



Book of Acts

Chapter 26

Theme: Paul before Agrippa

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This speech, though in substance the same as that from the fortress stairs of Jerusalem (Ac 22:1–29), differs from it in being less directed to meet the charge of apostasy from the Jewish faith, and giving more enlarged views of his remarkable change and apostolic commission, and the divine support under which he was enabled to brave the hostility of his countrymen.¹

McGee Introduction: This testimony of Paul is not a defense of himself. It is a declaration of the gospel with the evident purpose of winning Agrippa and the others present to Christ. This is a dramatic scene, and this chapter is one of the greatest pieces of literature, either secular or inspired.

This chapter was marvelous to me even before I was saved. When I was a young man, I was connected with a little theater. You know that everybody at some time wants to be an actor, and I had the foolish notion that I could become one. The director suggested that I memorize chapter 26 of the Book of Acts. She didn't give me the Bible, but this chapter was printed in some other book and I memorized it from that. I must say that it has always had a tremendous effect upon me.²

Evangelism, Testimony—Paul stood in chains before Agrippa just as he stood before Felix to testify to God's grace in his life. See note on 24:10-21. Paul used this difficult situation to share and witness to what God had done in his life through Jesus Christ. Sharing what Jesus means in one's life is always a powerful, persuasive testimony. The apostle urged the powerful King to become a Christian. Through this encounter, all the elements of an effective testimony are seen: (1) tell of Jesus Christ regardless of the difficulties; (2) urge the hearers to receive Christ whether they respond or not; and (3) press on no matter what others think or say. God will honor such a testimony.³

Chuck Smith: Paul was rescued by Lysias, the captain of the Roman guard from the mob that was attempting to beat him to death in Jerusalem on the temple mount. He was taken into protective custody by the Roman government and sent under special guard to Caesarea for his protection, where he appeared before the governor Felix who held Paul a prisoner for two years, more or less, as a political pawn. When Festus became the governor in Felix's place, who had been replaced by the Roman Empire because of his corruption, Festus served Paul's case and began to give Paul the run-around saying, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and answer these charges?" Paul said, "I appeal to Caesar." Being a Roman citizen, Festus was obliged to send him to Caesar, but he had a problem. The problem was this: he could not really send him to Caesar without legitimate charges being made against him, and there were no legitimate charges. And so, he explained his problem to Herod Agrippa who came to pay a courtesy visit, and Herod

¹Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., Fausset, A. R., Brown, D., & Brown, D. (1997). *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*. On spine: Critical and explanatory commentary. (Ac 26:1). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:624). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³Disciple's Study Bible

Agrippa said, "Well, I will hear his case." The whole idea now of Herod Agrippa hearing Paul's case is that there might be made formal charges to send with Paul as he made his appeal unto Caesar.

And so, as we get into Chapter 26, we find that Herod Agrippa, who is the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who ordered the murder of the children at the time of the birth of Christ, who was the grand-nephew of Herod Antipas, who had ordered the death of John the Baptist, the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had put James to death and had imprisoned Peter. Herod Agrippa II, and Paul is now standing before him there in Caesarea to declare his cause, and the idea is that they might formulate charges against him to send with him as he goes to Rome.⁴

"There are things we can do that will help us to consistently have the Spirit of the Lord in our homes, especially during scripture reading time. And if we have that Spirit, both the parents and children can be touched, blessed, and changed—and each family member can be strengthened every day we read the words of the Lord together... *If you use spiritual examples from your own life*, you will invite the Spirit into your home and will help bring about the conversion of all present.

"We see a classic example of this principle—and its power—in Paul's testimony to King Agrippa." (*Searching the Scriptures: Bringing Power to Your Personal and Family Study*, 204-9, emphasis added)⁵

Acts 26:1

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

[Then Paul stretched forth the hand] Ancient orators sometimes stood with the right hand outstretched.⁶

Then Agrippa said to Paul: Remember Paul stands before the man whose great-grandfather had tried to kill Jesus as a baby; his grandfather had John the Baptist beheaded; his father had martyred the first apostle, James. This was a man whose family history made him unlikely to receive Paul warmly!

Paul *is* happy to speak before Agrippa. First, because he is pleased to have the evidence of his case examined closely by the highest officials, but also because he is pleased to preach the gospel to kings! This was a partial fulfillment of what the Lord promised Paul at his conversion: *Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.* (Acts 9:15)

Clarke: Then Paul stretched forth the hand—This act, as we have already seen on Acts 21:40, was merely to gain attention; it was no rhetorical flourish, nor designed for one. From knowing, partly by descriptions, and partly by ancient statues, how orators and

⁴ Chuck Smith, Pastor, Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, CA

⁵ <http://www.gospeldoctrine.com/NewTestament/ntindex.html>

⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

others who address a concourse of people stood, we can easily conceive the attitude of St. Paul. When the right hand was stretched out, the left remained under the cloak, which being thrown off the right shoulder, to give the arm the fuller liberty, it then rested on the left: under these circumstances, the hand could be stretched out gracefully, but was confined to no one attitude, though the third and fourth fingers were generally clenched.⁷

Barnes: Then Paul stretched forth the hand. Acts 21:40. This was the usual posture of orators or public speakers. The ancient statues are commonly made in this way, with the right hand extended. The dress of the ancients favoured this. The long and loose robe, or outer garment, was fastened usually with a hook or clasp on the right shoulder, and thus left the arm at full liberty.⁸

BBC: On receiving permission from the judge (in this case, unofficially Agrippa), one could speak. Paul's hand is stretched forth in customary rhetorical style; gestures were an important part of ancient training in public speaking.⁹

Barnes: And answered for himself. It cannot be supposed that Paul expected that his defence would be attended with a release from confinement; for he had himself appealed to the Roman emperor, Acts 25:11. This design in speaking before Agrippa was, doubtless,

- (1.) to vindicate his character, and obtain Agrippa's attestation to his innocence, that thus he might allay the anger of: the Jews;
- (2.) to obtain a correct representation of the case to the emperor, as Festus had desired this, in order that Agrippa might enable him to make a fair statement of the case, (Acts 25:26,27;) and,
- (3.) to defend his own conversion, and the truth of Christianity, and to preach the gospel in the hearing of Agrippa and the attendants, with a hope that their minds might be improved by the truth, and that they might be converted to God.

BKC: Paul had already made his defense to Festus (25:6-12), so now the apostle directed his address to Agrippa. Furthermore, the purpose of this speech was for Agrippa's information.

The motioning of the hand was evidently after the manner of orators of that time. This speech has a number of parts: (1) complimentary remarks (26:2-3), (2) Paul's early life in Judaism (vv. 4-8), (3) his zeal in opposing Christianity (vv. 9-11), (4) his conversion and commission (vv. 12-18), (5) his ministry (vv. 19-23), (6) his verbal jousts with Festus and Agrippa (vv. 24-29).¹⁰

Sha'ul **began his defense**, not in a judicial sense, for he is not being tried before Herod Agrippa II (see 25:13). Since he has already appealed to Caesar (25:11), it is before him

⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the New Testament

⁸ Barnes' Notes on the New Testament

⁹ Bible Background Commentary, New Testament

vv. verses

¹⁰Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:424). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

that he will be making a formal defense in court. Rather, Sha'ul is “defending” his whole life, his Gospel, his Lord. From Sha'ul's (and Luke's) viewpoint he is doing even more than that: he is making use of an extraordinary opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to yet another kind of audience, the ruling elite (compare Lk 21:12–15). His hearers see him as a prisoner, but he sees himself as a bringer of Good News. That Sha'ul's picture of the situation is correct is seen in the responses of Festus (v. 24) and Agrippa (vv. 25–29), for they relate not to Sha'ul's guilt or innocence but to the Gospel message.

