

Immediately after governor Festus arrived in Israel, the Jewish leaders sought to persuade him to let them have deal with Paul. As a favor to them, Festus asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem to be tried there. Paul knew of their previous plot to kill him and rightfully expected them to try again, so he used his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Rome. King Agrippa II and his sister Bernice had come to Caesarea to greet the new governor, Festus. Festus asked Agrippa to help him draft a letter to explain the charges against Paul. Paul was now to speak before this royal entourage.

¹ So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense: ² "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. Acts 16:1-3

Paul knows that Agrippa is familiar with Jewish customs and controversies. The reason he is being held is a controversy over Jesus as the Messiah, and especially controversial was the claim of resurrection from death. I imagine that Paul was excited to share his testimony with this king, for that is what Jesus had predicted. He is now watching that prediction come to pass (Acts 9:15ⁱ). So Paul pleaded for Agrippa to listen patiently.

⁴ "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews. Acts 26:4 Paul had been famous for his zeal for the Law. He was an up and coming shining star. In our culture someone in a similar role we might talk of as one day being our president. He was one of the best students of the leading rabbi, Gamliel. Perhaps the people were even hoping that as a Pharisee he would make some headway against the Sadducee party that held power.

⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee. Acts 26:5 In a previous chapter he said he was a Pharisee and the son of Pharisees (Acts 23:6ⁱⁱ). He took the laws of Moses as seriously as anyone could. One might argue that Essenes were stricter, but many discounted the movement's importance since they were not involved in the nation's political structure.

⁶ And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, ⁷ to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king! Acts 26:6-7 Now that Paul has given his background, the stage is set for his defense and his amazing testimony. Paul declared he was on trial because of his hope in the promise made by God to the patriarchs. Paul knows Agrippa is aware that the real issue between Paul and the Sanhedrin (Rulers of the Jews) is the interpretation of the prophetic passages that point to the Messiah.

Many commentators assume that Paul is talking about resurrection, as that is the subject of the next verse. However, the hope of the Jews in that age was the coming of

the Messiah and His kingdom. Scholars have tried to downplay that hope, but their point of view has been soundly refuted by other scholars such as Prof. Ronningⁱⁱⁱ. The very way their Scriptures were assembled pointed to His coming. The Gospels point again and again to the expectation (John 6:14^v). The people asked John the Baptist if he was *that* prophet, not just a prophet, but the One who was expected (John 1:21^v). That One was to be like Moses. They asked Jesus out right if He was the Messiah (Luke 7:19^{vi}). False messiahs abounded in the first century because of the expectation.

While resurrection is certainly found in the prophets, it is hard to find in the Pentateuch. That is why the Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, as they only used those books of Moses. So "the promise made by God to our fathers" refers to the blessing of the coming Messiah. God told Abraham the world would be blessed through his offspring (Genesis 12:3^{vii}). Paul points out in another place that the word "offspring" was singular, meaning one individual (Galatians 3:16^{viii}). The promise was repeated to Isaac (Genesis 26:4^{ix}) and Jacob (Genesis 28:14^x). Moses declared God was going to raise up from among the Jews one like himself to whom we must listen (Deuteronomy 18:15^{xi}). The hope of the Jews was in the promise of the coming Messiah who would usher in the kingdom of God. And Jesus did usher in the kingdom, for He reigns in every heart who receives Him as Lord. The gates of hell can't withstand the assault by this kingdom's army (Matthew 16:18^{xii}). The weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds (2 Corinthians 10:4^{xiii}).

⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead? Acts 26:8 If the hope was in the promise of a messiah, why did Paul jump to the question of resurrection? It's because the kingdom was to be an eternal kingdom with the King who reigns forever (Isaiah 9:7^{xiv}). Death had to be defeated to have eternal life. It was the natural question that would be asked if Jesus was the promised eternal King. That is one of the reasons that Jesus had to defeat death. And because He defeated death to reign forever, He promises that even if we die all who have accepted Him as Lord over this kingdom will have eternal life. (John 11:25^{xv}).

The hope in the promises to the fathers was the coming of the eternal king who reigns forever over subjects who have been given eternal life to ever live in the presence of God in His righteous realm (Daniel 2:44-45^{xvi}). That is the hope of every believer. That is why at the funeral yesterday it could be said that we grieve but not as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13^{xvii}).

