

Troubles, Trials & Opportunities

Acts 26

Trouble Ahead

On Paul's "third missionary journey," God warned him of the trouble ahead (20:22-23). On his way to Jerusalem, Paul was warned again and again. In Tyre, the disciples "urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem" (21:4).¹ In Caesarea, the prophet Agabus told Paul that he would be bound and handed over to the Gentiles (21:11). The people urged him not to go.

📖 But Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (21:13, *NIV*).

1. Paul's attitude may seem extreme. Is this reasonable?² Explain.

Trouble in Jerusalem

After arriving in Jerusalem, Paul went to the temple. Some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul and "stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, shouting... 'This is the man who teaches everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place'" (21:27-28, *NIV*).

The hostility toward Paul was persistent. Outside the temple, they tried to kill him (21:31). After hearing him speak, they shouted, "Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!" (22:22). Later, more than forty Jews plotted to kill him, taking a solemn oath (23:12-15). The Jews³ continued to testify against him and seek his death (24:1-9; 25:1-3, 25:24).

Trials & Hearings

The trouble in Jerusalem led to a series of hearings and trials:

- 👁️ Before the crowd in Jerusalem (21:40-22:21).⁴
- 👁️ Before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (22:30-23:10).
- 👁️ Before Governor Felix in Caesarea (24:1-23), and then prison.
- 👁️ Before Governor Festus in Caesarea (25:6-12), two years later.⁵
- 👁️ Before King Agrippa (and Festus) in Caesarea (25:23-26:32).



Each of these hearings provided Paul an opportunity to defend the truth and his actions, give his testimony, and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

Trial before Agrippa

After Paul's hearing before Festus, King Agrippa came to visit. Festus explained the situation to him. Then Agrippa said, "I would like to hear this man myself" (25:22). The next day, they brought Paul before Agrippa, Festus, and the assembly. Read Acts 26.

¹ Acts 21:4 says, 'Through the Spirit, they urged Paul not to go,' which seems to contradict Paul's earlier guidance (20:22). The simplest explanation is that the disciples in Tyre were led by the Spirit to foresee Paul's trouble, but it was their idea to urge him not to go. This would be similar to the disciples' urging after Agabus' prophecy (21:12).

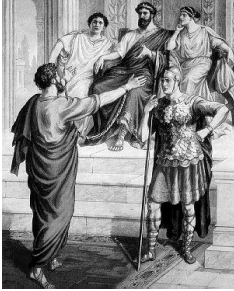
² The gospel is a matter of eternal life and eternal death! Furthermore, Paul's Lord is the Creator of the universe.

³ Paul was not opposed by *all* Jews. Many Christians, including Paul, were Jewish! But the greatest opposition came from the Jews, including the high priest and majority of chief priests and Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (23:2, 12-15; 24:1). Meanwhile, the civil authorities generally concluded that 'there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment' (23:29; cf. 25:25; 26:31). This is similar to the situation of Jesus (Luke 23:1-2, 4-5, 13-14, 22-24).

⁴ This was not really a hearing or trial, but an informal, impromptu speech immediately after Paul's arrest.

⁵ Actually, Paul did not get much of a hearing before Festus. Festus asked Paul if he was willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. Paul knew better, so he appealed to Caesar (25:9-11). The Lord's word would be fulfilled (23:11).

Paul's Speech

- ❑ **Respect to Listener** (26:2-3) – Paul showed respect to Agrippa.
 - ❑ **Reference to Common Ground** (26:4-5, 9-11)
 - ☑ Paul's opponents knew his background. He lived as a Pharisee (26:4-5). Like them, he was convinced that he ought to strongly oppose the name of Jesus. And he did! (26:9-11).
 - ☑ Paul was able to say, "I was like you!" But something changed.
 2. As a Christian, what "common ground"⁶ can you find with others who either disbelieve or oppose the Christian faith?⁷
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- ❑ **Reason for Change - Experiential** (26:12-18)
 - 👁 Saw a Light (26:13)
 - 👂 Heard a Voice (26:14-18) – Paul shared his testimony.
 3. In what ways today might people "see a light" and "hear a voice" that lead them to become followers of Jesus Christ?⁸
 - ❑ **Repentance/Obedience** (26:19-20)
 - ☑ Paul obeyed the voice he heard. And God's voice still goes out into the world. "He commands all people everywhere to repent (turn to Him)" (Acts 17:30).
 - ☑ Paul not only repented, he obeyed the Lord's commission to proclaim the gospel (26:17-18). He practiced what he preached. He proved his repentance by his deeds (26:20).
 - ❑ **Reason for Change - Rational** (26:6-8, 22-23, 26-27)
 - Paul started with "common ground" (the Old Testament Scriptures) and reasoned that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and hope.⁹
 - The Christian faith is reasonable!¹⁰ It can be rationally defended from different grounds.

Reactions & Paul's Responses

- 📖 Festus: "You are out of your mind, Paul!...Your great learning is driving you insane." (26:24)
- 📖 Paul: "I am not insane... What I am saying is true and reasonable." (26:25) Then Paul turned to Agrippa, who supposedly accepted part of the basis of Paul's argument (i.e., the prophets). If he were reasonable, he should confirm its validity (26:26). He was "put on the spot."
- 📖 Agrippa: "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"
- 📖 Paul: "Short time or long – I pray that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains." (26:29, NIV)

Reflection/Application

- Brothers & sisters, what "trials" are you facing that may provide opportunities for sharing or showing your faith? Using Paul's speech as a model, think about applying it in your sharing.
- If you do not believe, are you listening to Christians who share their reasons for believing? Ask questions and humbly consider the claim that the Christian faith is "true & reasonable."

⁶ Some 'common ground' can be used to build on, while other prior 'common ground' should be rejected. For example, Christians may build on certain principles of science and philosophy but reject naturalistic presuppositions.

⁷ Examples of common ground include bodies of knowledge (science, philosophy, etc.) and human experience.

⁸ In some way, every Christian is met by the 'Light of the world' (John 8:12) who still speaks through the Bible.

⁹ e.g. Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-10; 49:1-7; 52:13-53:12; 61:1-3. See *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by Josh McDowell.

¹⁰ If you question this statement, see Jay's "Can an Intelligent Person Believe in God?" on the ICF website.