Sha'ul's speech may be outlined thus: (1) Introduction (vv. 2–3), (2) Sha'ul the zealous Pharisee (vv.4–8), (3) Sha'ul the zealous persecutor of Messianic Jews (vv. 9–11), (4) Sha'ul confronted by Yeshua the Messiah (vv. 12–18), (5) Sha'ul the zealous preacher of Yeshua (vv. 19–20), (6) Sha'ul's arrest by zealous unbelieving Jews (v. 21), (7) Sha'ul focussing his own zeal on the I-thou encounter of the moment, as he offers his hearers salvation through trusting Yeshua the Messiah (vv. 22–23, 25–27, 29). The pivot-point in Sha'ul's life, as well as in his speech, is part (4), his confrontation by Yeshua. The pivot in the lives of his hearers is part (7), his present proclamation of the Gospel, with its choice between obeying God or not. Sha'ul's zeal, his singleminded pursuit of his purpose in life, contrasts with the effete and indifferent dilettantism of the Roman aristocrats, as portrayed in chapter 25 and in vv. 24–32 below.¹¹

McGee: The appearance of Paul before Agrippa is, in my judgment, the high point in the entire ministry of this apostle. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy that he should appear before kings and rulers. Undoubtedly it was God's will that he should come before King Agrippa. I have already indicated that this made a profound impression on me when I memorized it. I must confess that it had some effect upon my decision later on to study for the ministry.

There are several features about this chapter that we ought to note before we get into Paul's message before King Agrippa. First of all, I want to make it clear again that Paul is not on trial. This is not a court trial. Paul is not making a defense before Agrippa. He is preaching the gospel. In view of the fact that this great apostle had appealed to Caesar, not even King Agrippa could condemn him, and he is certainly out of the hands of Governor Festus, as the final verse of this chapter confirms: “Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar” (v. 32). They no longer had the authority to condemn him. Neither could they set him free. They are helpless. So Paul is not attempting to make a defense. Rather he is trying to win these men for Christ.

This was not a trial, but it was a public appearance of Paul before King Agrippa and the court so that they might learn firsthand from the apostle what “that way” really is. You see, everyone was talking about *The Way*. Someone would ask another, “Say, have you heard this new thing about *The Way*?” The other would reply “Well, I have heard some things about it. It is something new going around. What's it all about?” I would imagine that even Festus and Agrippa had some sort of exchange like that. Agrippa would have said, “I've been hearing about this but I'd like to know more about it. We ought to get it from an expert.” Therefore they have this public appearance to explain *The*

¹¹Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:1). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Way. I think this was one of the most splendid opportunities that any minister ever had to preach Christ. There has never again been an opportunity quite like this.

This was an occasion filled with pagan pomp and pageantry. It was a state function filled with fanfare and the blowing of trumpets. There was the tapestry and tinsel. The function was attended by all the prominent personages of that section and the prestige of Rome. It must have been a scramble for people to be able to attend this occasion. The purple of Agrippa and the pearls of Bernice were in evidence. There were the gold braid and the brass hats of the Roman Empire. The elect and the elite, the intelligentsia and the sophisticates had all turned out in full regalia. There would be the pride and ostentation and the dignity and display which only Rome could put on parade in that day.

Notice again how Dr. Luke records it: "And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth" (Acts 25:23).

This stirs the imagination. I trust that somehow we can picture this scene before us as we listen to the message of Paul. This elaborate gathering is for just one purpose: to hear from a notable prisoner by the name of Paul. He is the one who has already been over the greater part of the Roman Empire, certainly the eastern part of it, preaching *The Way*.

When the door of that great throne room swings open, a prisoner in chains is ushered into this colorful scene. He is dressed in the garb of a prisoner, and he is chained to two guards. He is unimpressive in his personal appearance. This is the man who teaches and preaches the death, the burial, and the resurrection of Christ for men because they are sinners and need a Savior. This is the one who can speak with authority about the new *Way*. And they will listen to this man because he knows how to speak and because he is an intelligent man. The light of heaven is on his face. He is no longer Saul of Tarsus but Paul the apostle. What a contrast he is to that gay, giddy crowd of nobility gathered there!

Festus told how the Jews had tried to kill Paul. My, how they hated him, and yet they had no real charge against him. That whole crowd looked at Paul, and I rather think that he looked over the whole crowd.

Paul is not a scintillating personality. Some liberal has called him, "Pestiferous Paul." Well, you can call him that if you want to. Maybe in the Roman Empire that is what they thought of him. Remember that the Lord Jesus had said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). This man is true to the Lord Jesus, so the world will hate him.

I do not think, frankly, that Paul was physically attractive. Yet he had the dynamic kind of attraction which the grace of God gives to a man. He was energized by the Holy Spirit. Oh, that you and I might be able to say with Paul, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Now let's turn our eyes from the glitter and the glamour of the occasion to the two men who stand out in this assembly: Agrippa and Paul. What a contrast! One of them is in purple, the other is in prison garb. One is on a throne, the other is in shackles. One wears a crown, the other is in chains. Agrippa is a king, but in the slavery of sin. Paul is a chained prisoner, rejoicing in the freedom of sins forgiven and liberty in Christ. Agrippa

is an earthly king who could not free Paul nor himself. Paul is an ambassador of the King who had freed him and who could free Agrippa from the damning effects of sin.

We need to remember that King Agrippa was a member of the family of Herod. He belonged to the rottenest family that I know anything about. It is the worst family that is mentioned in the Bible. I think old Ahab and Jezebel were like Sunday school kids compared to the Herod family. You know the old bromide about giving the Devil his due. Well, let's give the Herods their due. Agrippa was an intelligent man and a great man in many respects in spite of his background. He knew the Mosaic Law, that is, he knew the letter of it. Paul rejoiced in this because it gave him an opportunity to speak to a man who was instructed and who would understand the nature of the charges.

As I have said before, I can't help but believe that Paul was getting a little impatient during those two years of incarceration. He had appeared before the mob in Jerusalem, before the captain, then before Felix (publicly, then privately many times), then he appeared before Festus. Now he must appear before Agrippa. None of these other men fully understood the background of the charges against Paul. Neither did they understand the gospel. This is true even of the Roman captain in Jerusalem. It is amazing that these people could have lived in that area, been exposed to Christians, have heard the apostle Paul, and still not really have understood. Yet that was the situation.

Paul's plea to Agrippa to turn to Christ is magnificent. It is logical and it is intelligent. Rather than being a defense, it is a declaration of the gospel.¹²

Acts 26:2

I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:

[happy] (Dake) Greek: *makarios* (GSN-3107). Translated "happy" only 6 times (John 13:17; Acts 26:2; Romans 14:22; 1 Cor. 7:40; 1 Peter 3:14; 1 Peter 4:14), and "blessed" 43 times (Matthew 5:3-11; Matthew 11:6; Matthew 13:16; Matthew 16:17; Matthew 24:46; Luke 1:45; Luke 6:20-22; Luke 7:23; Luke 10:23; Luke 11:27-28; Luke 12:37-43; Luke 14:14-15; Luke 23:29; John 20:29; Acts 20:35; Romans 4:7-8; 1 Tim. 1:11; 1 Tim. 6:15; Titus 2:13; James 1:12,25; Rev. 1:3; Rev. 14:13; Rev. 16:15; Rev. 19:9; Rev. 20:6; Rev. 22:7,14). Paul here expressed his good fortune in being able to answer before such an intelligent judge, and one so well acquainted with the customs of the Jews (Acts 26:2-3).

Clarke: I think myself happy—As if he had said, This is a peculiarly fortunate circumstance in my favor, that I am called to make my defense before a judge so intelligent, and so well acquainted with the laws and customs of our country. It may be necessary just to observe that this Agrippa was king of Trachonitis, a region which lay on the north of Palestine, on the east side of Jordan, and south of Damascus. For his possessions, see on Acts 25:13 (note).

¹²McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (4:625). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Barnes: I think myself happy. I esteem it a favour and a privilege to be permitted to make my defence before one acquainted with Jewish customs and opinions. His defence, on former occasions, had been before *Roman* magistrates, who had little acquaintance with the opinions and customs of the Jews, who were not disposed to listen to the discussion of the points of difference between him and them, and who looked upon all their controversies with contempt. See Acts 24, Acts 25. They were, therefore, little qualified to decide a question which was closely connected with the Jewish customs and doctrines; and Paul now rejoiced to know that he was before one who, from his acquaintance with the Jewish customs and belief, would be able to appreciate his arguments and motives. Paul was not now on his trial; but he was to defend himself, or state his cause, so that Agrippa might be able to aid Festus in transmitting a true account of the case to the Roman emperor. It was his interest and duty, therefore, to defend himself as well as possible; and to put him in possession of all the facts in the case. His defence is, consequently, made up chiefly of a most eloquent statement of the *facts* just as they had occurred.

