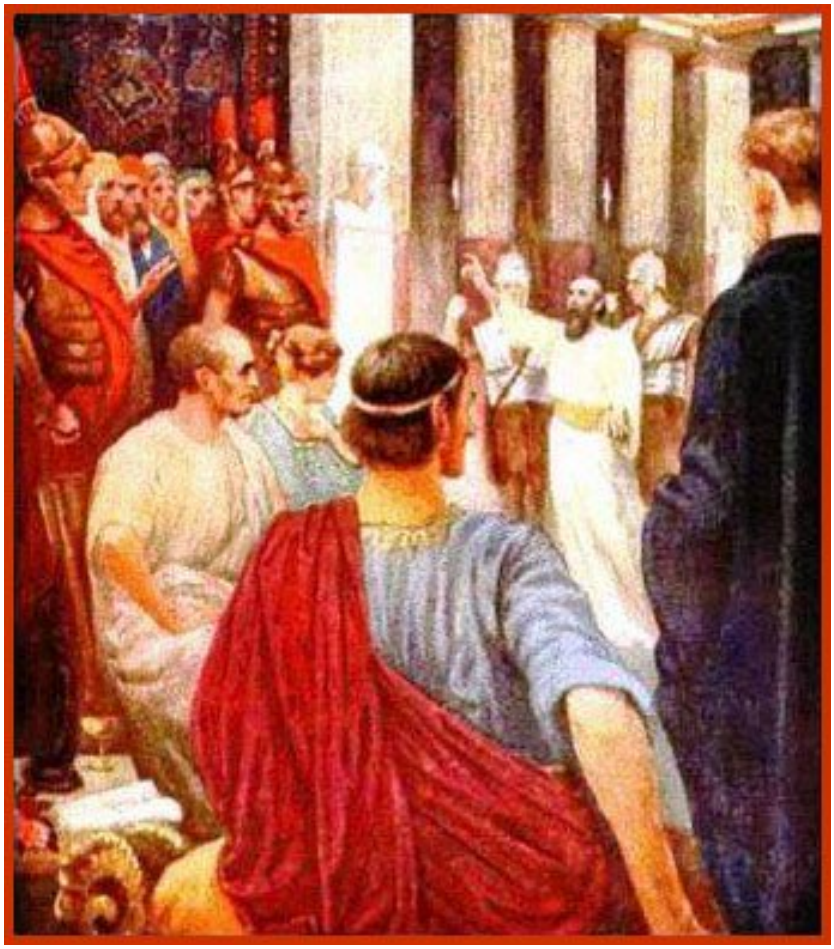
Paul's Defense before Israel's Foreign Rulers

V 1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself:

"Stretched out his hand." **A common gesture made at the beginning of a speech. Paul's intention wasn't so much to defend himself (there were no accusers there) but, since he was supposed to explain his cause to Agrippa so Agrippa could explain it to Festus so Festus could explain it to Caesar, then it was really just the Lord's set-up and perfect opportunity to reach these members of elite society with the message of the Gospel.**



V 2-3 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews,

"especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

"I think myself happy… I shall answer for myself." **Paul was *"happy"* for this opportunity to give his side of the story and thereby quench all the rumors and accusations that Agrippa and others of the rulers may have heard from the Jews. This reminds us of his statement before Felix two years earlier, *"I do the more cheerfully answer for myself."* (24:10)**

Paul was glad too that Agrippa was *"expert in all customs and questions… among the Jews".* Unlike governor Festus, or even governor Felix, king Agrippa was brought up in Israel and had a reputation as a pious Jew with a good understanding of Jewish beliefs and customs. Now Paul had the opportunity to explain his beliefs in much greater depth than he had before with other officials.

And one more reason for Paul's happiness: at last, he was seeing the light at the end of the long tunnel of his incarceration in Israel. Soon he would be on his way to Rome, the place where he had wanted to go for so many years.

V 4-5 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.
"They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

"If they were willing to testify." **The Jews did not like to admit that Paul was once *"a Pharisee"* who lived *"according to the strictest sect of our religion".* This background added more weight to Paul's testimony and message of dissatisfaction with the limitations of traditional Jewish religion.**

V 6 "And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.

