

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for July 5, 2020

Paul Before His Conversion
Acts 26:1-11

This is the third time we read the story of Paul in Acts (cf. 9:1-30; 22:3-21).

Unlike the first two appearances before governors in Caesarea (Felix, Acts 24, and Festus, Acts 25), this appearance before King Agrippa (cf. Acts 9:15) was not technically a trial since the trial would be before Caesar in Rome (Acts 25:12). It was a hearing so that Festus could receive advice from Agrippa regarding how to communicate the case to the Roman Emperor.

1. Paul the appellee (26:1-3)

King Agrippa was in contrast to the two other governors that Paul appeared before, Felix and Festus. He was more knowledgeable of Judaism and was less inclined to appease the Jews.

Paul respectfully sought to “make a defense” (where our term “apologetics” is derived) of not only himself but of Christ as well.

2. Paul the accused (26:4-8)

Paul’s “own nation” (26:4) was the province of Cilicia, where his hometown of Tarsus was located in the southeast portion of modern day Turkey. He was well-known far beyond Jerusalem, which he added in view of his coming appeal to Caesar in Rome.

Paul identifies himself with Israel by using the pronoun “our” (25:5, 6, 7). This builds the point that Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Israel. Ironically, the Jews accused Paul for the hope of this very promise. The Jews did not accept Jesus because they failed to accept the promise of the Old Testament.

Agrippa, with a knowledge of the Jewish religion, would be aware that the Pharisees taught the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection of Jesus was consistent with the hope of the promise of God to their fathers. Apart from the resurrection of Christ, Paul’s story is meaningless, the Jewish promise is empty and our faith is worthless (1 Corinthians 15:14). Christ is the “firstfruits” of the resurrection from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20).

3. Paul the accuser (26:9-11)

His sin of persecution of the followers of Jesus was more than only an acknowledgement of his own guilt, it was a condemnation of the Jewish leadership. Paul’s repetition of “many” and “them” indicates the killing was spread well beyond the execution of Stephen in Acts 7:1-8:3. The Romans did not grant permission for the Jews to put anyone to death and Agrippa would not

have viewed this account of the Jewish leaders favorably. Paul's comment that he "received authority from the chief priests" emphasized their indictment.

As we see from Paul's participation in the death of Stephen in Acts 8:1-3, Paul's "vote" was not in an official capacity but simply meant he was in full support of the murder.

That believers were in the synagogue when they were punished further connected them to the Jewish religion. Paul "tried" to have them blaspheme Christ but failed, a testimony to the faith of those he persecuted.

Paul's transformed life served as evidence for the reality of Christ's resurrection. In the same way, our transformed life does also. Consider how Christ has transformed your life and how your testimony validates the truth of Christ.

Sharing about your changed life is effective in making a defense for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15). This is much more powerful when it comes from how you view yourself in your heart.