

violently opposed to them that I even chased them down in foreign cities.

¹² "One day I was on such a mission to Damascus, armed with the authority and commission of the leading priests. ¹³ About noon, Your Majesty, as I was on the road, a light from heaven brighter than the sun shone down on me and my companions. ¹⁴ We all fell down, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will.'

¹⁵ "'Who are you, lord?' I asked.

"And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting. ¹⁶ Now get to your feet! For I have appeared to you to appoint you as my servant and witness. You are to tell the world what you have seen and what I will show you in the future. ¹⁷ And I will rescue you from both your own people and the Gentiles. Yes, I am sending you to the Gentiles ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me.'

8. Discussion: (a) Describe the various ways Paul's life was changed when he became a follower of Jesus. (b) [Note: An *apostle* is a person who is commissioned to represent the sender—much like an ambassador.] When Jesus commissioned Paul as an apostle, what new instructions did Jesus give Paul? (c) Jesus told his followers: "Go and make disciples of all nations. . . ." (See Mt. 28:19) How does this command apply to us today? How and where are we to go with the message?

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An Interactive Life Application Bible Study of the Acts of the Apostles for Small Groups

Key: Blue = New Testament Red = Words of Jesus

Green = Old Testament Quotes

Lesson 31

1. Background: In lesson 30 Paul was given an opportunity to defend himself before the Roman Governor Felix and his wife, Drusilla. During a delay in the trial, the governorship passed from Felix to Festus.

Acts 25:9-22 Then Festus, wanting to please the Jews, asked [Paul], "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there?"

¹⁰ But Paul replied, "No! This is the official Roman court, so I ought to be tried right here. You know very well I am not guilty of harming the Jews. ¹¹ If I have done something worthy of death, I don't refuse to die. But if I am innocent, no one has a right to turn me over to these men to kill me. I appeal to Caesar!"

¹² Festus conferred with his advisers and then replied, "Very well! You have appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar you will go!"

¹³ A few days later King Agrippa arrived with his sister, Bernice, to pay their respects to Festus. ¹⁴ During their stay of several days, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. "There is a prisoner here," he told him, "whose case was left for me by Felix. ¹⁵ When I was in Jerusalem, the leading priests and Jewish elders pressed charges against him and asked me to condemn him. ¹⁶ I pointed out to them that Roman law does not convict people without a trial. They must be given an opportunity to confront their accusers and defend themselves.

¹⁷ "When his accusers came here for the trial, I didn't delay. I called the case the very next day and ordered Paul brought in. ¹⁸ But the accusations made against him weren't any of the crimes I expected. ¹⁹ Instead, it was something about their religion and a dead man named

Jesus, who Paul insists is alive. ²⁰ I was at a loss to know how to investigate these things, so I asked him whether he would be willing to stand trial on these charges in Jerusalem. ²¹ But Paul appealed to have his case decided by the emperor. So I ordered that he be held in custody until I could arrange to send him to Caesar."

²² "I'd like to hear the man myself," Agrippa said.

And Festus replied, "You will—tomorrow!"

2. Discussion: (a) Why did the Jews try to get the Roman Governor Festus to send Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem? (b) Where was Paul's trial before Festus held? (c) When Paul was given opportunity to be tried in Jerusalem, how did he answer and how did Festus respond? (d) Why do you think King Agrippa wanted to hear directly from Paul?

3. Festus introduces Paul to Governor Agrippa.

Acts 25:23-27 So the next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived at the auditorium with great pomp, accompanied by military officers and prominent men of the city. Festus ordered that Paul be brought in. ²⁴ Then Festus said, "King Agrippa and all who are here, this is the man whose death is demanded by all the Jews, both here and in Jerusalem. ²⁵ But in my opinion he has done nothing deserving death. However, since he appealed his case to the emperor, I have decided to send him to Rome.

²⁶ "But what shall I write the emperor? For there is no clear charge against him. So I have brought him before all of you, and especially you, King Agrippa, so that after we examine him, I might have something to write. ²⁷ For it makes no sense to send a prisoner to the emperor without specifying the charges against him!"

4. Discussion: (a) Based upon this account, how do you picture Agrippa and Bernice in your mind? (b) Why did Festus want to have Paul appear before King Agrippa?

5. Paul Speaks to Agrippa.

Acts 26:1-8 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You may speak in your defense."

So Paul, gesturing with his hand, started his defense: ² "I am fortunate, King Agrippa, that you are the one hearing my defense today against all these accusations made by the Jewish leaders, ³ for I know you are an expert on all Jewish customs and controversies. Now please listen to me patiently!

⁴ "As the Jewish leaders are well aware, I was given a thorough Jewish training from my earliest childhood among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵ If they would admit it, they know that I have been a member of the Pharisees, the strictest sect of our religion. ⁶ Now I am on trial because of my hope in the fulfillment of God's promise to our ancestors. ⁷ In fact, that is why the twelve tribes of Israel zealously worship God night and day, and they share the same hope I have. Yet, Your Majesty, they accuse me for having this hope! ⁸ Why does it seem incredible to any of you that God can raise the dead?

6. Discussion: (a) Why did Paul begin his defense by stating that he was fortunate to be presenting his case to King Agrippa? (b) Why did Paul say that his critics should have known his background and should have taken that into consideration? (c) What hope was Paul speaking of? (d) If Paul's hope is your hope, why is it so important?

7. Paul continues his defense before King Agrippa.

Acts 26:9-18 "I used to believe that I ought to do everything I could to oppose the very name of Jesus the Nazarene. ¹⁰ Indeed, I did just that in Jerusalem. Authorized by the leading priests, I caused many believers there to be sent to prison. And I cast my vote against them when they were condemned to death. ¹¹ Many times I had them punished in the synagogues to get them to curse Jesus. I was so