

Exegetical Notes, Acts 25:23-26:32

“To Rome: The Fifth Stop - The Second Defense”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kyllies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Acts 25:23-26:32

(See Exegetical Notes on Acts 21:15-25:12. The Jews in Jerusalem had accused Paul of inciting trouble throughout the Roman world and in Jerusalem. They had brought charges against Paul before the Roman governor, Felix. Though none of the charges could be proven, Felix held Paul in jail for two years. When Felix was recalled to Rome, the new governor, Festus, heard the case against Paul, but still wanted to appease the Jews. He suggested that Paul return to Jerusalem to stand trial there. Paul refused, exercising his right to be heard in Rome in the Emperor’s Court. Festus ordered Paul to be taken to Rome for trial. But before his departure for Rome, Festus ordered Paul to make a second defense against the charges before King Agrippa.)

Verses 23-25

The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. ²⁴ Festus said: “King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ For I think it is unreasonable to send a prisoner on to Rome without specifying the charges against him.”

- The day following Agrippa’s arrival, Festus called a proceeding to order. He explained to Agrippa that Paul had been accused by the Jews of crimes which they believed should have led to Paul’s execution. The problem was that he found Paul not guilty of any crime which deserved the death

sentence. However, Paul, as a Roman citizen had exercised his right to be tried in the Emperor's Court in Rome. So, Festus had ordered that Paul go to Rome to be tried.

- But Festus explained that he did not know what to tell the officials in Rome about Paul. He did not know what the charges against Paul really were. He felt that it was unreasonable to send a prisoner to trial in Rome if he could not explain to Rome why the prisoner was being sent there.
- He was asking Agrippa, who was a Jew, to listen to Paul and tell him what to write to Rome about Paul.

Verses 26:1-8

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: ² "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ "The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. ⁷ This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. ⁸ Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?"

- With Festus' approval, Paul began his second defense against the charges brought against him by the Jews.
- He told Agrippa that he had lived his life as a Pharisee and that he was on trial because he believed that Jesus was the Messiah promised to Israel and that he believed Jesus had been raised from the dead.

Verses 9-11

⁹ "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord's people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. ¹¹ Many a time I went from

one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

- Paul explained that at first he had not believed that Jesus was the Messiah and that he had been dispatched by the High Priest to persecute Christians. He explained that he was “obsessed” with the destruction of Christianity.

Verses 12-20

“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. ¹³ About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

¹⁵ “Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“ ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ¹⁶ ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them ¹⁸ 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.’

¹⁹ “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven.

²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds.

- Paul told Agrippa about his conversion experience. See exegetical notes on Acts 9:1-31.
- Paul explained that he was obedient to Jesus’ calling to be his messenger to Jews and Gentiles.

Verses 21-23

²¹ That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me.

²² But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from

the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”

- Paul explained to Agrippa that it was because of his change of heart about Jesus and his speaking to Gentiles about coming to faith in Jesus that he was arrested by the Jews and treated as he was.
- He explained that he was guilty of nothing more than believing that Jesus was the fulfillment of what Israel’s prophets had promised.

Verses 24-27

At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”

²⁵ “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”

- Festus could not believe what Paul was saying. He thought Paul must be insane to believe that anyone could be raised from the dead.
- But Paul explained to him that those familiar with the writings of the Jews, as was Agrippa, would understand what he was saying.
- He asked Agrippa if he believed in what the prophets of Israel had promised.

Verses 28-32

²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

²⁹ Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

³⁰ The king rose, and with him the governor and Bernice and those sitting with them. ³¹ After they left the room, they began saying to one another, “This man is not doing anything that deserves death or imprisonment.”

³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

- Jokingly, Agrippa asked if Paul’s intention was to make him a Christian in one short speech.
- Paul said, he hoped that not only Agrippa but that everyone listening to him that day would turn to Jesus.

- The hearing was adjourned. Secretly, both Festus and Agrippa were convinced that Paul had done nothing which deserved the death sentence and that, had he not appealed to Rome, he could/should be set free.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *To Rome: The Fifth Stop – The Second Defense*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Interim Senior/Lead Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)