JNTC: By Jews; or possibly “by Judeans,” who are also Jews (see 21:20, Yn 1:19N). But not “by the Jews,” as if “the Jews” were alien to Sha’ul; moreover, in the Greek there is no article before “*Ioudaioi*” here or in vv. 3, 4 or 7.

Agrippa himself was a Jew (his father Agrippa I wasn’t but his mother was, since his mother’s mother’s mother was Mariamne, the Hasmonean princess and second of King Herod the Great’s ten wives; see 16:1). The reason Sha’ul says he **considers himself fortunate** to be making his defense before him is that Agrippa, who is not only Jewish by birth but **well informed about all the Jewish customs and controversies**, will appreciate the situation. Sha’ul is talking to a *landsman* (Yiddish: “fellow Jew”) and knows he can dispense with the sort of detailed explanations that would be necessary to get himself understood by pagans. The irony of vv. 6–7 would be lost on Festus.

Nevertheless, Sha’ul knows that he will be able to communicate with Festus and the rest of the assembly too, because when the king pays close attention they too will pay close attention (I can’t help thinking of the song: “When the *rebbe* laughs/cries, all the *Hasidim* will be laughing/crying ...”).

Sha’ul’s introduction, which is complimentary yet free of fabricated flatteries (contrast 24:2–4), sets the tone for the rest of the speech.¹³

Acts 26:3

Epecially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

Paul is pleased that he is not dealing with a Roman, but with someone that knows the customs, the laws, the traditions of the Jews.

¹³Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:2). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

[customs] Greek: *ethos* (GSN-1485). Translated "custom" (Luke 1:9; Luke 2:42; Acts 6:14; Acts 16:21; Acts 21:21; Acts 26:3; Acts 28:17); "manner" (John 19:40; Acts 15:1; Acts 25:16; Hebrews 10:25); and "as one is wont" (Luke 22:39).

[questions] Greek: *zetema* (GSN-2213), an inquiry, question. Here; Acts 15:2; Acts 18:15; Acts 23:29; Acts 25:19.

This speech is a good example of Paul's powerful oratory. Beginning with a compliment to Agrippa, he told his story, including the resurrection of Christ, and the royal audience was spellbound.

BKC: 2-3. Paul was sincere in these compliments because he knew Agrippa was indeed well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies, in addition to being a practicing Jew.

In contrast with Tertullus who promised a brief speech before Felix (24:4), Paul implied his defense might be more lengthy. This is the climax of all Paul's defenses recorded in Acts (cf. 22:1-21; 23:1-8; 24:10-21; 25:6-11).¹⁴

McGee: Paul is now speaking to a man who understands what he is talking about. Agrippa is an intelligent man, he knows the Mosaic Law, and he understands the Jewish background. Paul really rejoices in this opportunity to speak to such an instructed man who will understand the true nature of the case. Paul likewise is well instructed in the Mosaic Law, but Paul has met Christ. Now the Law has a new meaning for him. The soul of Paul is flooded with a new light. Now he sees that Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness. Now he knows that God has supplied that which He had demanded. He knows that God is good and that through Christ God is gracious. Paul wants King Agrippa to know this. There is a consummate passion filling the soul of the apostle as he speaks. I think this is his masterpiece. His message on Mars' Hill is great, but it does not compare at all to this message.

Although there were probably several hundred people present to hear this message, Paul is speaking to only one man, King Agrippa. Paul is trying to win this man for Christ.

Paul starts with a very courteous introduction, telling Agrippa how he rejoices in this opportunity. Then he proceeds to give King Agrippa a brief sketch of his youth and background. Then he tells of his conversion. Finally he makes his attempt to reach the man for Christ.

Now first of all I am going to ask you to read this entire message without interruption. Actually it tells its own story. Then I shall make some comments about it.

And so it was true that Herod Agrippa had become a real student of Jewish law and of Jewish custom, and he was noted for his vast understanding of the Jewish religion. Having read the scriptures and studied the prophets, he knew them well. Paul said, "I'm really very happy to be able to explain to you my case, because I know that you have a background in these things."

cf. *confer*, compare

¹⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:424). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Acts 26:4

My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

[youth] Greek: *neotes* (GSN-3503), anyone from boyhood to young manhood (Matthew 19:20; Mark 10:20; Luke 18:21; 1 Tim. 4:12). Though born in Tarsus, Paul was educated as a youth in Jerusalem, probably from the age of 12 when male children were brought to the annual solemnities. This might be the case with Paul's nephew in Acts 23:16.¹⁵

Clarke: My manner of life, etc.—The apostle means to state that, though born in Tarsus, he had a regular Jewish education, having been sent up to Jerusalem for that purpose; but at what age does not appear; probably about twelve, for at this age the male children were probably brought to the annual solemnities. See on Luke 2:41 (note).

From my youth. Paul was born in Tarsus; but at an early period he had been sent to Jerusalem for the purpose of education in the school of Gamaliel, Acts 22:3.

Barnes: Know all the Jews. It is not at all improbable that Paul was distinguished in the school of Gamaliel for zeal in the Jewish religion. The fact that he was early entrusted with a commission against the Christians, (Acts 9,) shows that he was known. Comp. Philippians 3:4-6. He might appeal to them, therefore, in regard to the early part of his life; and, doubtless, to the very men who had been his violent accusers.

JNTC: Sha'ul can take it as a given that **all Jews know, ... and if they are willing, they can testify** about him (for evidence of this see 21:21 and possibly 28:21–22). There had not yet been an effort to expunge Sha'ul from the history of the Jewish people (see 22:3), although, by implication, some Jews would already have refused to vouch for him.

In my own country, Cilicia—and in particular, the city of Tarsus.

In Yerushalayim, where Sha'ul had studied under *Rabban* Gamli'el (22:3).

I lived as a *Parush*, a Pharisee. The Greek verb is in the aorist tense, which implies action accomplished in the past that has effects continuing into the present. Sha'ul lived as a Pharisee in the past, and he continued doing so after he became a believer (see 23:6&N, Ga 1:14&N, Pp 3:5&N). By emphasizing, for the benefit of the gallery (Agrippa already knew it; see vv. 2–3), that the *P.rushim* are **the strictest party of our religion**, all the more does he imply that as a Messianic Jew he remained *Torah*-observant (see 13:9, 21:21).¹⁶

History, Confession: Following the Israelite tradition by confessing faith through reciting history, the New Testament uses personal testimony, the recitation of an individual's history with God to confess faith.

¹⁵ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

¹⁶ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:4). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

Acts 26:5

Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Pharisees were as strict as one could get. Paul states his credentials as a faithful Jew before his conversion to Jesus Christ, and reminds Agrippa that he is still walking in faithful fulfillment of the promise made by God to our fathers.

[knew me from the beginning] I not only know all the Jews of importance, but they also know me and could testify that I am telling the truth.

[sect] Greek: *hairesis* (GSN-139), heresy (note, Acts 5:17). The three main sects were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Essenes. The Pharisees were the more strict in doctrines and moral practices.

Clarke: After the most straitest sect—That is, the Pharisees; who were reputed the strictest in their doctrines, and in their moral practices, of all the sects then among the Jews. The sects were the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes.

Barnes: That after the most straitest. The most rigid, the most strict; not only in regard to the written law of God, but the traditions of the elders. Paul himself elsewhere testifies, Philippians 3:4-6, that he had enjoyed all the advantages of birth and training in the Jewish religion, and that he had early distinguished himself by his observance of its rites and customs.

Barnes: I lived a Pharisee. I lived in accordance with the rules and doctrines of the Pharisees. Matthew 3:7. The reasons why Paul here refers to his early life are:

- (1.) As he had lived during the early period of his life without crime; as his principles had been settled by the instruction of the most able of their teachers, it was to be presumed that his subsequent life had been of a similar character.
- (2.) As he, at that period of his life, evinced the utmost zeal for the laws and customs of his country, it was to be presumed that he would not be found opposing or reviling them at any subsequent period. From the strictness and conscientiousness of his past life, he supposed that Agrippa might argue favourably respecting his subsequent conduct. A virtuous and religious course in early life is usually a sure pledge of virtue and integrity in subsequent years.

