, so the Jews could accompany him there for a trial.

2. Did Festus suspect the Jews' true motives (25:3-5)? Why? No doubt Felix told him about Lysias' initial report. In any event, Festus would not have been governor unless he was shrewd in the devious ways of men. He might not have been spiritual, but he was not stupid.

******3. Why did Paul appear to Caesar for justice (25:6-12)?** See 21:31, 23:12-15, 25:1-3.

Paul knew that the Jews still wanted to murder him, and he also realized that Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor by sending Paul to Jerusalem to stand trial. It was a reversal of Festus' original decision, and would have been Paul's third trial. He knew he stood little chance of surviving. Appealing to Caesar was the only way he could avoid being transferred to Jerusalem and subsequently assassinated or unfairly condemned. The appeal was Paul's last option.

¹ Kistemaker, 859.

According to 25:7, what weakness was there in the Jewish prosecution? They could not prove the charges against him.

ESV **Proverbs 12:17** . . . a false witness utters deceit.

4. Based on 25:9, why did Festus change his mind and offer to send Paul back to Jerusalem for trial? Like Felix before him (24:27), he wanted to do the Jews a favor. How he expected to protect Paul while in custody in Jerusalem is unclear; maybe he thought the life of an innocent man was a small price to pay to keep peace.

Festus said, “to Caesar you shall go.” Where was Caesar located? See 23:11. Caesar’s tribunal was in Rome. This was in fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to Paul:

ESV **Acts 23:11** . . . as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.

Nero: Nero was emperor at the time of Paul’s appeal (he reigned from A.D. 54 - 68). The first five years of his reign were peaceful; after that his actions became increasingly evil.²

Legal Problem: Festus was now in the unenviable position of having to send a Roman citizen to Rome without any specific charges!³ The accusations against Paul had nothing to do with Roman law.

*******5. What surprised Felix about the accusations against Paul (25:13-22)?** Since the Jews wanted Felix to condemn Paul to death, Felix expected his accusers to change him great evil. As it was, however, their charges concerned disputes about Judaism and whether Jesus was alive or dead (25:18-19). How Luke was privy to this conversation is unknown.

Who was Agrippa and over what was he king (25:13)? He ruled over the northern half of Palestine and was the great-grandson of Herod the Great (who killed the baby boys in Bethlehem). Agrippa’s uncle, Herod the Tetrarch, had John the Baptist executed and was the one before whom Jesus stood when on “trial”. Agrippa’s father, Herod the King, was the one who had James the apostle executed (and who died of worms). Agrippa did not come from a godly family. Though a Jew, he was staunchly pro-Roman, and later supported Titus’ invasion of Judea, culminating in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. His sister, Bernice, carried on a love affair with General Titus and traveled with him back to Rome in A.D. 75.⁴

Bernice (25:13): Bernice (25:13) was not Agrippa’s wife, but rather his sister who acted as his queen. Since Agrippa was not married, there was rumor of an incestuous relationship.

² *ESV Study Bible*, 2138.

³ Kistemaker, 867.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 871.

Bernice's sister was named Drusilla and was married to Felix, the recently recalled governor (24:24, 24:27).⁵

According to 25:15, what did the Jews want Festus to do? They wanted him to condemn Paul to death without another trial.

6. Why did Felix not give in to the Jews' demand (25:15-16)? Per Roman custom, he refused to condemn Paul without a trial.

When Felix understood this to be a religious dispute (25:19), how did he propose to settle the matter (25:20)? He proposed that Paul to back to Jerusalem for a trial there. Thus we now learn the second reason Felix wanted to send Paul to Jerusalem.

******7. Why did Felix ask King Agrippa for help (25:23-27)?** See 25:25-27. Paul had appealed to be tried before Caesar, but Festus had nothing he could write down as to what Paul was being charged with! He wanted Agrippa to help him come up with legal charges against Paul!

Word Study: "pomp" (25:23) is from *phantasia*, basis for the English word "fantastic".

******What request did Paul make of Agrippa (26:1-3)?** He asked Agrippa to be patient with Paul as Paul made his defense.

A Hearing, Not A Trial: This was a fact-finding hearing, not an official court trial. Paul had already been tried by both Felix and Festus, without verdicts, and had appealed to Caesar to escape being extradited to Jerusalem. Agrippa had no jurisdiction over Paul.

8. What reason did Paul give for considering himself fortunate that Agrippa was his judge (26:2-3)? Unlike the Gentiles Felix and Festus, Agrippa was himself Jewish and was familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews.

Application: Paul was respectful to Agrippa, even though he might have felt resentment against him for all the evil his relatives had committed. Paul found something positive to say to Agrippa.

ESV 1 Peter 2:17b Honor the emperor.

