

A PURPOSE FOR A PREACHER IN PRISON

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

God called Paul to be a witness for Jesus Christ to all that he met. Paul said he was faithful to this calling in his testimony before King Agrippa II: "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22-23). This should be the desire of every Christian.

Paul's imprisonment and hearings at Caesarea over a period of more than two years demonstrated the providential care of the Lord in at least three areas. First, Paul's life was protected from those who desired to kill him. Second, Paul was able to declare the gospel to important government officials. Third, Paul's ministry in Rome would be brought about by the Lord in His time.

I. Paul's Defense before Felix — 24:1-27

A. Dishonest Accusations by Tertullus — 24:1-9

24:1-4 — Felix was a freedman which means he was formerly a slave. History also indicates he was politically and personally an evil man. Tacitus, a historian, indicates that Felix indulged "in every kind of barbarity and lust, exercised the power of a king in the spirit of a slave." Josephus recorded that Felix was guilty of having the high priest, Jonathan, assassinated. He was a brother of Pallas, a favorite of Claudius Caesar, and it was because of Pallas' influence that he was able to hold such a high position. God used this wicked man to protect His own appointed apostle from the Jews.

Tertullus was probably a Jew (cf. v. 9) with a Roman name, who was hired by the Sanhedrin to present their case against Paul. "An orator" indicates he was one who was a public speaker with a good flow of words; hence, he was like an attorney. His rhetoric was mostly used in an attempt to secure Felix's good favor (24:2-4) since the accusations against Paul were minimal.

Paul was accused of three offenses:

24:5a - Civil unfaithfulness. "Pestilent" literally means a plague (cf. Lk 21:11). Hence, what he had been to the church before his conversion, he now was to the Jewish body that previously sent him. "Sedition" has the idea of insurrection leading to riots (cf. Lk 23: 19). Tertullus was trying to make Paul appear as a traitor to the Roman government (compare Rom 13:1ff).

24:5b - Religious heresy. Paul was called a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. Sect has inherent in it the idea of heresy. The Jews hoped that the Romans would condemn Paul for practicing a religion contrary to that which they considered legal.

24:6 - Temple desecration. Paul was accused of desecrating the sacred temple. The original charge claimed that he had done it (21:28), but here the charge is changed to an "attempt" to desecrate it (the translation "hath gone about" should be "attempted"). Note how Tertullus distorted the truth concerning the Jewish involvement in the case (cp v. 6 with 21:31). This charge was more specific and should have been easy to prove. Then, if proved, Paul could be sentenced to death because the Romans allowed the Jews to put to death any who violated the temple laws (cf. 21:27).

B. Disciplined Defense by Paul — 24:10-21

24:10-13 - Paul responded to the three charges against him. First, he answered the charge of civil unfaithfulness. He had only been in Jerusalem for twelve days, hardly long enough to organize a conspiracy and a riot. His purpose in the temple was for worship, and the Jews could not prove anything else (v. 31)!

24:14-16 - Paul's second answer dealt with the charge of religious heresy. He spoke positively of his religious association with The Way. He carefully noted that this was not a heretical group because:

1. It worshipped the God of the Jews;
2. It was true to the Old Testament Scriptures;
3. It believed the resurrection (cp. Dan 12: 2) - a Jewish doctrine vital to Paul (cf. 1 Cor 15:12ff);
4. It allowed Paul to have a clear conscience before God and men.

24:17-21 - Third, Paul answered the charge of temple desecration. His purpose in the temple after several years of absence was to bring offerings for his nation. This may refer to the collection for the saints. The real trouble-makers were the Jews from Asia who were not even present to bring accusations against Paul. The only accusation Paul could think of that could be brought against him was his preaching of the resurrection of the dead.

C. Dishonorable Motives by Felix — 24:22-27

24:22-23 - Felix was not ready to make a definite decision concerning Paul. Apparently, he understood Paul's gospel showed he had a "more perfect knowledge of that way." Like Pilate with Jesus, Felix could not condemn Paul, but yet he wanted to have the favor of the Jews. Paul was imprisoned, but he was free to receive visitors.

24:24-26 - Paul was kept in prison for two years while Felix waited for Paul to pay him money for his release. He apparently saw no fault in Paul, but his corrupt character caused him to have corrupt judgment.

Drusilla, his wife, was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the murderer of James (12:1, 2). She was also the sister of Agrippa II (Acts 25:13) and Bernice. She was previously married to the king of Emesa, but Felix enticed her away. She had some Jewish ancestry, but her marriage was contrary to God's law.

Paul reasoned or preached to Felix and Drusilla of righteousness (he was unrighteous by his own civil injustice); of temperance or self-control (he was intemperate by his own marital indulgences; Felix was married three times); and of judgment (he knew he deserved judgment because he trembled - v. 25). Felix was convicted, but unlike Moses, he chose to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

24:27 - Felix left Paul bound after two years of imprisonment. Felix was replaced as governor by Festus because he used such violent means to squelch a riot between the Jews and pagans. Leaving Paul bound was Felix's attempt to appease the Jews for any resentment they had against him.

II. Paul's Defense before Festus — 25:1-12

A. Dangerous Politics by Festus — 25:1-9

25:1 - Festus followed Felix as governor, but he died after holding this office for only two years. Soon after his appointment, he visited Jerusalem, probably in an attempt to secure the good will of the Sanhedrin and Jews.

25:2-6 - The high-ranking Jews promptly requested him to bring Paul to Jerusalem in an attempt to kill Paul. Festus refused to bring Paul to Jerusalem, but agreed to rehear Paul's case in Caesarea at which time he would decide Paul's fate.