The appeal to many potential witnesses is not unusual; it occurs even in Plato's version of Socrates' defense.

How ironic! An informed Jew like Agrippa can appreciate the irony; this is why Sha'ul calls his attention to it by addressing him directly. Agrippa himself may not cherish the hope of resurrection, but he knows very well that **our twelve tribes do.**¹⁷

¹⁷Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:6). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

I lived a Pharisee: The Jewish historian Josephus described the Pharisees as “a body of Jews with the reputation of excelling the rest of the nation in the observances of religion, and as exact exponents of the laws.” Paul pointed out that he was not some stranger or foreigner trying to start a new religion. He was a Jew, a Pharisee, who lived out his Jewish faith better than most.¹⁸

And the Pharisees were indeed the most orthodox of the orthodox; they were the radicals. They were the ones who went the second mile in a sense to be very exacting as far as the religious practices worked, because everything had to be just perfect for the Pharisees. They had their traditions and their customs.

after the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee

“ [Paul] defended himself as ‘a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee’ (“Acts 23:6Acts 23:6) and called the Pharisees the ‘strictest’ party in Judaism (“Acts 26:5Acts 26:5, NKJB). Recent committee translations agree on that term, which means ‘most exact’ or ‘most careful’ in this context. The Mishnah, the Jewish law written down about A.D. 200, preserves the thinking of the Pharisees, whose fundamental tradition was, ‘Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.’ Thus, Paul walked in the path of his father and of the fathers of his people, who sought to protect the Mosaic code, which was the central ‘Law.’ Josephus, a young Pharisee who lived at the time of Paul, explains, ‘The Pharisees had passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the Laws of Moses.’ The Mishnah summarizes these rules about rules, condensing and compacting them into some eight hundred pages in the standard English translation... For Jesus Christ, the process had gone too far, as he accused the Pharisees of cluttering the meaning of God's greatest commandments: ‘Ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups, and many other such like things ye do. . . . Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition’ (“Mark 7:8"Mark 7:9Mark 7:8-9).” (Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 22 - 23.)¹⁹

"The main characteristics of the Pharisees were their legalism and their legalistic inflexibility. They were known for their strict accuracy in the interpretation of the law and their scrupulous adherence to living the law in every minute detail. . . .

"Paul was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and he was educated by Gamaliel, a Pharisee. On three different occasions he declared himself to be a member of the sect. . . . This training as a Pharisee made him an extremist in his devotion to the Jewish law, which answers the question as to why he was such a zealous persecutor of the Christians prior to his experience on Damascus Road.” (“Paul: Persecutor Becomes a Follower”, *LDS Church News*, 1991, 06/29/91)

¹⁸ The Nelson Study Bible

¹⁹ <http://www.gospeldoctrine.com/NewTestament/ntindex.html>

Acts 26:6

And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

[for the hope of the promise] I have not committed any sin. I am judged for the hope the Jews always have held to be true—the resurrection of the dead (Acts 23:6; Acts 24:15,25; Acts 25:19).

[made of God unto our fathers] Genesis 12:1-3; Job 19:26; Psalm 16:10; Psalm 17:15; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2.

Clarke: For the hope of the promise—This does not appear to mean, the hope of the Messiah, as some have imagined, but the hope of the resurrection of the dead, to which the apostle referred in Acts 23:6 (note), where he says to the Jewish council, (from which the Roman governor took him), of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question: see the notes there. And here he says, I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise, etc., and to which, he says, Acts 26:7, the twelve tribes hope to come. The Messiah had come, and was gone again, as Paul well knew; and what is here meant is something which the Jews hoped to come to, or attain; not what was to come to them; and this singular observation excludes the Messiah from being meant. It was the resurrection of all men from the dead which Paul's words signified; and this the Jews had been taught to hope for, by many passages in the Old Testament. I shall only add, that when, in the next verse, this hope of the promise is mentioned as what the Jews did then hope, *καταντησαι*, to come to, it is the very same word which Paul, in Philippians 3:11, uses to express the same thing: If by any means, (says he) *καταντησω*, I might attain to, the resurrection of the dead. Bp. Pearce.

Barnes: Of the promise, etc. See the references in the margin. It is not quite certain whether Paul refers here to the promise of the Messiah, or to the hope of the resurrection of the dead. When he stood before the Jewish sanhedrim, Acts 23:6, he said that he was called in question on account of holding the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. But it may be observed, that in Paul's view, the two things were closely united. He hoped that the Messiah would come, and he hoped therefore for the resurrection of the dead. He believed that he had come, and had risen; and therefore he believed that the dead would rise. He argued the one from the other. And as he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that he had risen from the dead, and had thus furnished a demonstration that the dead would rise, it was evident that the subject of controversy between him and the Jews involved everything that was vital to their opinions and their hopes. See Acts 24:8.

Barnes: Made of God. Made by God. See the marginal references. The promises had been made to the fathers of a Messiah to come, and that embraced the promise of a future state, or of the resurrection of the dead. It will help us to understand the stress which Paul and the other apostles laid on the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, to remember that it involved the whole doctrine of the separate existence of the soul, and of a future state. The Sadducees denied all this; and when the Pharisees, the Saviour, and the apostles opposed them, they did it by showing that there would be a future state of

rewards and punishments. See the argument of the Saviour with the Sadducees explained: Luke 20:27-38.

History, Promise: The Christian message is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. Christianity is the fulfillment of God's history with Israel.

for the hope of the promise: Paul was not being judged because he had done something wrong. He had not turned against his own Jewish heritage. Instead he fervently believed in the promises God had made to the nation of Israel: the promise of a coming Messiah and the reestablishment of the kingdom of God. Paul did not reject the hope of salvation for Israel. Instead he saw that hope fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead confirmed to Paul that all believers would be raised from the dead to enjoy the blessings of the promised kingdom of God.²⁰

And Paul said, "It is because of the promises that were made to our fathers, because I hoped in these promises that I stand here to be judged." Interesting, knowing that Herod Agrippa knew the prophecies. He brings him right to these promises that God had made.

Acts 26:7

Unto which *promise* our twelve tribes, instantly serving *God* day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

Paul is claiming to be accused of being a good Jew.

[our twelve tribes] Paul did not believe that the ten tribes were lost. They were still in existence and were the Jews scattered abroad.

Serving God. In the ordinances and observances of the temple. As a nation, they did not serve him in their hearts; but they kept up the outward form of religious worship.

Barnes: For which hope's sake. On account of my cherishing this hope in common with the great mass of my countrymen. See Acts 23:6. If Paul could convince Agrippa that the main point of his offence was that which had been the common belief of his countrymen, it would show to his satisfaction that he was innocent. And on this ground Paul put his defence: that he held only that which the mass of the nation had believed, and that he maintained this in the only consistent and defensible manner-that God had, *in fact*, raised up the Messiah, and had thus given assurance that the dead should rise.

Two of the most basic future hopes of most Jews were the resurrection of the bodies of the righteous and the restoration of the twelve tribes at the same time.

²⁰ The Nelson Study Bible

BKC: 4-8. In summary, Paul asserted that from his early life he lived . . . according to and for the hope of Israel (vv. 6-7; cf. 23:6; 24:15; 28:20). (On his living in Jerusalem, see 22:3.) He stated that this hope involved the resurrection from the dead. This is why Christ quoted Moses (Ex. 3:6) to defend the doctrine of the Resurrection (Matt. 22:32). Because Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, people must be resurrected in order to receive the promise God made to them. Likewise the promises made to the Jews demand they be resurrected in the coming Messianic Age.

Paul's reference to the 12 tribes of Israel shows the error of British-Israelism with its "10 lost tribes of Israel" (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; James 1:1; Rev. 7:4-8; 21:12).²¹

Acts 26:8

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

[Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?] This is question 72 in Acts. The next question is in Acts 26:14.

Clarke: That God should raise the dead?—As Agrippa believed in the true God, and knew that one of his attributes was omnipotence, he could not believe that the resurrection of the dead was an impossible thing; and to this belief of his the apostle appeals; and the more especially, because the Sadducees denied the doctrine of the resurrection, though they professed to believe in the same God. Two attributes of God stood pledged to produce this resurrection: his truth, on which his promise was founded; and his power, by which the thing could be easily affected, as that power is unlimited. Some of the best critics think this verse should be read thus: What! should it be thought a thing incredible with you, if God should raise the dead?