⁵ *New Bible Dictionary*, 132, 481)

****9. **What reason did Paul give for being on trial (26:4-8)?** See 23:6, 25:19. Paul understood that it all boiled down to his belief in the general resurrection of the dead (26:6, 8) and in particular, his assertion that Jesus came alive from the dead, 25:19. This showed the continuity between Judaism and Christianity.⁶

What well-known history did Paul bring up in 26:4-5? Paul referred to the fact that from youth he had been involved with the strictest party of Judaism, to which his accusers could testify. Paul was no outsider to orthodox Judaism; his beliefs were mainstream.

10. In 26:6-8 Paul stated he was on trial for his belief in the resurrection of the dead. What is the link between Paul's past life as a Pharisee (26:4-5) and his present hope in the resurrection of the dead (26:6-8)? Paul's point is that it was common in Judaism to hope to attain to the resurrection of the dead. Paul was not a heretic. His belief grew out of his past training as a Pharisee and was a belief held by "the twelve tribes" (26:7, a general reference to Israel). There was nothing un-Jewish about His beliefs.

What answer did Paul expect to his question in 26:8? Paul knew that Agrippa, as a Jew, would not think it incredible.

******How did Paul initially feel about Jesus (26:9-11)?** Paul was convinced that he should do everything in his power to oppose the name of Jesus. Paul believed in the general resurrection of the dead, but not in Jesus' resurrection.

11. Why did Paul introduce this information about his former opposition to the Gospel (26:9-11)? It was to show a contrast between his former opposition and his later acceptance. Something had to account for Paul's change from persecutor to promoter.

Thus, Josh McDowell entitled a chapter in his book *More Than a Carpenter*, "Did You Hear What Happened to Saul?" In it, McDowell quotes Elias Andrews, who was principal of Queens Theological College: "Many have found in the radical transformation of the 'Pharisee of the Pharisees' the most convincing evidence of the truth and the power of the religion to which he was converted, as well as the ultimate worth and place of the Person of Christ." Also quoted is Lord Lyttleton: "The conversion of apostleship of Saint Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity to be a Divine Revelation".⁷

******What changed Paul's mind about Jesus (26:12-18)?** Jesus supernaturally appeared to Paul while on his way to Damascus to persecute the church.

⁶ Marshall, 411.

⁷ Josh McDowell, *More Than A Carpenter* (Tyndale: 2009), 122-123.

12. Why do you suppose Paul required such a dramatic conversion (26:12-18)? It was probably for our sake, as a powerful witness to the truth of the Gospel. It is more evidence that demands a verdict!

13. Jesus stated that it was hard for Paul to kick against the “goads” (26:14). What does that mean? We use the word goad today in such sentences as, “Don’t goad him on!” The Greek word literally means a sharp point. It referred to a pointed iron rod used to prod cattle.⁸ The imagery was that of a stubborn ox who got prodded every time he kicked back in rebellion. The prod usually won! This was a proverb in Greek literature that referred to struggling against one’s destiny.⁹ Jesus was pointing out that Paul could not successfully resist God’s will.

What God-appointed mission did Paul receive in 26:16-18? He was to go to the Gentiles and bear witness to the resurrected Jesus so that they would turn from darkness to light.

Multiple Sightings: Notice how, in 26:16, Jesus said He would appear to Paul again. Paul saw the resurrected Jesus several times.

Multiple Rescues: In 26:17, Jesus promised to rescue Paul from both Jewish and Gentile opposition.

14. Based on 26:18, what effect does salvation have on people? Those who are saved have their eyes opened, turn from darkness to light, turn from the power of Satan to God, receive forgiveness of sins, and have a place with those who are sanctified by faith. Wow!

15. How is God’s sovereignty in the salvation process seen in Paul’s conversion (26:12-18)? How does this apply to you? God sovereignly singled out Paul for salvation. You may not realize it, but the fact that you believe is equally supernatural. Your faith is a supernatural act of God.

16. This makes the third time that Luke has recorded Paul’s road to Damascus experience (26:12-18). Why do you suppose Luke devoted so much type space to Paul’s conversion? Paul was on trial for his belief in Jesus’ resurrection. Luke obviously felt it was very important, key evidence for the truth of the resurrection. Something had to account for the change in Paul’s attitude. Paul’s own conversion is one of the proofs of the truthfulness of the Gospel. Paul’s goal was to persuade Agrippa and the others to believe in Jesus.

******How did Paul respond to the heavenly vision (26:19-23)?** He was not disobedient, but in obedience declared what he had seen to those in Damascus, then Jerusalem, then Judea, then to the Gentiles.

17. What can we learn about genuine repentance from 26:20? True repentance includes performing deeds in keeping with repentance. True repentance changes one’s lifestyle.

⁸ Thayer, #2759.

⁹ Marshall, 415.

ESV **Matthew 3:8** [John the Baptist]: Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Word Study: “repent” and “repentance” (26:20) are from *metanoia*; *meta* means “change” and *noeo* means “thinking”; thus, a change of thinking (about sin and Jesus) that leads to a change in action.

