**Acts of the Apostles
A Study of New Testament History**
**Lesson 21
Acts 26:1-32**

**Paul's Defense Before King Agrippa**

**Introduction:**

In Palestine, a part of the Roman Empire known for frequent uprisings, there was virtually no tolerance among Roman officials toward those who were charged with disturbing the peace. Therefore, the charges brought against the apostle Paul were serious enough to demand immediate attention. His enemies had accused him of being "a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." It was said he, "even tried to profane the temple" (Acts 24:5-6). The only so-called crime to which Paul would freely admit was that he was a follower of Jesus Christ who had been resurrected from the dead and had ascended to the Father in heaven. Despite all the false allegations made against Paul, Roman officials found no evidence that would make him worthy of death.

During times when tensions rose in Palestine between Jews and Romans, peace was often maintained by each side doing what they could to appease the other. In most instances Jewish courts were allowed to hand down judgment in civil and criminal cases with little or no interference from Rome. However, Rome reserved the right to intervene in Jewish legal affairs when it came to capital cases (cases demanding the death sentence), or when serious criminal charges were brought against a citizen of Rome.
If the accused was a Roman citizen who was also a Jew, he was given the option of having his case tried in either a Jewish or Roman court. However, Paul knew there was virtually no chance of receiving a fair trial before the Jewish Supreme Court – the Sanhedrin. This was the same body of men who had condemned Jesus to die; who had repeatedly threatened the apostles for preaching a resurrected Christ; who had murdered Stephen without a fair trial; and who had given Saul of Tarsus (Paul) permission to arrest disciples of Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus and bring them bound to Jerusalem to face certain death.

Following the disturbance in the temple, during which Paul was nearly killed by an angry mob, he was taken into protective custody by the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias. That, however, provided Paul with little comfort. He continued receiving death threats from his enemies who had vowed to neither eat nor drink until the apostle was dead. For his own safety, Paul was taken during the night under heavy armed guard to Roman provincial capital, Caesarea, where his case would be brought before the Roman governor, Felix. Despite Paul's innocence, and despite being terrified by Paul's message of "righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come," Felix chose to leave the apostle under house arrest for the next two years as a favor to the Jews (Acts 24:25-27).

When Porcius Festus succeeded Felix as governor he also sought to appease the Jews by asking Paul if he would consent to having his trial transferred back to Jerusalem (Acts 25:9). It was becoming increasingly clear to Paul that he would have difficulty finding justice in even a Roman court in Palestine. Therefore, since Paul had a legal right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard by Caesar, and since he had been reassured by the Lord that he would bear witness of Jesus Christ at Rome as he had done in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11), Paul appealed to Caesar. He told Festus, "For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar" (Acts 25:1).

All that remained was for Festus to prepare a legal brief in which the charges against Paul would be detailed, and which would argue for either Paul's conviction or acquittal based on the evidence. However, to prepare this brief Festus needed to understand the allegations brought against Paul so that he could judge the merit of those allegations based on Roman law. To assist him in the matter Felix sought the council of King Agrippa, a descendant of Herod the Great and son of Herod Agrippa I. Although King Agrippa was not a Jew by birth, he had adopted the religion of the Jews as his forefathers had done, and faithfully governed large portions of Palestine by appointment of Caesar. Despite Agrippa's lavish and immoral lifestyle, and his incestuous relationship with his sister Bernice, he was well acquainted with the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. For the first time since Paul's arrest in Jerusalem two years earlier, it appeared he would finally be able to present his defense before a man who was as loyal to Rome as he was to the religion and beliefs of the Jews.

**Memorization:**

Acts 26:28 – *Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."*

**Key Events of Acts 26:1-32**

* Paul speaks of his early life as a Pharisee and his opposition to Jesus and His followers
* Paul recounts the story of his conversion
* Paul explains why he was falsely accused
* The exchange between Festus, Paul and Agrippa

**Link to Online Bible Study Tools:**

These websites contain numerous Bible Versions and Translations, Concordances, Dictionaries, Lexicons and many other useful tools: http://biblos.com/ and http://www.biblestudytools.com/ (Click on "Our Library" at the top of the home page)

**The Exposition:**

**I. Paul's defense before King Agrippa (Acts 26:1-32)**

**A. Paul speaks of his early life as a Pharisee (Acts 26:1-10)**

1. Why was Paul "happy" to have his case heard by King Agrippa?

2. What does Paul says about his own reputation among the Jews, and of his beliefs as a Pharisee?

3. What is "the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers" and the "promise" Israel "hoped to attain"? (Also see: Acts 28:20) Support your answer with Scriptures from the Old Testament.

4. Why would it not be "incredible" to Agrippa "that God raises the dead"? Explain your answer.

5. List some of the Old Testament prophecies quoted in Acts that foretold the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

6. Why did Paul feel he "must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth"?

7. List some of the things Paul did "contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."

**B. Paul explains his conversion (Acts 26:12-18)**

1. What do you think Paul hoped to accomplish by first explaining his zeal against "the saints"? Explain your answer.

2. What does Paul mean by the phrase "while thus occupied" (Acts 26:12)?

3. How does Paul describe his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus?

4. In your own words explain what the Lord meant by the following statements:

a. "To make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you."

b. "I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you."

c. "To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."

d. "That they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

**C. Paul speaks of his life as an apostle of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:19-23)**

1. How do verses 19-20 correspond with what Jesus told His apostles in Acts 1:8?

2. Paul said his mission was to declare to both Jews and Gentiles "that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance." Using Paul's words, where would baptism for the remission of sins fit into this mission?

3. What does the phrase "do works befitting repentance" suggest?

4. What are the "reasons" Paul mentions here for the Jews seizing him and trying to kill him?

5. List some of the ways Paul "obtained help from God" up to that moment?

6. Provide some passages from the Law of Moses and the Prophets that show "Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

**D. The final exchange between Festus, Paul and Agrippa (Acts 26:24-32)**

1. What would prompt Festus to think Paul was insane (beside himself)?

2. How did Paul respond to Festus, and how would this prove Paul was not insane?

3. Why would the things of which Paul spoke be "words of truth and reason"?

4. What was Paul convinced of regarding King Agrippa?

5. What was Agrippa's response?

6. Commentators have debated whether Agrippa was sincere in his reply to Paul, or was merely saying this in jest.

a. Which do you believe? Explain your answer.

b. What evidence might others offer who take the opposite view?

7. Regardless of Agrippa's sincerity, what was it that Paul hoped would come from his testimony that day.

8. What conclusion did Agrippa, the governor, and Bernice reach concerning the charges against Paul?

9. What did Agrippa say to Festus regarding Paul's appeal to Caesar?

10. Do you think Paul was too hasty, or perhaps showed a momentary lack of faith, in making his appeal to Caesar? Explain your answer.

**Application:**Be prepared to discuss what lessons can learn from these events, and how these lessons can be applied to present-day situations.