

Theme of Acts: The Holy Spirit and the Birth of the Church

Personal Reflection

Complete this section in one sitting or little by little during the week. Begin with prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit into your time. Spending time in the Bible, studying the original intent, meaning and cultural context helps you to understand how it applies to you now.

Further Study

Complete on your own or with your small group.

Read Acts 26 Click on any Bible verse in the study to read it or use your own Bible.

Song for the week: Living Hope - Phil Wickham

Song links: <https://youtu.be/u-1fwZtKJSM?si=hCkU3XM-VbqWyy0g>

Personal Reflection

At the end of Acts 25, Paul was in prison in Casera, left there for two years by Felix who heard his case but refused to make a decision as to Paul's innocence or guilt. He and his Jewish wife, Drusilla, both listened to Paul while he was held in prison.

Festus succeeded Felix and promptly attended to Paul's case at the request of the Jews in Jerusalem. As he knew very little about Judaism, Christianity, or the Jewish culture, his decision was to send Paul back to Jerusalem to have his case heard there. Paul, being both a Jew and a Roman, exercised his Roman citizenship to request to be sent to Caesar, the Emperor in Rome, to present his case there instead.

The Caesar at the time was Caesar Nero. "The first five years of his reign, under the influence of good men around him, Nero was regarded as a wise and just ruler. Paul had no reason at this time to believe that Nero would be anti-Christian (*Enduring Word*)." Years later, Nero would become an enemy of Christians.

Wise means "having or showing experience, knowledge, and good judgment" and **just** means "based on or behaving according to what is morally right and fair" according to the Oxford Dictionary.

Nero was under the influence of good men and then he later changed. Consider who you are being influenced by; is it for your growth or detriment?

More than likely, you are also influencing others. What do you hope they are learning from you?

Festus was in a room with the high-ranking military officers, the prominent men of the city and King Agrippa. He ordered Paul be brought into the room. Then Festus said to King Agrippa "I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner to Rome without specifying the charges against him."

King Agrippa gave Paul permission to speak. Remember Agrippa's background:

- His great grandfather ordered the murder of the Jewish male babies when Jesus was born. (*Matthew 2:16-18*)
- His grandfather oversaw the trial of Jesus. (*Luke 23:8-12*)
- His father had James the disciple executed. Eventually for not giving God glory, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died - in this very town of Caesarea. (*Acts 12:1-4, Acts 12:17-24*)

Agrippa's father was a friend of Emperor Claudius. Agrippa was educated in Rome at Claudius's court and while he was there he learned of his father's ugly death in Caesarea, the very place he was visiting and hearing from Paul.

Agrippa had three sisters: Berenice (who he was with in Caesarea), Miriamne, and Drusilla (who was the third wife of the Roman governor Felix). The same Felix who had kept Paul in prison for two years.

He was probably well acquainted with who Jesus was and may have heard his brother-in-law and sister speak of their time listening to Paul. Yet King Agrippa said, "I'd like to hear the man myself." *Optional, read Acts 25:18-22*

What preconceived ideas might he have had both for and against Paul?

King Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." The next 23 verses were Paul's defense and testimony. He did not waste the opportunity to spread the gospel. Paul stretched his hand out and answered. This motion was a customary form of dignified speaking, designed to show the earnestness of the speaker. To be **earnest** is to show sincere and intense conviction. Paul showed his conviction in his speech and in his motions.

Paul said to Agrippa "you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies." Given what you have learned, what are some of those controversies?

Paul began by reminding those listening of his reputation:

- People had known him since he was a child.
- He was a Pharisee - one who followed the law.
- He opposed the name of Jesus.
- By authority of the chief priests he imprisoned believers of the Way.
- He voted to kill believers of the Way.
- He was obsessed with persecuting the believers and hunted them down in foreign cities.

In the eyes of the Jews, Pharisees and chief priests, what kind of reputation had Paul built before his conversion?

As we build our reputations it can become easy to want to impress the wrong people or to impress the right people for the wrong reasons. In your story, who have you sought to impress and later discovered it was not the best idea?