Barnes: With you. This is in the plural number; and it is evident that Paul here addressed not Agrippa alone, but those who were with him. There is no evidence that Agrippa doubted that the dead could be raised; but Festus, and those who were with him, probably did; and Paul, in the ardour of his speech, turned and addressed the entire assembly. It is very evident that we have only an outline of this argument, and there is every reason to suppose that Paul would dwell on each part of the subject at greater length than is here recorded.

Ancient courtrooms counted arguments from probability more heavily than they counted what we would consider hard evidence (such as reliable witnesses); Paul must thus counter the supposition that a resurrection is improbable by reminding his hearers of God's power and that resurrection is rooted in the most basic Jewish hope.

vv. verses

cf. *confer*, compare

²¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:424). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

JNTC: Why do you people consider it incredible that God raises the dead? There is a tendency among liberal scholars to regard Yeshua's resurrection not as an event in verifiable human history but as a subjective event in the realm of faith. This is not the Bible's approach at all. J. Warwick Montgomery writes,

“On the Areopagus [Paul] presents Christ's resurrection as the capstone of his case for the truth of the gospel (Acts 17:19–31). In 1 Corinthians 15 he blends *kerygma* [proclamation] with *apologia* [proof] by offering a list of eyewitness testimonies to the evidential fact of the resurrection. In his stand before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 26), he not only assumes that these sin-blinded sinners can evidentially arrive at the facticity of the resurrection (‘Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?’), but also appeals to a common ground of evidential knowledge (‘The king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner’ [v. 26 below, KJV]) ... Christian [and Messianic Jewish] faith is not blind faith or credulity; it is grounded in fact. To talk about a real but unprovable resurrection is as foolish as to talk about suprahistorical or spiritual resurrections. They are all cop-outs—sincere, certainly, but terribly harmful in an age longing to hear the meaningful affirmation, ‘He is risen.’ ” (*Faith Founded on Fact*, Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1978, pp. 78–79).²²

Agrippa was an *expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews* (Acts 26:3), yet he did not believe that God could, or would, raise the dead. Paul boldly exposes the foolishness of limiting God this way, by saying to Agrippa: Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead? Why should it be thought incredible that God can do anything? We must stop putting God in a small box, and realize that the only thing that limits God is His own Word, because He will always honor His word (Psalm 138:2).

“As the above passages illustrate, the doctrine of the resurrection, concerning which the prophets have taught and testified, is simply not congruent with the learning and the philosophies of the world. The resurrection is something to which the world cannot relate empirically; it has to be understood by faith and by the Holy Ghost. Consequently it is not readily accepted or believed in the world. Paul's magnificent statement about the resurrection recorded in 1 Cor. 15:11 Cor. 15 apparently was written to convince the intellectuals of his day, those who trusted in reason, that the resurrection was logical, scriptural, and necessary. He said that his knowledge of the resurrection came by revelation but that the doctrine was reasonable even so. The testimony of the scriptures and of the Holy Spirit is that the resurrection of Jesus, and eventually of all mankind, is literal, historical, and factual truth. It really did happen to Jesus, it has already happened to many, and it will yet happen to many more.” (Robert J. Matthews, *A Bible! A Bible!*, 199.)²³

²²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:8). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

²³ <http://www.gospeldoctrine.com/NewTestament/ntindex.html>

Acts 26:9

I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

[many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth] Acts 7:58; Acts 8:1-3; Acts 9:1-2; Acts 22:4-5.

Acts 26:10

⁰Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against *them*.

“...gave my voice against them” in the Greek actually says “gave a small pebble.” The point of this is that the Sanhedrin’s practice was to vote with small stones. Black and white. Guilty or not guilty.

From this many scholars believe that Paul was once a member of the Sanhedrin. If he was, he had to have been married, because you had to be married to be on the Sanhedrin. From 1 Cor 7:7 we infer that he was married but became a widower.

Cf. Rev 2:17 White stone. One possible meaning is a favorable vote, after the tradition of the Sanhedrin.

[**saints**] Only used once in the gospels (Matthew 27:52); 4 times of Christians in Acts (Acts 9:13,32,41; Acts 26:10), but 56 times in the epistles and Revelation.

[**shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them**] Paul imprisoned, persecuted, and executed saints, compelling them to blaspheme (Acts 26:9-12). Now he was their chief defender.

Clarke: Many of the saints—From what is said in this verse, it seems that Paul, before his conversion, was invested with much power: he imprisoned the Christians; punished many in various synagogues; compelled them to blaspheme—to renounce, and, perhaps, to execrate Christ, in order to save their lives; and gave his voice, exerted all his influence and authority, against them, in order that they might be put to death; and from this it would seem that there were other persons put to death besides St. Stephen, though their names are not mentioned.

Barnes: I gave my voice. Paul was not a member of the Sanhedrim, and this does not mean that he *voted*, but simply that he joined in the persecution; he approved it; he assented to the putting of the saints to death. Comp. Acts 22:20. The Syriac renders it, "I joined with those who condemned them." It is evident also that Paul instigated them in this persecution, and urged them on to deeds of blood and cruelty.

BBC: “Casting a vote” could also be used of unofficial decisions; Paul himself was probably too young to belong to the Sanhedrin, but he could still have exerted influence on others’ opinions. If Paul refers to more executions than Stephen’s, members of the Sanhedrin or unofficial courts may have voted for their execution while the procurator was in Caesarea, but the executions themselves, like Stephen’s, were illegal. Thus Paul’s account here paints his accusers, for whose cause he once worked, in a rather anti-Roman light.

Besides being committed to Judaism, Paul had also been fanatic in his opposition to Christianity (cf. 8:3; 9:2; 22:4-5, 19). His casting votes **against** imprisoned Christians does not necessarily mean Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. It may simply mean he agreed with the Sanhedrin’s action (cf. 8:1; 22:20).²⁴

I cast my vote against them There are those who say that this clearly implies that Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, having a vote against Christians who were tried before the Sanhedrin (like Stephen in Acts 7). If Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin, it also means that at that time he was married, because it was required for all members of the Sanhedrin. Since as a Christian, he was single (1 Corinthians 7:7-9), it may mean that Paul’s wife either died or deserted him when he became a Christian.

Acts 26:11

And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted *them* even unto strange cities.

[**exceedingly mad against them**] Paul's past unreasonable zeal and madness against Christians enabled him to be exceedingly patient with his own countrymen.

Clarke: Being exceedingly mad against them—Only a madman will persecute another because of his differing from him in religious opinion; and the fiercest persecutor is he who should be deemed the most furious madman.

Unto strange cities—Places out of the jurisdiction of the Jews, such as Damascus, which he immediately mentions.

Barnes: And compelled them to blaspheme. To blaspheme the name of Jesus, by denying that he was the Messiah, and by admitting that he was an impostor. This was the object which they had in view in the persecution. It was not to make them blaspheme or reproach God, but to deny that Jesus was the Messiah, and to reproach him as a deceiver and an impostor. It is not necessarily implied in the expression, "and *compelled* them to blaspheme," that he succeeded in doing it; but that he violently endeavoured to make them apostatize from the Christian religion, and deny the Lord Jesus. It is certainly not impossible that a few might thus have been induced by the authority of the sanhedrim,

cf. *confer*, compare

²⁴Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:424). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

and by the threats of Paul to do it; but it is certain that the great mass of Christians adhered firmly to their belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

Barnes: And being exceedingly mad. Nothing could more forcibly express his rage and violence against the Christians. He raged like a madman; he was so indignant that he laid aside all appearance of reason; and with the fury and violence of a maniac, he endeavoured to exterminate them from the earth. None but a madman will persecute men on account of their religious opinions; and all persecutions have been conducted like this, with the violence, and fury, and ungovernable temper of maniacs.

Barnes: Unto strange cities. Unto foreign cities; cities out of Judea. The principal instance Of this was his going to Damascus; but there is no evidence that he did not intend also to visit other cities out of Judea, and bring the Christians there, if he found any, to Jerusalem.