"The hope of the promise." **Refers to the coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom, as well as the Resurrection of the dead.**

V 7 "To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and

day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

"Twelve tribes." **The 10 tribes of northern Israel had been dispersed by the Assyrians in the 700's B.C. But before that event, members of those tribes had intermingled with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin; many also had fled to Judah in advance of the approaching Assyrians. So in effect Israel still consisted of *"twelve tribes".***

"Accused by the Jews." **It was absurd that Paul should be accused for promoting the glorious fulfillment of promises contained in the very writings to which the Jews considered themselves to be such staunch adherents.**

V 8 "Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

"God raises the dead." **If Agrippa was *"expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews"* (verse 3), then he had probably swallowed the Sadducees' line of disbelief in the Resurrection. Since the Sadducees came from the rich and powerful class, then likely, Agrippa had plenty of interaction with them. And there was also his interaction amongst the Romans. As unbelievers, they, of course, would think of the Resurrection story merely as some form of wishful thinking or superstition.**

We can gather this from Festus' casual observation earlier that the Jews *"had some questions against him* [Paul] *about… a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive."* (25:21) So Paul, aware of the general climate of doubt surrounding Felix about the resurrection, asks, *"Why should it be thought incredible?"* That, after all, had been the *"hope of the promise"* of the Jews for generations and was now a central pillar in the Christian faith.

The coming of the Messiah had reversed the effects of the Curse: in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve had eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God told them (and all mankind), *"You shall surely die… For dust you are, and to dust you shall return."* (Genesis 2:17, 3:19)

But when Jesus came, He taught and demonstrated by His own death and resurrection that God was now offering mankind, including those who had died before His coming, the glorious promise of living on after death in the heavenly realm, and even in the earthly realm. (John 11:25, 1 Peter 3:19-20, 4:6) No more did the death experience have to be shrouded in feelings of permanent loss, hopelessness, or gloom as in times past.

V 9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

***"Indeed, I myself thought… to do many things contrary."* Paul shows his understanding of Agrippa's unbelief, testifying of his own unbelief previously.**

V 10-11 "This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.
"And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

***"I cast my vote."* Literally, "I threw my pebble"; this was the manner of voting in ancient times. The statement implies that Paul may have been himself a member of the Sanhedrin – or if not a member, certainly very close to that ruling circle.**

***"Compelled them to blaspheme."* To renounce their faith in Christ. Detailing his former crimes like this may have helped Paul to better relate to Agrippa who also may have been guilty of committing serious crimes. As a king, likely he would have known what it meant to use violence, incarceration, or murder against his rivals, just as Paul had done.**

V 12-18 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,
"at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.
"And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

“So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.
‘But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, 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.
‘I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,
‘to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.’

In these verses Paul once more recounts the dramatic testimony of his encounter with the Lord on the Damascus road. (Acts 9:3-16, 22:6-16)

“To open their eyes… to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance.” **This was the Lord’s new job description for Paul, and indeed, the job description for anyone who wishes to follow in Christ’s footsteps.**

“Sanctified by faith that is in Me.” **“Sanctify” comes from the Greek for “to separate or set apart”. Faith in Christ causes His disciples to be different, set apart from the world. *“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.”* (John 17:15-16)**

V 19-20 “Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,
“but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

“Not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” **Saying it this way suggests that it was not easy to follow the *“heavenly vision”*; it was also a more humble way of putting it rather than to boastfully proclaim that he was just so obedient. Paul was too well aware of his shortcomings to put it in such a way. It was more like, “Well, I know I’ve made lots of blunders and wasn’t as obedient as I should’ve been sometimes, but at least I wasn’t disobedient to the heavenly vision.”**

> **…Not even Paul counted himself to have attained. He kept making mistakes for the rest of his life… Nevertheless he was a good apostle, a faithful evangelist, and did a tremendous job, in spite of all of his shortcomings, failures, sins, mistakes, and blunders. [from lecture delivered during the *Jesus Revolution* era, 1970]**

"Works befitting repentance." **Paul was faithful to encourage believers to go beyond just believing and endeavor to change their lifestyle, and to win others to the faith – that is, to become the kind of "sons" who would be worthy of receiving an *"inheritance"* (as mentioned in verse 18).**

V 21 "For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

"For these reasons." **Paul's preaching of total dedication and his witnessing to the Gentiles were the real reasons for the Jews' hatred of him. The Jews, because of their loathing of the Gentiles and envy of Paul, objected to the good things he was doing, which had nothing to do with being a *"creator of dissension"*, the original accusation put before governor Felix. (24:5)**

Paul's passion to preach the truths of God, even if not understood by Festus, showed clearly that the Jews' accusations were only the result of an internal religious dispute. This turned out to be a good way for Paul to defend himself. Without dwelling too much on nitty-gritty details about the case, his approach gave a clear presentation of the Gospel message and at the same time showed that he was no *"creator of dissension"* (*"mover of sedition"* – KJV).