Throughout the ages man has been frustrated with those in power. Injustice seems to never cease. The effects of sin are so devastating emotionally and physically but especially spiritually. The end of all evil is coming! This is our hope! Jesus, the Righteous One, the Wonderful Counselor is coming to take over. Every wrong will be righted. Every iniquity will be dealt with. Finally, justice will always prevail. What a hope! And we have assurance that it is ours because Jesus walked out of the grave! He conquered death, gave us the great commission, and ascended into heaven where He sits at God's right hand until every enemy is made His footstool (Psalm 110:1^{xviii}).

⁹ *"I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.* Acts 26:9-10 Paul described how convinced he was that Jesus was a false messiah and how zealously he persecuted the saints by imprisoning them. He even voted to have them executed. That is how convinced he was that Jesus was not the One. And why was that? Paul and many like him expected the reign of the Messiah to be a physical one in which He would drive out the Romans and reinstate the kingdom of David and expand it over the world. But there is a problem with that interpretation. How was this one to reign forever? How were his followers to live forever? And what about the prophecies of the suffering servant? Death had to be defeated. David predicted God would not let His Holy One be abandoned to the grave or see decay (Psalm 16:10^{xix}). Resurrection was necessary!

Paul goes on to describe his actions against those he now calls saints. ¹¹ *And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.* Acts 26:11 When Paul began attacking Christians, they were still meeting with the unbelieving Jews in the synagogues. Paul would go to those synagogues and ask which worshipers were followers of the Way. He would punish them and try to get them to say Jesus is God, which, at the time, he considered blasphemy. Then he could ask for a death sentence. He described his manner as "raging fury," even going to foreign cities to hunt them down. This makes his conversion even more amazing! We should be in awe of the way God works. This is the man who would give us the majority of our New Testament and explained Christian doctrine for the ages to come. He would be one of the greatest missionaries ever. His past would keep him humble as God mightily used him. I'm sure we wouldn't have picked Paul, but God knew what He was doing.

¹² *"In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.* Acts 26:12 He was the official representative sent by the very group that is now accusing him and wanting to put him to death. He was in his raging fury when he met Jesus and everything turned upside down.

¹³ *At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.* Acts 26:13 This is the third telling of Paul's testimony in the book of Acts (see 9:3-19 ; 22:6-11). We have seen before that the great light is a messianic title (Isaiah 9:2^{xx}; 49:6^{xxi}).

¹⁴ *And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'* Acts 26:14 We've seen that double use of a name when one is called by God. In this case it was Paul's name in Aramaic. We are reminded that to persecute believers in Jesus is to persecute Him. We are His body and His bride. We represent Him in the earth. He feels our pain (Hebrews 4:15^{xxii}). When others serve us they serve Him (Matthew 25:40^{xxiii}).

Paul tells a saying from Jesus that wasn't in the first two accounts. "It is hard for you to kick against the goads." A goad was pointed stick used to prod an animal to move. Sometimes the animal will kick back against the goad and injure itself. Paul had apparently been fighting the Holy Spirit's prodding. Some of you hear this morning may be kicking against the goads of the Holy Spirit. We only injure ourselves when we do that. How much better to yield and find God's blessing. This tells me that when people zealously do wrong while thinking they are doing right, it is likely that the Spirit of God is goading their conscience. It is a hard thing to keep resisting, but when you do, you can become cruelly calloused.

15 And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Acts 26:15 Some people are bothered by Messianic Jews calling Jesus by His Aramaic name, Yeshua. But apparently Jesus used it, so how can we complain?

16 But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, Acts 26:16 God appeared to Paul to make him a witness of the resurrection and to have him, the most unlikely of all people, to be His ambassador. He was called to be a servant of Jesus, and to tell of the times Jesus appeared to Him. Jesus appeared to him at his conversion. He appeared to Paul in prison and told him he would go to Rome (23:11^{xxiv}). He probably appeared in the revelation of the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:1-4^{xxv}). And Jesus appeared to Paul before the shipwreck we will read about in the next chapter (Acts 27:23^{xxvi}). Every appearance was a reminder that Jesus was alive and had conquered death. But the phrase in the verse is "things in which you have seen me." So it was not only the resurrected Jesus, but those things in which Paul sees Him, in the Word, in the direction of the Holy Spirit, in the body of Christ, and in divine circumstances.