BBC: Pliny, governor of Bithynia in the second century, noted that former Christians could easily be moved to worship the gods, but complained that genuine Christians could not be forced to do so, even on the pain of death. Pagan rulers who had earlier tried to force Jews to abandon their ancestral customs had encountered the same resistance, which pagan officials generally considered obstinate.

Acts 26:12

Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Whereupon as I went to Damascus—See the whole account of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus explained at large, in Acts 9.

As I journeyed to Damascus: Here Paul gives the fullest account yet of his experience on the Damascus road, detailing the fact that he was made aware of his commission to the Gentiles even at that time.

The commission was clear: For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness. Paul was commissioned to be two things. First, a minister, which means he was to be a *servant* of the things which he had seen, and of the things which Jesus would yet reveal to him. The commission of the Christian is not to make the message or his testimony serve him; he is called to *serve* the message. Second, Paul was called to be a witness of those things. The commission of the Christian is not to create experience or create the message, but to witness it and experience it.

ii. Right now, as he stands before Agrippa, Paul is being obedient to this command of Jesus. Paul knew the significance of telling others what Jesus had done in his life. He knew how to present the gospel not only in words, but also by his life story, presenting the truth that once he was lost, now he was found

Acts 26:13

¹³**At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.**

[midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun] The light from heaven would have to be exceedingly bright to be brighter than the midday sun. Even the men who traveled with him saw the light. It was so bright and the supernatural was so present that it caused all of them to fall to the ground (Acts 26:14). They all heard the voice, but only Paul heard the words that the voice spoke (Acts 9:7; Acts 22:9).

ESV: The light from heaven is the brightness of God's glory (cf. 22:6), as in Ezek. 1:26–28 and Rev. 1:16.

Acts 26:14

And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*

[Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? ...Who art thou, Lord?] These are questions 73-74 in the Book of Acts, the next question is in Acts 26:27.

[pricks] Greek: *kentron* (GSN-2759), goads or spurs. Translated "prick" (Acts 9:5; Acts 26:14) and "sting" (1 Cor. 15:55-56; Rev. 9:10).

BBC: Falling down was a common response to such revelations in the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. The “heavenly voice” (which some segments of Judaism thought had replaced prophecy) was often thought to speak in Hebrew or Aramaic. “Kicking against the goads” was a Greek proverb about fighting a god, possibly originating with the classical Greek playwright Euripides. It is not cited in the other accounts of Paul’s conversion, but it is appropriate in an address to Agrippa, who had an ample Greek education.

An oxgoad was a sharp stick used to prod cattle. “It is hard for you to kick against the goads” (oxgoads) means, “You are only hurting yourself.”

I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, ... “I am Yeshua.” See Mk 5:41N on whether Hebrew or Aramaic was spoken in Yeshua’s time, and Mt 1:1N on the name “Yeshua.” The movement by English-speaking Messianic Jews to call the Messiah by his Hebrew name, “Yeshua,” which the Savior and his friends would have used during his lifetime, instead of the more common “Jesus,” has actually been denounced by a few Gentile Christians as being “separatist,” “rebuilding the middle wall of partition” (Ep 2:14) between Jews and Gentiles in the Messianic Community. But this verse gives more than adequate ground for the practice: if it was good enough for Yeshua to call himself

“Yeshua,” it is good enough for us too. It is perverse to regard adoption of Yeshua’s own custom as separatist.²⁵

ESV: The Hebrew language most likely refers to Aramaic (see esv footnote; also note on 22:2). To kick against the goads is a proverbial statement the Romans probably knew, meaning that one cannot ultimately resist God's will. Goads were sharp sticks used to prod oxen, and if the oxen kicked in resistance, the drivers would keep them in line by using the goads more severely.

Acts 26:15

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

BBC: 15-18. Jesus’ words to Paul evoke Old Testament passages about prophets’ calls (Jeremiah 1:5-8) and Israel’s call to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:7, 16). “An inheritance among those who have been sanctified” (NASB) or “the set-apart ones” refers to the Jewish hope that they as God’s set-apart people would inherit the world to come, just as Israel had “inherited” the Promised Land.

Acts 26:16

But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

[minister] Greek: *huperetes* (GSN-5257), an under-rower, and is used of anyone who is a subordinate to another. Translated "servant" (Matthew 26:58; Mark 14:54,65; John 18:36); "minister" (Luke 1:2; Luke 4:20; Acts 13:5; Acts 26:16; 1 Cor. 4:1); and "officer" (Matthew 5:25; John 7:32,45-46; John 18:3,12,18,22; John 19:6; John 5:22-26). Paul was to be under the sole authority of Christ and to tug at the oar in order to bring the gospel vessel and the church through the tempestuous sea to the eternal harbor.

But rise and stand on your feet: Jesus called Paul up to his feet. This was not because his humility wasn’t proper, but because he was sent to go somewhere, and he had to rise and stand on his feet if he was going to go anywhere!

[witness] Greek: *martus* (GSN-3144). Translated "witness" 29 times (Matthew 18:16; Matthew 26:65; Mark 14:63; Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8,22; Acts 2:32; Acts 3:15; Acts 5:32; Acts 6:13; Acts 7:58; Acts 10:39,41; Acts 13:31; Acts 22:15; Acts 26:16; Romans 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Thes. 2:5,10; 1 Tim. 5:19; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:2; Hebrews 10:28; Hebrews 12:1; 1 Peter 5:1; Rev. 1:5; Rev. 3:14; Rev. 11:3); "martyr" (Acts 22:20; Rev. 2:13; Rev. 17:6); and "record" (2 Cor. 1:23; Phil. 1:8).

²⁵Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:14). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

[and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee] The 15th New Testament prophecy in Acts (Acts 26:16-18, fulfilled). Next, [□] Acts 27:10. This predicts that Christ would have further communications with Paul and would protect him from all people so he could turn men to God (Acts 26:18).

Clarke: But rise, etc.—The particulars mentioned here, and in the two following verses, are not given in Acts 9:1-9, nor in Acts 22:6-11, where he gives an account of his conversion. He has detailed the different circumstances of that important event, as he saw it necessary; and perhaps there were several others which then took place, that he had no opportunity of mentioning, because there was nothing in succeeding occurrences which rendered it necessary to produce them.

Clarke: To make thee a minister— An under-rower; that is, one who is under the guidance and authority of another; an assistant, or servant. So Paul was to act solely under the authority of Jesus Christ; and tug hard at the oar, in order to bring the vessel, through the tempestuous ocean, to the safe harbour. See the concluding observations on John 6.

Clarke: And a witness— A martyr. Though this word literally means a witness, yet we apply it only to such persons as have borne testimony to the truth of God at the hazard and expense of their lives. In this sense, also, ancient history states St. Paul to have been a witness; for it is said he was beheaded at Rome, by the command of Nero.

In the which I will appear—Here Christ gives him to understand that he should have farther communications from himself; and this may refer either to those interpositions of Divine Providence by which he was so often rescued from destruction, or to those encouragements which he received in dreams, visions, trances, etc., or to that general inspiration under which he was enabled to apprehend and reveal the secret things of God, for the edification of the Church. To all of which may be added that astonishing power by which he was so often enabled to work miracles for the confirmation of the truth.

JNTC: 13–18 This is Sha’ul’s third version of his encounter with Yeshua on the road to Damascus, the others being at 9:3–19 and 22:5–16. Some details in the reports differ. In chapter 9 the light is said to have flashed around Sha’ul and his companions; in the other tellings it surrounded Sha’ul. In chapter 9 his companions stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one; in chapter 22 they saw light but did not hear the voice of the speaker; and here, in chapter 26, they all fell to the ground. Each telling, having its own purpose and being directed to a particular audience, emphasizes different aspects of what happened. Here is a composite consistent with all three versions. The light surrounded both Sha’ul and his companions. They all saw the light, but only Sha’ul saw Yeshua. They all heard some sort of sound, but only Sha’ul heard distinct words. All fell to the ground, but Sha’ul’s companions got up again.

Understood as what it is described as being, a supernatural event, no further explanation is needed. But some who do not believe in supernatural events have attempted to “demythologize” Sha’ul’s “conversion experience” as a combination of

coincidences, psychotic or epileptic seizures, and embellishments. (The very term “conversion experience” subtly prejudices the matter by focussing on subjective aspects, whereas in all three reports Sha’ul emphasizes the objective.)

