

Trial and Third Testimony

Study 26a: ROMAN FAIR PLAY (25:13-27)

25:13-15 Who is this Herod, & his consort Bernice?

(1) This Agrippa was a son of the Agrippa whose tragical end has been related in 12:20-24. At his father's death, as he was considered too young to succeed him on the throne, Judea was committed again to the government of procurators. He passed his early life at Rome. In A.D. 50, on the death of Herod, his uncle, he received the sovereignty of Chalcis, and in A.D. 53 the dominions of Philip and Lysanias (Luke 3:1), at which time he assumed the title of king. In the year A.D. 55, Nero added to his possessions a part of Galilee, and Perea. He died, after a reign of nearly fifty years, in A.D. 100. It will be observed that, although Luke in this passage styles Agrippa a king, he does not style him King of Judea; whereas, in speaking of his father (12:1,sq.), he not only applies to him this title, but mentions an instance of his exercise of the regal power at Jerusalem. **H.B. Hackett** *Acts* p.279



Titus, conqueror of Jerusalem, later 11th emperor. Not mentioned in the NT, but a significant player nonetheless

(2) Bernice, a sister of Drusilla (the wife of Felix), had a very shady record. Her life with her brother followed marriages to Marcus, the son of Alexander, and to Herod of Chalcis (who was her uncle). Because of the scandal of an incestuous relationship with Festus, Bernice persuaded Polemo, king of Cilicia, to marry her, but she was soon back with Agrippa. Later she lived with Titus, the son of emperor Vespasian. Because of her bad reputation among the Roman people, Titus was prevented from marrying her, and finally sent her from Rome, possibly when he became emperor. Yet she was very "religious," and even undertook a Nazarite vow in 66 to try to stop the mad rush of the Jews into war with Rome. **W.S. LaSor** *Church Alive* p.351

25:16-27 What impression of Roman justice do we take from Festus?

(3) Roman law demanded a fair trial in which an accused person could both hear the charges and evidence against himself and then make his defence. Whatever had happened under Felix's jurisdiction -- when there had in fact been precisely such a confrontation -- it was necessary for Festus to re-open the matter and satisfy himself that justice was done. **I. Howard Marshall** *Acts of the Apostles* p.388

(4) I wonder what was going on in Paul's mind. Was he looking around at all the pomp and ceremony? Was he identifying the great persons present? Was he wishing he had been able to get a new robe, to be a little better groomed, to have put on some perfume and gargled? After reading about his reactions to Athens, we know how silly these questions are! If the grandeur that was Greece had only moved him to anger because of its idolatry, this second-rate spectacle, put on for an incestuous king and queen, must have stirred up similar feelings! **W.S. LaSor** *op. cit.*, p.355



W. Sanford LaSor

(5) There is probably quiet humour in Luke's description of the "great pomp" with which they assembled; Luke had a very true sense of values, and knew that in his friend and teacher Paul there was a native greatness which did not need to be decked with the trappings of grandeur that surrounded his distinguished hearers. History has vindicated Luke's perspective. Most people nowadays who know anything about Agrippa and Bernice and Festus know of them as people who for a brief space of their lives crossed the path of Paul and heard him speak words which might have brought much blessing to them had they been disposed to pay serious heed to them. All these Very Important People would have been greatly surprised and not a little scandalized had they been able to foresee the relative estimates that later generations would form of them and of the handcuffed Jew who stood before them to plead his cause. **F.F. Bruce** *Acts* p.484

Study 26b: PAUL ADAPTS HIS APOLOGIA AGAIN (26:1-32)

26:1-5 Where does Paul begin his defense before Agrippa, in contrast with Felix and Festus? (24:11,12; 25:8)

(6) The apostle shews his thorough Judaism in blood, in education, and in feeling. As a patriot he bears witness to the Jews' zealous service of God, and he takes his own firm stand upon the national hope. **R.B. Rackham** *The Acts of the Apostles* p.463

26:6-8 Note that even while defending the gospel of the resurrection, Paul begins not with his own testimony

(7) The word *hope* is a key term in Paul's defence (23:6; 24:15; 26:6f.; 28:20). It refers to the believing expectation that God will fulfil the promises and prophecies made in the Old Testament, and for Paul it refers specifically to the belief that these promises have been and will be fulfilled in Jesus. **I.H. Marshall** *op. cit.*, p.391

26:9-12 After laying an Old Testament foundation (continuity), on what does Paul next lay stress (common ground)?

(8) No wonder Paul considered himself less than the least of all saints! To have to live with the memory of saints that you have put to death must be terrible. But there is something worse. And that is to remember that there were some whom you caused to curse the name of Jesus -- those whose faith was not strong enough and you made them deny their Saviour! Paul had to remember that he had been the Great Inquisitor. **William Sanford LaSor** *op. cit.*, p.358

26:13-18 Itemize new details in Paul's testimony

(9) In describing the scene on the Damascus road some particulars not given before are mentioned. The light was "above the brightness of the sun." They "all" fall to the ground. The voice spake to him "in the Hebrew tongue." It said: "It is hard for thee to kick against the

pricks." These particulars would go to show before Agrippa that in that sublime moment Paul was calm and self-possessed. He noted everything. He did not fall down in a swoon. All fell before the power of the light. It was not a delusion, not a mere vision. It was a sensible reality ... And here he gives utterance to a profound fact not mentioned before in the book, but one which Jesus made known in his teaching (Matt. xii. 26,29,30), that the world of mankind is in the power of Satan. Paul was commissioned to turn them from this power and its darkness (v.18). By implication this explains the Jews' inconsistent course against Paul. They were under the pall of satanic moral darkness. **J.M. Stifler** *The Acts of the Apostles* p.252