I don't want to overlook the command to "stand upon your feet!" God was about to commission Paul. The same thing was said to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 2:1-3. *1 And he said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you."² And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me.³ And he said to me, "Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.* Paul's call was similar to that of Ezekiel and began with the same command. Get up, for I am sending you. If you hear the call to stand on your feet, look out! But remember, it was the Spirit in Ezekiel and Paul who was fulfilling God's command to them. There was an intentional similarity with the call of prophets for Paul was delivering the Word of the Lord to those to whom he was sent, as was also true of the other apostles after the resurrection (John 20:21^{xxvii}).

*17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you
18 to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'* Acts 26:17-18 This account is unique from the others

in that Paul told of the promise to be delivered from both Jews and Gentiles (Jeremiah 1:8^{xxviii}). We have seen that deliverance does not mean he would not suffer, but that God would keep him through it all until his mission was completed.

These verses also give us a fuller account of his mission. It is our mission as well. By sharing the Gospel we open the eyes of those who are in darkness and turn them to the light, away from the power of Satan to God. And the reason we do this is so that they can enter that kingdom of God by receiving forgiveness of sins. When they do, they join us as sanctified souls through faith in Jesus. This is one reason the Jews were so upset. Paul was saying the Gentile converts were sons and daughters of God's kingdom because of what Jesus did rather than through obeying the law. The abuse of the law was what gave those leaders power, influence, and wealth.

This is an important point that Paul emphasizes in his letters. Sanctification is not something we attain by hard work so that we might please God. We are sanctified in God's sight because of what Jesus has done (Hebrews 10:10^{xxix}). We can't give enough money, attend church enough, do enough good deeds, or do anything to become holy in God's sight. The only way to be sanctified is by faith in what Jesus has done for us. Then His Spirit fills us and brings forth fruit in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23^{xxx}).

This was Paul's gospel to King Agrippa. It was a powerful story of total transformation. Some would suggest that Paul's conversion surely has some natural explanation. Perhaps a bright meteor passed at the very moment an earthquake shook knocking the group to the ground and Paul suddenly had cataracts and hallucinated due to dehydration, and saw the face of his enemy, Jesus, telling him to go tell people he disliked, the Gentiles, that He had risen from death. It takes more faith to believe that than to believe Paul is telling us exactly what took place.

We will continue the narrative next week and see how the king responded, but you are welcome to read ahead. How have you responded? What will you do with the testimony of Paul who hated Jesus and His followers, but saw the risen Jesus multiple times and calls us to enter the kingdom of God by believing Jesus' sacrifice is sufficient to pay your sin debt in full? Will you then let Him be the king reigning in your heart?

Questions

- 1 Why was Paul before Agrippa II?
- 2 Why was Paul glad to give him his defense?
- 3 Who was Paul before his conversion?
- 4 What had he done to Christians?
- 5 What was the promise he hoped in?
- 6 How was the promise related to resurrection?
- 7 What two new things are shared in this account?
- 8 What is significant about the command to rise and stand on his feet?
- 9 What is Paul's gospel?
- 10 Is it possible Paul's conversion was a natural event? (See JNTC by Stern p. 317)

ⁱ **Acts 9:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

ⁱⁱ **Acts 23:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial."

ⁱⁱⁱ See Messianic Hope by John Ronning

^{iv} **John 6:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

^v **John 1:21 (ESV)**

²¹ And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."

^{vi} **Luke 7:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"

^{vii} **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

^{viii} **Galatians 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

^{ix} **Genesis 26:4 (ESV)**

⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

^x **Genesis 28:14 (ESV)**

¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

^{xi} **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

^{xii} **Matthew 16:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

^{xiii} **Deuteronomy 18:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—

^{xiv} **Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

^{xv} **John 11:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,

^{xvi} **Daniel 2:44-45 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,

⁴⁵ just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces

the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.”

^{xvii} **1 Thessalonians 4:13 (ESV)**

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

^{xviii} **Psalms 110:1 (ESV)**

¹ The LORD says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.”

^{xix} **Psalms 16:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

^{xx} **Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)**

² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

^{xxi} **Isaiah 49:6 (ESV)**

⁶ he says: “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

^{xxii} **Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 25:40 (ESV)**

⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

^{xxiv} **Acts 23:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.”

^{xxv} **2 Corinthians 12:1-4 (ESV)**

¹ I must go on boasting. Though there is nothing to be gained by it, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— ⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

^{xxvi} **Acts 27:23 (ESV)**

²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship,

^{xxvii} **John 20:21 (ESV)**

²¹ Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”

^{xxviii} **Jeremiah 1:8 (ESV)**

⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.”

^{xxix} **Hebrews 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

^{xxx} **Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV)**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.