Repentance and faith are opposite sides of the same coin. They are often synonymous terms.

ESV **Acts 3:19** Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out . . .

ESV **Acts 11:18** . . . to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.

ESV **2 Timothy 2:25b** God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth . . .

Just as faith without works is dead, so too true repentance leads to the performing of deeds in keeping with repentance.

In 26:21, Paul declared that “for this reason” this Jews seized him and tried to kill him; for what reason? The reason was Paul’s witness to the Gentiles, and for placing them on equal spiritual footing with the Jews.

18. According to 26:22, to what did Paul attribute his continued survival? *See 26:16-17.* It was due to God’s help! Otherwise he would have been killed long ago. His opponents were the Jewish ISIS.

19. What did the prophets and Moses say would come to pass (26:22-23)? The Old Testament predicts that the Christ would suffer, rise from dead, and be a light to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Apologetics: One evidence for the truthfulness of the Gospel is fulfilled Old Testament prophecy.

******What stopped Paul from completing his defense (26:24-29)?** He was interrupted by Festus’ adverse reaction.

20. What had Paul said that would have made Festus, as a Gentile, think Paul was out of his mind (26:24)? *See 26:12-18.* It was probably what Paul said about Jesus appearing to him on the road to Damascus. Festus’ answer to the question, “Do you hear what happened to Saul?”, was that Paul was out of his mind. Sadly, he died in office after only two years.¹⁰

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:18** . . . the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing . . .

¹⁰ Kistemaker, 860.

Same With Jesus: In evangelism, it is helpful to press people to decide if Jesus is Lord, lunatic or liar.

In response to Festus, Paul appealed to the king's knowledge of the rise of Christianity (26:26). Why did Paul then ask Agrippa if he believed the prophets (26:27)? See 26:22-23. Paul was seeking common ground with Agrippa (acceptance of the validity of the Old Testament prophets) in an effort to prove the reality of what happened to Paul.

21. In 26:38, how did Agrippa interpret Paul's question (26:27)? He rightly saw it as an attempt to convert him! It was a trap of logic. After this, Agrippa essentially cut the session off, putting off deciding for Christ in so short a time.

Persuasive Evangelism: We can learn about Paul's evangelistic method from Agrippa's use of the word "persuade" (*peitho*, 26:27). Paul persuaded men to believe; he gave evidence for the truth of the Gospel.

ESV **1 Peter 3:15** [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you . . .

We cannot argue anyone into heaven. Whatever you can talk people into, the devil can talk them out of. However, God may use our arguments in His process of bringing the elect to salvation.

22. What glimpse into Paul's heart can we see in 26:29? See *Romans 9:2-3, 10:1*. Paul wanted all who heard him to believe in Jesus. He cared about people.

ESV **Romans 9:2-3** . . . I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh.

ESV **Romans 10:1** . . . my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved.

How did Paul make it clear to Festus and Agrippa that he still had not received justice (26:29)? The words, "except for these chains" made the point that Paul, an innocent man, deserved to be set free.

******23. What did the king and the governor conclude about Paul's case (26:30-32)?** They decided that Paul was innocent and could have been release had he not appealed to Caesar. However, had Paul not appealed to Caesar, he probably would have been murdered before Agrippa ever came to visit Caesarea.

Blame Game: It is amazing that the blame went to Paul for appealing, rather than to Felix or Festus for not setting Paul free after two trials.

Eaves Dropping: Luke was doubtless present at the hearing and evidently overheard the conversation as the dignitaries exited.

Too Much: Paul's testimony was too much for the king and governor to bear. First, Festus interrupted Paul's defense (26:24), then Agrippa abruptly rose and walked out (26:30). The hearing was over!

So What?

24. Was Paul's primary motivation acquittal or evangelism? Since this was a unofficial hearing and not a trial, Paul's main interest was clearly evangelism.

Paul asserted Jesus to be alive from the dead (25:19). How did Festus and Agrippa each respond to this claim? See 26:24, 28, 30. Festus thought him insane. Agrippa didn't want to come to grips with it (pun), so he wanted more time to consider it and ended the hearing.

25. Was Paul's evangelism in court a success or a failure? Why? Paul's job was to bear witness; God's job is to convert. A successful witness is someone who shares Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and leaves the results to God. Paul was a success because he was a witness to the heavenly vision he received.

How do you imagine Paul felt about the legal outcome of this hearing (26:1-32)? "If we see God's sovereign hand orchestrating all of our circumstances according to His plan, then we can rest in Him, knowing that He will work it together for good according to His purpose."¹¹

ESV **Acts 9:15** . . . he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings . . .

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
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¹¹ Steven Cole, "Lesson 65: God's Protective Hand (Acts 25:1-26)", Bible.org. Accessed 08/25/18.