25:7 - The Jews made one charge after another against Paul, but they lacked one important thing - EVIDENCE!!

25:8-9 - Paul again categorically denied the charges, but Festus, using political favor instead of judicial justice, did not release Paul. Instead, he asked Paul if he would be willing to have his case reheard in Jerusalem. This was a dangerous game of politics. What Festus had earlier refused to do, he now suggests for political advantage.

B. Discerning Appeal by Paul — 25:10-12

25:10-12 - Paul, recollecting the previous two years of injustice, declined to accept Festus' proposal, but instead appealed to be tried at Rome before Caesar Nero. This was the right of a Roman citizen and in accord with the providential workings of God (Rom 13:1-4). He was willing to suffer death at the hands of the Romans, if he deserved death, but he knew he was innocent, so he appealed to Caesar. Festus was not required to send Paul to Rome but, if he chose not to, he would have to carry on the case himself. This he did not want to do because he had no legal charges against him, but on the other hand he did not want to release him and destroy his rapport with the Jews. Sending Paul to Rome was the easiest solution to his problem.

III. Paul's Defense before Agrippa — 25:13-26:32

A. Disturbing Dilemma for Festus — 25:13-27

25:13 - King Agrippa was a great-grandson of Herod the Great and the son of Agrippa I who had imprisoned Peter (12:1). Agrippa I died in A.D. 44 when Agrippa II was only seventeen. As a result of his youth, he did **not** assume his father's kingdom, but later Claudius gave him rule over Chalcis. Still later he was given the region north and east of the Sea of Galilee. Included in his power was the right to appoint the high priest and to keep custody of the high priest's garments used on the Day of Atonement. Hence, he was very influential in the Jewish religion. His capital was located at Caesarea Philippi which he renamed Neronias in honor of Nero.

Bernice was the sister of Agrippa II and of Drusilla. History indicates Agrippa and Bernice may indeed have been involved in an incestuous relationship. It was this couple who came to visit Festus on a good will mission since he had just been appointed governor.

25:14-22 - Festus was not subordinate to Agrippa II, but he needed advice on a difficult legal problem. How could he send a prisoner (Paul) to Rome with no real legal charges against him (25:27)? He recognized it was only a religious and not a legal dispute between Paul and the Jews. Festus was concerned about his own political future and this was embarrassing to him.

25:23-27 - Agrippa II expressed an interest in hearing the case and the next day, with great pomp, he and other leaders with him gathered and heard the case. Notice the contrast between the honor given to earth's dignitaries and the dishonor given to God's dignitary (Paul in chains).

B. Dedicated Testimony by Paul — 26:1-23

1. Paul's introduction — 26:1-3

26:1-3 - Paul commended Agrippa II for hearing his case. Agrippa II, a descendant of Herod, was well-trained in Roman law and also had studied Jewish history. Josephus indicates that Agrippa II was an able historian.

2. Paul's orthodoxy — 26:4-11

26:4-8 - Paul related to him his life in relation to the Jews' most strict group, the Pharisees. He was most dedicated to their cause and his doctrine agreed with the Pharisees' doctrine on the resurrection; however, Paul later realized that his own resurrection was impossible without Jesus Christ's resurrection (1 Cor 15:17, 20).

26:9-11 - Paul likewise admitted his own failure to comprehend the truth of the resurrection in Jesus Christ at first. Therefore, he persecuted the Christians that witnessed of Jesus' resurrection.

3. Paul's conversion and commission — 26:12-18

26:12-16 – See the first account given of Paul's conversion and commission (Acts 9:1ff) in lesson 4 of these Study Notes.

26:17 – Paul would be delivered by the Lord from both the Jews ("the people") and the Gentiles in Palestine and would be sent to the Gentiles in Rome to give them the gospel.

26:18 - Five purposes of Paul's ministry in Rome:

1. To open their eyes
2. To turn them from darkness to light
3. To turn them from the power of Satan unto God
4. To show them how to receive forgiveness of sins
5. To show them how they could receive an inheritance among the saints (cp. Acts 13:10-11; 2 Cor 4:4-6; Col 1:12-13; 1 Pet 1:23-25.)

4. Paul's dedication — 26:19-23

Paul testified of his obedience to God's call as a witness both to small and great. Furthermore, his witness was according to the Old Testament Scriptures when he spoke about the death and resurrection of Christ to the Jews **and** Gentiles.

C. Different Reactions by Festus and Agrippa — 26:24-32

26:24-26 - Festus' conclusion. Festus interrupted Paul's defense and accused Paul of being out of his mind (v. 24). He did not think Paul was mentally incompetent, but rather that he was educationally unbalanced. Festus did not have a mind to understand these things (1 Cor 1:18ff; 2:14). Yet, Paul was careful to note that Agrippa was aware of these things. Although the events of Christianity began in a small country, Christianity was no longer a secret.

26:27-28 - Agrippa's evasion. Paul put Agrippa on the spot. Paul asked him concerning his belief of the Old Testament. If he denied the Scriptures, he would alienate most of the Jews. Agrippa's response is not to be taken as that of one almost converted. Rather, it was an evasion of Paul's personal work: "Do you think you can convert me to become a Christian in one little meeting?" Agrippa was more concerned with his royal dignity than with his eternal destiny.

26:29-32 – Agrippa's decision. Paul continued his appeal (v. 29), but Agrippa had enough. He stood to show that the meeting was over. He had made his decision not to receive Christ. However, he declared Paul was innocent. Nevertheless, God's plan was being accomplished; Paul had just witnessed to a king and now he would go to Rome where he would witness to the emperor and his household (23:11).