

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ
Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 20

Day One: Paul's Defense before King Agrippa

This week in Acts 26, we see the fulfillment of the Lord's promise regarding the Apostle Paul: "He is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles and kings . . ." (Acts 9:15). Each one present in the assembly room of the palace that day—among them important prominent government officials and ranking military officers—were all aware of the situation. And in the process of presenting his own defense, Paul meticulously depicted the transforming power of the gospel upon those who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

King Agrippa held authority over the court of meeting but, by the time it was over, Festus, as well as the king and his sister Bernice were each in the defendant's chair facing the inevitable truth staring them in the face—that God's grace was granting them the opportunity to listen to the gospel message! And they too would one day have to answer for it.

Read Acts 26:1–32.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord.

Memory verse: 1 Corinthians 1:18 Write out the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

1. Personal: Recall a time when the message of the cross was foolishness to you. Contrast that time in your life with the assurance you have today that it is the power of God.

Deeper Discoveries ~

It's interesting to note that Luke would highlight Paul's conversion story three times in Acts. While some might simply pass lightly over it, regarding it as mere review, there is a reason why we find it at this point in the book. Ask God to give you fresh eyes to see and insight to discern this time through. In your own words, write a summary sentence for each of the five features in our story and a lesson you can derive from each one.

- a. *Paul's early life* (Vv. 4–11): _____

Lesson: _____

- b. *The light Paul saw* (Vv. 12–13): _____

Lesson: _____

- c. *The voice Paul heard* (Vv. 14–18): _____

Lesson: _____

- d. *Paul's obedience to the vision* (Vv. 19–23): _____

Lesson: _____

- e. *Paul's challenge to those hearing the gospel* (Vv. 24–32): _____

Lesson: _____

- f. Now take it down even further: what one word would *you* use to best describe Paul's life and ministry? _____

Day Two:

On the Defense

Read Acts 26:1–11 for review.

Paul would later state in no uncertain terms writing his letter to the Corinthians that he had been entrusted with a stewardship: “For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16–17).

1. Understanding Paul’s mindset as a preacher, why do you think he considered himself fortunate to make his defense to King Agrippa?

2. What point does Paul make in verse 4, concerning the Jews who testified against him?

3. What does Paul state as the reason he was standing trial? Vv. 6–7

Basically, Paul was in this present predicament for proclaiming that the promise of God to the Jewish forefathers had been fulfilled through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. But not surprisingly, scripture records that this *hope of Israel* would not be received by His own people.

4. Look closely at John 1. Jot down the specific words that stand out depicting Jesus as:
 - a. *The Eternal Word* (Vv. 1–3): _____

 - b. *The True Light* (Vv. 6-13): _____

 - c. *The Word becoming flesh* (Vv. 14–18): _____

 - d. *The Lamb of God* (Vv. 29–34): _____

Paul stated to King Agrippa that he was standing in his own defense and being judged for the hope of the promise made by God to Israel. In his early life, Paul himself fought vehemently against those who believed in Christ. He understood why the Jews didn’t believe, as he himself did *many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth* (v. 9). But Paul’s life’s mission became preaching Christ to these very people so they too would come to faith in Him.

Day Three:

Fully Persuaded

Read Acts 26:19–32 for review.

To our amazement, Paul was never concerned with the responses of his hearers. He was only interested in explaining how he came to know Christ and have a personal relationship with Him. In his audience sat individuals listening to his message that had different degrees of readiness and receptivity to the gospel message. Festus could not be expected to understand the things of Judaism, but King Agrippa was a Jew and had full knowledge of the history and facts concerning the faith. Paul had much to say to them and requested that his listeners pay attention: “Therefore, I beg you to hear me patiently” (Acts 26:3b).

1. Festus: *Worldly and unspiritual*—In contrast to Paul, Festus represents the carnal, worldly man, “Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!’” (v. 24). 1 Corinthians 2:14 helps us understand the reasoning of Festus; what does this verse say? Write it out.

2. Agrippa: *Almost a Christian*—He represents an awakened conscience. Paul recognizes it and poses the question: “Do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.” What answer does Agrippa give to Paul? Vv. 27–28

It must be noted that the words *almost Christian* convey no sense of sin pardoned, no joy or peace with God, no claim to the abiding presence of Christ within the soul. When once the heart is quickened and the conscience awakened to sin, desire must give way to decision. Agrippa listened but did nothing to commit himself. This was his moment—he would never hear from Paul again.

3. Paul: *Fully persuaded*—Before encountering Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road, Paul thought it his duty to oppose Jesus: “I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:13). The “light” that surrounded Paul at his conversion also breaks through each believer’s heart today. Look at 2 Corinthians 4:6; what does this verse say?

Do you perhaps know a “Festus”—someone that is worldly and unspiritual? How about an “Agrippa”—someone who is *almost a Christian*? Would you take a moment and pray for them? How about *you*? Do you perhaps fall into one of these two categories? Or are you *fully persuaded*? If you are the latter, God has a plan and a purpose for your life that includes a mission to take the message of His truth to others. Fully persuaded means fully submitted to all that He has planned for you. In the remainder of our study we’ll look at that more closely. For today, consider where God has you at the moment and yield yourself to Him.

Day Four:

Ambassadors for Christ

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). This week's memory verse is an anchor for those of us desiring to be used mightily of God while attempting to fulfill His will in our flesh. We can't do it—ours is simply to yield and He does the rest: *nothing in my hands I bring, but only to Thy cross I cling.* Paul began as a *persecutor* and found himself a *proclaimer* in the cause of Christ. The same might be said of us as well. Before Christ, we were part of the opposition; but after we became numbered among the family of God. Our inheritance is accompanied by the call of God; indeed it is our joy to serve Him!

Up Close ~

1. What is the "gospel" that you have received? Look at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4 and restate verses 3–4 in your own words.

2. As a *new creation in Christ*, what ministry has God entrusted to you? What does this mean to you? See 2 Cor. 5:17–19.

3. Having received this ministry, what does that make you? 2 Cor. 5:20 What are your thoughts about this?

4. In 2 Cor. 5:21, Paul condenses the mission message to one verse; what is it?

To them [saints] God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily (Colossians 1:27–29). Paul's words to the Colossian believers that also ring true today.

5. As you consider the great trust committed to you . . . how are you allowing God to work mightily in you? What would you ask Him for in order to complete *your* mission?

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Compose a prayer of what you need to speak out for Christ: is it opportunity or equipping? If you don't feel adequate, tell the Lord that today and watch what He will do on your behalf.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
