

# Some Things “Almost” Proven

**Introduction.** In the last part of Acts, Paul returns to Jerusalem with the contribution for the saints that he’d been working on for years. When he arrives, he paid the expenses for four men who were taking a vow. At the end of the vow, Paul was accused of taking Trophimus (a Gentile) into the temple, which started an uproar.

Beginning at this point, Paul would make five speeches defending himself before religious and civil authorities in Jerusalem and Caesarea, culminating in his masterful defense before Agrippa: 1) The crowd in Jerusalem (22:1-21); 2) the Sanhedrin (23:1-10); 3) Felix (24:10-21); 4) Festus (25:8-11); and, 5) Agrippa (26:1-32). Paul’s final defense before heading to Rome is the longest and most comprehensive of all his defenses after his arrest.

After Paul makes his introductory remarks to Agrippa, he explains his early life as a faithful Jew and Pharisee. He then further admits that at one time he persecuted the followers of Jesus, but then Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus and commissioned him to be a minister and a witness of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Paul declared that he was obedient to the heavenly vision and then briefly summarized his defense. Festus thought he was mad but Agrippa was “almost” persuaded to become a Christian.

The “almost” conversion of King Agrippa is a heartbreaking account (Acts 26:26-28). However, there are some valuable lessons from this story concerning both Paul’s words and King Agrippa’s response. The following are four truths, proven by Paul’s encounter with Agrippa.

## ***I. God’s Works Are Evident***

- A. In the previous verses of Acts 26, Paul gave Agrippa his conversion account, and told him of the events that transpired concerning Jesus. Then, after being accused of being driven “mad” by “much learning,” Paul appeals to Agrippa by saying, “For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner” (v. 26).
- B. In other words, the works that God did through Jesus weren’t just tall tales made up by the apostle Paul and other New Testament writers. Furthermore, Paul’s conversion wasn’t made up either.
  1. These events were real and very obvious to anyone willing to accept the truth. Jesus was a real person, and His teachings, miracles, death, burial, and resurrection were all known by many.
  2. The works Jesus did through the apostle Paul’s conversion, along with countless others, were demonstrations of how powerfully God was working through the gospel to convince and convert mankind (Acts 2:22-23; 2 Corinthians 12:12). This was all carefully documented (Luke 1:1-4; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8). Nothing, including His teaching, was “done in a corner” or in secret (Matthew 5:1; 23:1; Luke 24:25; John 7:28, 37; 8:2, 20).
- C. Furthermore, nothing God does for the benefit of mankind is a secret (Job 12:22; Psalm 8:1; 97:6; Acts 14:17; 17:24-27; Romans 1:20). Anyone who would

deny God's power and His works would have to make a conscious effort to hide from what He has done. We are "without excuse."

## **II. The Old Testament is Useful for Conversion**

A. How many times have people deemed the Old Testament unnecessary to study when it's so beneficial for many uses? While we aren't under the Law of the Old Testament (Colossians 2:14-15); and while the New Testament does reveal the avenue by which man can be saved (Hebrews 9:14-15), the Old Testament is still useful for conversion. It accomplishes several important purposes:

1. It answers life's basic questions.
  - a) What is the origin of man and the universe? By inspiration, Moses said, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).
    - (1) Genesis 1 is completely harmonious with the laws of science.
    - (2) The popular evolutionary theory, palmed off as "fact," contradicts both science and Scripture.
  - b) What's my purpose here? By inspiration, Solomon stated, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13).
2. It reveals man's relationship to his God.
  - a) Man was created as a moral being with free will, accountable to his Creator (Genesis 1:27; 2:16-17; Romans 2:14-15).
  - b) When we choose to sin, we're separated from the fellowship of God (Isaiah 59:1-2; Ephesians 2:1, 12).
3. It explains the nature and attributes of God.
  - a) God is omniscient (Proverbs 5:21; 15:3; Isaiah 46:10)
  - b) God is omnipotent (Genesis 1:1-31; Job 42:2)
  - c) God is omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:23-24)
  - d) God is eternal and immutable (Psalm 90:2; Malachi 3:6)
  - e) God is holy (Isaiah 6:1-3; 57:15)
  - f) God is just (Psalm 145:17; Isaiah 45:21)
  - g) God is love (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 103:8; Isaiah 55:7; Jonah 4:2)
4. It has immeasurable evidential value.
  - a) The Old Testament contains predictive prophecy. The nature of Old Testament prophecy is threefold:
    - (1) Prophecy contains specific details, not vague assertions.
    - (2) Prophecy involves adequate timing. Predictions were uttered sometimes centuries before their fulfillment. This fact excludes the notion that the prophets made "educated guesses" by observing current events.
    - (3) Prophecy is fulfilled exactly. Prophetic statements don't merely resemble their historical fulfillment. Rather, fulfillments occurred in exact detail, corresponding to the specific declarations (cp. Isaiah 44:24-45:3).
  - b) These phenomena of Scripture are proofs of its divine origin.
    - (1) Liberal critics spurn predictive prophecy. Their antinaturalistic suppositions prevent them from considering the evidence. And so,

biblical prediction goes through a modernistic metamorphosis and turns into mere history.