(10) When Christians were put to death, he gave his *vote against them*. This statement raises several difficulties of interpretation. First, it is probably to be taken literally, implying that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin ... in the present version there is an added comment: '*It hurts you to kick against the goads.*' These words reflect a proverbial way of speaking, attested in several Classical Greek writers, and especially in Euripides, *Bacchae*, 794f., where Pentheus, the opponent of the cult of Dionysus, is warned: 'You are a mortal, he is a god. If I were you I would control my rage and sacrifice to him, rather than kick against the pricks.' But the proverb was also known in Judaism (*Psalms of Solomon* 16:4), and Philo spoke of how conscience stabs at a man (*Decal.* 87). Bruce thinks that the point here is that Paul was struggling against his conscience, but Hanson (p.238) points out that in Greek literature the proverb refers to struggling against one's destiny; this seems the more likely interpretation. Opinions differ as to whether the words represent exactly what the heavenly voice said or depict graphically the consciousness of struggle in Paul's mind as he realized increasingly that he was fighting on the wrong side; commentators have often noted how what he saw of Stephen's death must have made an impression on him. **I. Howard Marshall** *op. cit.*, pp.393-395

(11) ... he uses familiar Greek sayings such as *kicking against the goad* and *doing things in a corner*. He speaks of God simply as *God*, not as 'the God of our fathers'; nor does he use the Jewish name of LORD (i.e. JEHOVAH). **R.B. Rackham** *op. cit.*, p.463

26:19-27 In appealing directly to Agrippa, where does Paul place apologetic weight?

(12) The account of Paul's conversion is given for the third time, with the emphasis falling on his call to be a witness and to bring Gentiles to salvation. It was in obedience to this call that Paul had preached to both Jews and Gentiles. And it was because of this activity that he had been arrested by the Jews. Yet nothing that Paul had said should have caused this opposition: Moses and the prophets had foretold both the suffering and the resurrection of the Messiah and also the proclamation of light to Jews and Gentiles alike. It is thus the

interpretation of the hope of Israel that is the point at issue. **I. Howard Marshall** *op. cit.*, p.391

26: 28-32 Again Luke stresses that Paul's defense has been successful (cf. 23:29; 25:25)

(13) What a magnificent speech! Not one wasted sentence! It wasn't a sermon; it was a testimony. But it had the force of a sermon. It wasn't a defense. Paul called it an "apology"; but in his day that meant something quite different from what it means today. It was a statement designed to show that you were right. By his simple testimony, Paul was showing that he was right in taking the message of salvation to the Gentiles. **William Sanford LaSor** *op. cit.*, p.360

(14) The effect of the scene as a whole is to emphasize the uprightness of Roman legal proceedings over against the partiality and injustice of the Jews, and to show that, when measured by Roman law, Paul's behaviour appeared to be free from any guilt; mad he might appear to be, but not a criminal. There is tremendous emphasis on the climax: 'This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.' Paul's actual defence consists of another account of his conversion experience, in which he stresses that his Christian faith is in line with his Jewish beliefs as a Pharisee and that his commission from the risen Lord is to offer salvation both to the Jews and also to the Gentiles. **I. Howard Marshall** *op. cit.*, p.386

(15) It is difficult to believe that Luke did not in some way secure entrance to this scene. The royal visitor liked display, and the audience chamber would have been crowded to his liking. The small details, those inconsiderable things that mark the report of the eyewitness, are all there: Paul's characteristic opening movement with his hand, like his rueful lifting of his manacled wrists at the end; the slightly pompous tone of the king, a little conscious of his importance; Paul's quite polished and courteous opening words; the rude outburst of Festus, carried right out of his depth by the apologia of the brilliant prisoner or else into realms of spiritual experience explicable to him only as a form of madness. Paul's gentle turning of the situation back to the king's attention and its implied rebuke of Festus is also remarkable. It all leads to the conclusion that here is found firsthand reporting in Luke's most brilliant manner. The slight variations in the account of the incident on the road to Damascus support the same view. Luke wrote as he heard and remembered, and no one account negates the other. Luke is mainly concerned to show that Agrippa, like Festus, could find no fault in the prisoner. Enlightened Jewish opinion coincided with the verdict of Roman law. Paul lays the stress where the occasion demanded it: the systematic attempt of the Jerusalem hierarchy to eliminate the Christians and the savage and fanatical support that policy had once received from the apostle himself in his unconverted days. **E.M. Blaiklock** *Acts: The Birth of the Church* p.257

Next: Acts 27: Lord of Lords -- & lands & lakes

The Suffering Servant and the Messiah

(16) First, the Messiah must *suffer*, i.e. die (1:3). But where is this attested by 'Moses and the prophets'? Paul as a Christian appears to presuppose the identification of the Messiah as the suffering Servant, but it is not certain whether this step had been taken by the Jews, and it may well be that they disputed it. Secondly, the Messiah would be the *first to rise from the dead* and would announce *light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles*. This reflects the Christian statement that Jesus was the first fruits of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20), and again it implies the identification of the Messiah as the Servant who would 'prolong his days' (Is. 53:10) and be a light to all peoples (Is. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3). It is clear,

therefore, that the crucial point was the equation of the Messiah with the suffering Servant and the identification of Jesus as the one who fulfilled this role. The Christian argument was probably based historically on the fact that Jesus had already taken this step; its scriptural basis may have been that Isaiah 61:1f. was understood as a reference to the Servant described in the preceding chapters of the book (cf. the similarity of thought with Is. 42:1-7) and also as a reference to the eschatological prophet like Moses who had messianic functions. By means of this 'bridge passage', therefore, the way was open to identify the suffering Servant and the Messiah. **I. Howard Marshall** *op. cit.*, p.398