

THE BOOK OF ACTS | GOD'S REVELATION OF TRANSITION

SESSION 76 | ACTS 26:1-18

ACTS 26:1-8 | PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA: PART 1 - PAUL'S INTRODUCTION

- Verses 1-3 –
 - Assuming that Agrippa was anything like his grandfather, he indeed was an **expert in all customs and questions which are among Jews**. The word **customs** is εθος [ethos].
 - The Herodian dynasty was originally Idumean, but converted to Judaism and held to it scrupulously...when it benefited them politically.
- Verses 6-7 –
 - As Paul has consistently done, he brings the issue down to *resurrection*. Notice that he never brings it to the issue of law-abiding, unless he is defending himself, explaining that he is law-abiding. Those who view Paul as *not* observing Torah misunderstand him.
 - Note that Paul speaks of **our twelve tribes**. It is also a misunderstanding to believe that ten of the tribes were lost. The northern Kingdom fell and was not re-formed, but the tribes existed then (and now).
- Verse 8 –
 - Paul can speak directly to Agrippa this way, because he would have (at least publically) taken a pro-resurrection position.
 - Paul will use the faith position of Agrippa, even if that position is purely political.

. ACTS 26:9-23 | PAUL BEFORE AGRIPPA: PART 2 - PAUL'S TESTIMONY

As Paul gives his testimony, we may expect (because theologians have predisposed us to do so), that Paul will explain that all people are now saved by grace through faith and that he is being charged by the Jews for undermining their religion with this new teaching. However, if this is our expectation, it is not met in Paul's testimony.

- Verse 9 –
 - Paul begins by stating his *starting point*: he worked **against Jesus of Nazareth**. While it is not necessarily so, an argument from one who once held a different position is often one of the most persuasive.
 - Such an argument often understands fully the former position and has a keen insight on the issues that caused the person to change their mind.
- Verse 10 –
 - Paul continues to explain his former position, and in doing so, mentions the **saints** whom he formerly persecuted.
 - Because the word **saints** is used 95 times in the Bible, it is important for us to understand the identity of this group.
 - One of the most important principles of Bible interpretation is to let the *easy* passages serve as the foundation for interpretation of more difficult passages. In this passage, we easily know that **saints** were Jews who believed that Jesus was Messiah and had risen from the dead.
 - While this does not prove that there are not others in the Bible who are saints, it does give us a simple working definition of saints that we can use as a starting point in interpretation of more challenging passages.
- Verses 11-12 –

- Notice that he **punished them oft in every synagogue**, not in a “church” or a separate assembly, for no such thing existed at the time. These **saints** were fully-observant Jews meeting at the Temple and within their synagogues.
- The argument the Jews (like Saul) had against them was *not* that they were failing to abide by the law, but that they believed Jesus to be risen from the dead and Messiah.
- Paul, at the time, had full **authority and commission from the chief priests**, yet more evidence that he was “one of them.”
- Verses 13-14 –
 - This is now the third time that Paul has given his Damascus road testimony.
 - This is the first time that Paul mentioned that the **voice speaking to me was in the Hebrew tongue** (though we could have speculated such). The voice calls to him in his pre-mystery name, **Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?**
 - We also hear for the first time that the voice also said, ***it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks***. This is likely a figure of speech meaning, “you’re not going to win if you run from Me.”
- Verses 15-17 –
 - In this third account, Paul blends the Ananias visit and the “on the road” visit together. Saul is instructed that he would be a **minister and a witness of the things which thou has seen** (presumably on the Damascus road experience) and **of those things in the which I will appear unto thee**. Though the *revelation of the mystery*, which would come later, could be read into this prophecy of revelation, there is no need to do so, for the Lord clearly revealed other things to Saul outside of *the mystery*, and Paul was a witness of those things also.
 - Paul was being delivered **from the people, and from the Gentiles**, and would also be sent to the Gentiles. This “deliverance” should not be taken to say that he was set free from Jews and sent to Gentiles. The simple meaning of the phrase is that God is choosing Saul from among the **people** (i.e.: the Jews) and from the Gentiles. God could have chosen any other individual, but he chose Saul of Tarsus.
 - The fact that Saul is being sent to the Gentiles is not indication that the mystery had come. We cannot give such affirmation until we actually *hear the mystery*, which does not happen until Acts 13:38-39. The Kingdom Gospel involved *the ends of the earth*, and Paul was being sent to the non-Jews to proclaim the Kingdom gospel. Nothing of the mystery would be known for many years (see Galatians 1-2 for this testimony).
- Verse 18 –
 - A rule of Biblical interpretation: *things that are similar are not the same*.
 - There are similarities in the Kingdom offer to the Gentiles and the grace offer to the Gentiles.
 - Both involve **forgiveness of sins**, for example (1 John 1:9 is strongly tied to the Kingdom offer, as well as Acts 3:19).
 - The Gentiles were given opportunity to become part of the Jewish people and thus have the hope of salvation through the Kingdom.
 - While these things are *similar* to the gospel of grace, the grace message is *not in this verse*. For proof, see verses 20 and 22, where works and Old Testament prophecies are shown to be embedded essentially within Saul’s message to the Gentiles. Note that Saul’s ministry as recorded in the book of Acts confirms this interpretation.