- (2) For example, modernistic critics argue that the predictions of Daniel couldn't have been written by the prophet. Since they are so specific, they must be mere history. Concerning this kind of mishandling of scripture, Dr. Oswald T. Allis remarked: "Is it any wonder that massive volumes have to be written and oceans of ink spilled in the attempt to make the Bible say exactly the opposite of what it does say? Is it any wonder that the critics find it difficult to find a satisfactory and edifying explanation for what they believe to have been a deliberate falsification of history, a 'pious fraud'" (1972, 6)?
5. It magnified sin.
    - a) This is done in two ways. First, it showed sin to be "exceedingly sinful" (Romans 7:13). Sin was defined, described, and denounced. Second, it also proved that man can't keep a law-system perfectly (Romans 3:10, 23; Galatians 3:10).
    - b) Paul argued for the value of the Law, though he had been freed from it (1 Timothy 1:8-10; Romans 7:7).
    - c) The Old Testament provides an example of how God holds man accountable to a divine standard (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Hebrews 4:1-11; Jude 7). And, the magnification of sin led man to the irresistible conclusion that only God can provide a way of salvation.
  6. It furnishes the background for much of the New Testament.
    - a) The inspiration and the authority of the Scriptures is first developed in the Old Testament, along with the coming of the kingdom on the Earth.
    - b) New Testament language is explained by Old Testament language: "called," "offering," "promise," "seed," "found grace," "birthright," "circumcision," "redeem," "tabernacle," "priest," "sanctify," etc.
    - c) The New Testament mentions the Old Testament numerous times (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 3:18, 22-24; Galatians 3:24). New Testament books are saturated with Old Testament material: Matthew, Acts, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, James, and Revelation.
    - d) Much of the imagery in Revelation has roots in the apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament. Understanding the nature of the Old Testament language furnished the key for the early Christians to discern the signs of Revelation.
- B. Paul, in an effort to convert Agrippa, appealed to him from the Old Testament and its prophecies about the Christ: "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe" (v. 27). While we may teach someone how to be saved from the New Testament, it's pretty difficult to preach Christ without preaching the Old Testament and its prophecies about Him.
1. What better way to establish someone's faith in Jesus than by showing him the harmony of the prophecies of the Christ from the Old Testament, compared to the fulfillment of those prophecies in the New Testament?

2. We need to be teaching that Jesus was just as much the God of the Old Testament as He is the God of the New, for Jesus Himself said that, “before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58).

### **III. Faith Alone Can't Save**

- A. “Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe” (v. 27). Do you think that Paul, not only well educated but inspired by the Spirit of God, would say, “I know that you do believe” without being absolutely certain about this statement?
- B. Agrippa did believe, but sadly all that belief by itself couldn't make him a Christian. He still had to “become a Christian” (v. 28), which he “almost” did but in the end didn't (James 2:19-20). It can be proven over and over again: faith alone can't save, but faith plus obedience will (Hebrews 5:9; Romans 6:17-18; James 2:21-25). The grace of God is marvelous to have (1 Corinthians 15:10), but it doesn't remove my responsibility of action (Titus 2:11-12).
- C. Agrippa couldn't make up in faith what he lacked in obedient commitment to Jesus Christ. The same can be said for many today who believe but don't obey (Mark 16:16). And it can even be the case in our walk with God (James 2:14-16). Faith without works can come in many forms. Don't be deceived!

### **IV. Salvation is Man's Choice**

- A. “Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You almost persuade me to become a Christian’” (v. 28). A prominent doctrine of Calvinism teaches that man is saved by “Unconditional Election” — saved, not by his choice to “become a Christian,” but by God's “unconditional election” which He made before time began of all who would be saved or lost.
  1. Let's assume first of all that Agrippa was of the “elect” to be lost. Why would there be any need for him to be “persuaded”?
  2. On the other hand, let's assume he was part of the “elect” to be saved. Why go to the trouble of persuading him? Wouldn't he be fine either way?
- B. The fact was Agrippa, like every other soul that has lived long enough to be accountable, was singularly responsible for his decision to become a Christian. The grace of God and salvation in Christ is available to all who want to take it (Ezekiel 18:21). Agrippa was lost and had a chance to be saved and refused it. It's just that simple — but it's also that sad.

**Conclusion.** David Wells isn't a fan of the decades-long marketing approach that pretty much every church has followed. He says, “Much of it ... is replete with tricks, gadgets, gimmicks, and marketing ploys as it shamelessly adapts itself to our emptied-out, blinded, postmodern world.... There is too little about it that bespeaks the holiness of God. And without the vision for any reality of this holiness, the gospel becomes trivialized, life loses its depth, God becomes transformed into a product to be sold, faith into a recreational activity to be done, and the church into a club for the like-minded” (*Losing Our Virtue*, p. 180).

We've got to make sure that our preaching is just like the apostle Paul's, for that is the life-changing message God always intended. What's your decision? Will you

receive salvation offered by the grace of God through faith and obedience to the Bible, or will your story be like Agrippa's? As the song says, "Sad, sad, that bitter wail — almost — but lost!"

I am deeply indebted to Jonathan Glaesemann for the use of his material.