Paul said he had hope in what God promised their ancestors and that is why he was on trial. He acknowledged that the 12 tribes had hope and served God day and night. They were the same with their hope.

Then Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. The first thing Jesus said to him was, “why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

The word “**goad**” became a verb in the 1570s. It means to deliberately make someone angry or irritated, often causing them to react by doing something. An example would be “He was trying to goad her into a fight.”

A goad was originally a noun. It was a pointy stick or other tool used to prod something along, to make it move into action. It was sometimes up to 10 feet long with a sharp point which also made it a good weapon like Shamgar used it for when he struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. *Optional, read Judges 3:31*

Read *Ecclesiastes 12:11*. Paul would have known this verse. God was not trying to goad him into a fight. Based on what *Ecclesiastes* says, what was Jesus saying to Paul?

When you hear words from wise people, is it easy or hard to make changes in your life if their advice is contrary to your current thinking or acting?

Jesus told Paul, “I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me (*Acts 26:17-18*).”

How had Jesus rescued Paul up until this time? (Look back at old studies from our series or flip through *Acts* for an answer if you do not remember.)

Paul told Agrippa he was obedient to the vision and that all that happened was just as the law and prophets said it would.

Remember, Festus knew very little about Judaism, Christianity, or the Jewish culture. He acknowledged Paul had great learning. Why do you think Festus chose this point to interrupt Paul and call him insane?

Paul’s reaction included showing Festus respect. He said his words were true and reasonable. He knew Agrippa was familiar with what he was saying.

Agrippa asked Paul “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” Agrippa responded to Paul’s defense with what sounds like a sarcastic remark. But Paul didn’t react; instead he made a personal appeal which he hoped all his listeners would respond to.

Paul’s response is a good example for us as we tell others about God’s plan of salvation. When you earnestly tell your personal testimony, it can show the depth of your concern for others; which the Holy Spirit can use to soften the most hardened of hearts.

What has God been doing in your life that you can earnestly share with others?

King Agrippa, his sister Bernice and governor Festus left the room knowing Paul did not deserve death or prison. Agrippa said Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. They no longer have the authority to free him.

Putting it into practice:

Agrippa wisely chose to hear from Paul. He did not just believe what he had heard from others.

Like Agrippa, who do you need to get to know before coming to any conclusions? Are there any conversations you should be open to having?

On the other side is Paul - How do you act when accused of something unjustly? Is asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom and guidance in the moment a habit or something you need to put into practice?

Paul was unjustly accused. Yet, as Shannon said, he put all his hope in Jesus.

What would your life look like if ALL of your hope was in Jesus?

Frank challenged us to bring our burdens to the cross.

What burdens do you want to bring to Jesus? Name them and then give them to Jesus, asking Him to work in and through them.

Further Study

Agrippa asked Paul "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

Consider Agrippa's family background, what his sister Drusilla and his brother in law Felix may have already told him of their conversations with Paul. Consider that Agrippa was a Jew and knew what the prophets said.

If you became a Christian when you were older, was there a time you could identify with Agrippa? When the information was there but you were not ready to have faith and believe? Spend some time talking about this. Remembering can help us empathize and relate better to those we speak with.

Paul knew it was his responsibility to spread the good news of Jesus and the Holy Spirit's responsibility to convict people of their need for a Savior.

When you have told others about Jesus, have they ever told you they were not ready to believe yet? If so, how might remembering Paul's relentless sharing of the gospel regardless of people's decisions help encourage you to continue sharing the good news?

Scripture and experience make a compelling testimony . Every time you tell someone about Jesus you are helping to write a new chapter in the Christian church today. The story isn't over, it continues with us.

How might remembering your thinking and feeling before becoming a Christian help you share the gospel with others?

Pray

In *Acts 26:29*, Paul's heart is revealed in his words. He was more concerned for the salvation of strangers than for the removal of his own chains. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in you, to give you a burning desire to see others come to Jesus. A desire so strong that it overshadows your own problems.

Continue praying for your small group, our church and our pastors. As a small group ask God to show you opportunities this week to act out your following of Jesus.