Phillip Goble, in his one-man play, *The Rabbi From Tarsus* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1981), depicts Sha’ul in a Roman dungeon at the end of his life, with his physician and chronicler friend Luke peering down at him through a hole in the roof. Paul is dictating information for the book of Acts:

“Now let me pause to clear up one thing, Luke—for the benefit of the scoffers you must refute. What exactly made me switch ... not religions, but vocations, from that of persecutor to that of advocate and apostle? What was the problem, Doctor? Are the scoffers right? Was it really just a case of sunstroke? Nervous collapse? Hallucination? Guilt catharsis? ‘What is truth for you, Saul, is not truth for me,’ they say. ‘There are natural explanations for everything.’”

(Paul reclines on the stone bench like a man talking to his psychiatrist.)

“Yes, yes, Doctor. Here is the natural explanation. One day, on the road to Damascus, while I tried to enforce the Law of Moses, piously serving my God with all my heart, I—the arrestor—was arrested ... by a naive superstition. Quite naturally, a meteor just *happened* to blaze across the sky. At the very same time, it just *happened* to thunder, so that the other rabbis quite naturally did see and hear *something*. At the very same time—clumsy me—I just *happened* to fall off my horse. And at the very same time, I just *happened* to hallucinate with a nightmare vision, complete with face, fire and voice, that just *happened* to be my enemy, who just *happened* to want me to go to work for him!—among people who just *happened* to be my enemies, the Gentiles. At the very same time, I just *happened* to have tissues form over both my eyes with a purely accidental case of coincidental cataracts.”

(Rising)

“Yes, Doctor, there are natural explanations for everything, if one has enough bad blind faith to go his own way. (Many, like Nero, are lords of their own lives who want to go their own way, even if it may lead to hell.) But, Luke, I had to trust God, and like any other disciple, take a step of faith into the *mikveh* waters and into the Damascus synagogue.”²⁶

Acts 26:17

Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

[whom now I send thee] Paul never got away from the fact of his special call to the Gentiles.

Five Great Blessings of the Gospel:

1. Open the eyes (Acts 26:18; 2 Cor. 4:4; Ephes. 1:8; Rev. 3:18; Matthew 13:15-16)
2. Turn people from darkness to light (Acts 26:18; Luke 1:79; John 3:16-20; Col. 1:13)
3. Deliverance from Satan's power (Acts 26:18; Luke 4:18; Col. 1:13; 1 John 5:18)
4. Forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:18; Acts 2:38; Acts 3:19; Acts 13:38-39; Matthew 26:28; Ephes. 1:7)
5. An inheritance (Acts 26:18; Acts 20:32; Ephes. 1:11-18; Col. 1:12-13; 1 Peter 1:4)²⁷

²⁶Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:13). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

²⁷ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

Clarke: Delivering thee from the people—From the Jews—and from the Gentiles, put here in opposition to the Jews; and both meaning mankind at large, wheresoever the providence of God might send him. But he was to be delivered from the malice of the Jews, that he might be sent with salvation to the Gentiles.

Chuck Smith: So his commission, basically from the beginning, was to go to the Gentiles.

Now his purpose or the purpose of the gospel, of the gospel itself entailed the opening of their eyes. That implies blindness. Paul, later writing to the Ephesian church said, "The god of this world has blinded their eyes that they cannot see." A man who does not know Jesus Christ is blind to the truth many times. It's worse when he's not blind to the truth, but still does not believe. But the god of this world has blinded men's eyes that they cannot see the truth. So Paul was to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God.

There are two kingdoms in the world to date, two spheres of government: the government of God, and the government of Satan. They are mutually exclusive and antagonistic. Every man exists in one of these two kingdoms. You tonight are living in the kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness. You're living under the control of Satan or under the control of God. There are only two governing spheres of the universe. In the beginning there was just one, the kingdom of God. All things in obedience and in subjection unto him; God created angelic beings. One special being known as Lucifer, the anointed cherub, rebelled against the authority of God and formed a second government, the government of death and darkness. Ultimately, Satan's kingdom is going to come down. In fact, it is close to the end of Satan's reign now.

When Jesus returns, and I believe it will be very soon, to establish God's kingdom upon the earth, at that time Satan will be bound and cast into the abusso. After a thousand years he will receive a short reprieve from the abusso, and at the end of that short period he will then be cast into gehenna, into outer darkness, the kingdom of darkness, cast into outer darkness.

The kingdom of darkness will one day be in the blackness of darkness forever, and in the universe there will be only one kingdom again, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of light and life, and all of those within it subject unto God and to His authority, and what a beautiful universe that will be. How I long for that day, when every rebellious act and thought is put out and God reigns supreme.

So Paul's ministry was to deliver people from this kingdom of darkness and bring them into the kingdom of light, to free them from the power of Satan that they might come unto God in order that they might receive the forgiveness of their sins, which is the affect of the gospel and the inheritance among those that are set apart by faith in Jesus Christ. So we who have come to believe in Jesus Christ have an inheritance. The Bible speaks about the inheritance of the saints in light. Sons of God is sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. As Jesus said, "In that day I will say unto them, Come ye blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundations of the world" ([Matthew 25:34](#)).

And it's so easy to become a part of that kingdom; just by believing in Jesus Christ, those who believe in Him, who have submitted to His Lordship. It is a kingdom. You believe

that Jesus is King. You bow to His authority, and by that bowing to his authority, yielding yourself to the authority of Jesus, you become a subject of His kingdom.

Acts 26:18

To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Greatest synopsis of the Gospel message.

Clarke: To open their eyes To be the instrument of informing their understanding in the things of God.

Clarke: To turn them from darkness to light—From heathenism and superstition to the knowledge and worship of the true God.

Barnes: And to turn them from darkness to light. From the darkness of heathenism and sin, to the light and purity of the gospel. Darkness in an emblem of ignorance and of sin; and the heathen nations are often represented as sitting in darkness. Matthew 4:16; John 1:4; John 1:6.

Clarke: From the power of Satan unto God— From the authority and domination of Satan; for as the kingdom of darkness is his kingdom, so those who live in this darkness are under his dominion; and he has authority and right over them. The blessed Gospel of Christ is the means of bringing the soul from this state of spiritual darkness and wretchedness to the light and liberty of the children of God; and thus they are brought from under the power and authority of Satan, to be under the power and authority of GOD.

Barnes: And from the power of Satan. From the dominion of Satan. Comp. Colossians 1:13, 1 Peter 2:9; John 12:31; John 16:11. Satan is thus represented as the prince of this world; the ruler of the darkness of this world; the prince of the power of the air, etc. The heathen world, lying in sin and superstition, is represented as under his control; and this passage teaches, doubtless, that the great mass of the people of this world are the subjects of the kingdom of Satan, and are led captive by him at his will.

Clarke: That they may receive forgiveness of sins—That all their sins may be pardoned, and their souls sanctified; for nothing less is implied in the phrase, which signifies the taking away or removal of sins.

Barnes: That they may receive forgiveness of sins. Through the merits of that Saviour who died; that thus the partition wall between the Jews and the Gentiles might be broken down, and all might be admitted to the same precious privileges of the favour and mercy of God. Acts 2:38.

Clarke: And inheritance—By remission of sins, i.e. the removal of the guilt and pollution of sin, they become children of God; and, if children, then heirs; for the children of the heavenly family shall alone possess the heavenly estate. And as the inheritance is said to be among them that are SANCTIFIED, this is a farther proof that signifies, not only the forgiveness of sins, but also the purification of the heart.

Clarke: By faith that is in me—By believing on Christ Jesus, as dying for their offenses, and rising again for their justification. Thus we see that not only this salvation comes through Christ, but that it is to be received by faith; and, consequently, neither by the merit of works, nor by that of suffering.