V 22-23 "Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come –
"that the 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."

"That the Christ would suffer… be the first to rise from the dead." **Christ's suffering and Resurrection, along with that of all believers, were**

foretold in the Old Testament. (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Psalm 16:10)

V 24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

"You are beside yourself!" **Poor Festus had been left floundering by this message that was geared more for Agrippa who already had some familiarity with the strange truths Paul was bringing forward. From his Roman, secular viewpoint the idea that the dead could live again sounded preposterous, and he finally blew his cool, shouting, *"much learning is driving you mad!"***

Jesus had to face similar reactions from those whose perspectives were too limited to be able to grasp His extraordinary new teachings and activities. (Mark 3:21, John 8:48,52, 10:20) If it were not for the fact that Agrippa was the main audience, Paul would have tailored his approach to better suit Festus' more limited understanding of spiritual matters, as he had done before in other situations with those who had no knowledge of Judaism. (Acts 14:8-18, 17:16-34)

V 25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.

"I am not mad." **Paul didn't allow himself to get intimidated by this outburst but continued, saying, *"I speak forth the words of truth and reason."* That was quite a straightforward remark to make before the Roman governor, but it was needed in this situation to set aside one of the Devil's favorite spins: accusing God's people of insanity. The words *"truth and reason"* conveyed the message that Paul's words were just the opposite of flippancy, folly, or the derangement that Festus thought Paul had fallen into. In all this Paul continued to show respect to the governor, calling him *"most noble Festus".***

V 26 "For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.

"The king… knows these things." **Paul addresses Agrippa; in fact, he seems to be challenging him. That Festus could not grasp what Paul was**

saying was understandable, but for Agrippa, Paul said, *"None of these things escapes his attention".* (And the implication is that if Agrippa were to give his assent to *"these things"*, it would help Festus to believe also.)

***"Not done in a corner."* Jesus' death and the claim of His resurrection were common knowledge in Palestine. It's not as if the king hadn't heard about this already; it was just that he had trouble believing it.**

V 27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

***"Do you believe the prophets?"* Paul answers for him, *"I know that you do believe",* since it would have been too difficult in that setting for Agrippa to give a direct answer. "Yes" would make him look foolish to his Roman friends. "No" would have outraged his Jewish subjects.**

V 28-29 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."
And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

***"You almost persuade me to become a Christian."* Paul's words had certainly hit the mark. It sounds as if Agrippa was saying that he was at least now a secret believer but was not able, for whatever reasons, to proclaim it publicly. And who knows what effect Paul's words had on some of the other influential people who were present at the hearing? At any rate the receptivity of these mostly Gentile rulers was far greater than that of the Jewish rulers of Israel, the Sanhedrin, whom Paul had encountered just recently, and also two years earlier, and by whom he was nearly killed.**

> **(*Jesus:*) …Claim your country for Me! Claim its leaders, its upper levels of society, for Me. Get out there and reach them – and not just gently and lightly, but challenge them to do something for Me and others. Make disciples of your nation. (from lecture inspired by the *Jesus Revolution* – February, 2002)**

***"Except for these chains."* Perhaps this was a subtle way of**

encouraging the rulers present to do what they could to secure Paul's release.

V 30-32 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;
and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."
Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

"This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains… might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." **Agrippa, who was favorably influenced by Paul's message before the court, probably would have seen to it that Paul was set free right then and there. But the case had already been transferred to Rome, so apparently nothing else could be done at this point.**

Agrippa probably was not aware of the fact that Paul's appeal to Caesar had saved him from being sent to Jerusalem where the Jews would likely have killed him. (See Acts 25:2-3,9-12.) At any rate everything the Lord had said through Agabus the prophet was coming to pass: that Paul would be delivered *"into the hands of the Gentiles".* (21:11)

(Continue to ACTS, chapter 27)