[sanctified by faith] Sanctification is:

1. by the Father (Jude 1:1; John 10:36)
2. by Christ (Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2,30)
3. by the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:16; 2 Cor. 6:11; 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2)
4. by the Word of God (John 15:3; John 17:19; 2 Thes. 2:13; Ephes. 5:26; 1 Tim. 4:5)
5. by the atonement (Hebrews 10:10-14,29)
6. by faith (Acts 26:18; Ephes. 2:8-9)²⁸

LAN: Paul took every opportunity to remind his audience that the Gentiles have an equal share in God's inheritance. This inheritance is the promise and blessing of the covenant that God made with Abraham (see Ephes. 2:19; 1 Peter 1:3-4). Paul's mission was to preach the Good News to the Gentiles.²⁹

Salvation, Sanctification—Christian workers should be as concerned as Paul about the sanctification of their converts. Sanctification is by faith in Jesus Christ. Here the emphasis is on the beginning of sanctification at conversion. Sanctification involves forgiveness of sins. Here the emphasis is on a passive state given by God to those actively serving Him. God's power makes the Christian holy. Elsewhere, sanctification is also described as an active process of growing in Christ's image.³⁰

Acts 26:19

Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

[disobedient] Greek: *apeithes* (GSN-545), disobedient (Luke 1:17; Acts 26:19; Romans 1:30; Titus 1:16; Titus 3:3; 2 Tim. 3:2).

[heavenly vision] Acts 9:3-18; Acts 22:6-21; Acts 26:12-18.

Clarke: I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision—This, O Agrippa, was the cause of my conversion from my prejudices and mal-practices against the doctrine of

²⁸ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

²⁹ Life Application Notes, Life Application Bible

³⁰ Disciple's Study Bible

Christ. The vision was from heaven; I received it as such, and began to preach the faith which I had before persecuted.

Barnes: To the heavenly vision. To the celestial appearance; or to the vision which appeared to me manifestly from heaven. I did not doubt that this splendid appearance Acts 26:13 was from heaven; and I did not refuse to obey the command of Him who thus appeared to me. He knew it was the command of God his Saviour; and he gave evidence of repentance by yielding obedience to it at once.

BBC: 19-21. A Roman aristocrat like Festus may dislike Paul's mission to move Gentiles to repent, but he would not understand the Jewish opposition. Agrippa II, who had pagan friends and knew well the mounting animosity of Judean Jewry against Gentiles, would understand Paul all too well, and it is to him that Paul directs these words.

“His most detailed account of the vision on the road to Damascus is the last of several recorded. (See Acts 26:9-20.) And this is the only known instance in which he related the detail about the glorified Savior prophesying Paul's work among the Gentiles. (See Acts 26:16-18.) Why would Paul include this previously unmentioned detail only on that occasion? Probably because he was speaking to a *Gentile* audience, rather than to a group of Jewish Christians. Paul had reasons for delaying full details of their visions until the proper time and place.” (Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Parallel Prophets: Paul and Joseph Smith,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1985, 12)³¹

Acts 26:20

But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

[that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance] Three things preached to all people:

1. Repentance (Luke 13:3, note)
2. Conversion (note, Acts 3:19)
3. Restitution or proof of repentance (note, Matthew 3:8)

Clarke: But showed first unto them of Damascus—He appears to have preached at Damascus, and in the neighboring parts of Arabia Deserta, for about three years; and afterwards he went up to Jerusalem. See Galatians 1:17, 18; and see the note on Acts 9:23.

Clarke: That they should repent—Be deeply humbled for their past iniquities, and turn to God as their Judge and Savior, avoiding all idolatry and all sin; and thus do works meet for repentance; that is, show by their conduct that they had contrite hearts, and that

³¹ <http://www.gospeldoctrine.com/NewTestament/ntindex.html>

they sincerely sought salvation from God alone. For the meaning of the word repentance, see the note on Matthew 3:2.

JNTC: That they should turn from their sins to God and then do deeds consistent with that repentance. On “turn from sins” and “repentance” (Greek *metanoieô* and *epistrephô*, corresponding to Hebrew *shuv*) see Mt 3:2N. Sha’ul’s message was the same as that of Yochanan the Immerser (Mt 3:2, 8) and Yeshua (Mk 1:15, Mt 23:3); compare Ep 2:8–10&NN, Ya 2:14–26&NN. The New Testament in general, and Sha’ul in particular, are sometimes thought to proclaim an easy and painless salvation which makes no demands on the individual. This verse shows that Sha’ul expected followers of Yeshua not merely to assent to a creed but to do good works.³²

ESV: Paul’s obedience to his commission began in Damascus (9:19–25), continued in Jerusalem (9:26–29), and ultimately focused on the Gentiles (from 11:26 on). A witness by Paul throughout all the region of Judea is not recorded elsewhere in Acts but must have occurred during the time right after his conversion when he was in Jerusalem (9:28; cf. 9:31).

Chuck Smith: So Paul was calling upon people, even as John the Baptist, and even as Jesus did, to change, to turn, to turn from a life dominated by the flesh to the life dominated by the Spirit.

The word *repent* means actually, to change, and it isn’t a true repentance unless there is a change. There are many people who confuse sorrow with repentance. Now, I would imagine that if you would take a poll at San Quentin of the inmates there, and if you asked them, “Are you sorry for . . .” Well, if you just ask them if you’re sorry, I’m sure you would get the answer, “Yes.” If they were honest, “Are you sorry for your crime that brought you here?” I don’t think that the answer would automatically be, “Yes.” If you’d say, “Are you sorry you got caught?” “Yes.”

So there is a difference between sorrow over what you’ve done and sorrow over being caught at what you’ve done. There are a lot of people who are sorry for their sins. They say, “I repent.” No, you didn’t. You haven’t changed. You’re still doing the same thing. That isn’t repentance. Repentance means to change. So Paul was calling on people to change for a life lived after the flesh to a life living after the Spirit.

Acts 26:21

For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

JNTC: Jews. Not “the Jews” (see 26:2&N). Sha’ul is still occupied with the paradox that it is Jews, not Gentiles, who are opposing him. The usual translation, with the definite article, which is not present in the Greek text, pits Sha’ul against “the Jews” as a whole; it

³²Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:20). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

is therefore effectively antisemitic, even if not deliberately so (see Ro 10:4&N, 10:6–8&N).³³

[these causes] Seven reasons Jews hated Paul:

1. His conversion to Christianity (Acts 9:2-22; Acts 22:6-21; Acts 26:12-18)
2. Preaching Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah (Acts 9:20-25,29; Acts 13:23; Acts 17:3; Acts 18:5; Romans 1:3-6; 1 Cor. 1:18-24)
3. Preaching the resurrection of the dead, just and unjust (Acts 17:18,32; Acts 23:6-8; Acts 24:15,21; 1 Cor. 15)
4. Preaching the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Acts 13:30-39; Acts 17:3; Acts 17:18; Acts 26:23; 1 Cor. 15)
5. Preaching salvation through Christ and not of the law (Acts 13:23-39; Acts 15:1-12; Acts 20:21; Acts 26:17-18; 1 Cor. 1:18-24; Romans 3:24-31; Romans 4:1-25; Romans 5:1-11; Romans 8:1-13; Romans 10:4,9-10; Ephes. 1; Phil. 2; Hebrews 7-10)
6. Preaching Christ's blood as the fulfillment of all sacrifices and necessary to salvation (Acts 17:3; Acts 20:20; Acts 26:17-23; Romans 3:24-31; Romans 5:1-11; Galatians 3:13-29; Ephes. 1:7; Col. 1:14-20; Hebrews 7:10; 1 Tim. 1:15; 1 Cor. 1:18-24)
7. Offering salvation to Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Acts 13:46-49; Acts 14:27; Acts 18:6; Acts 26:17-18; Romans 9-11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Galatians 3:29³⁴)

Clarke: For these causes the Jews—went about to kill me—These causes may be reduced to four heads:—

1. He had maintained the resurrection of the dead.
2. The resurrection of Christ, whom they had crucified and slain.
3. That this Jesus was the promised Messiah.
4. He had offered salvation to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. He does not mention the accusation of having defiled the temple, nor of disloyalty to the Roman government; probably, because his adversaries had abandoned these charges at his preceding trial before Festus: see Acts 25:8; and see Calmet.

Acts 26:22

Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

Clarke: Having—obtained help of God—According to the gracious promise made to him: see Acts 26:17.

Barnes: Having therefore obtained help of God. Paul had seen and felt his danger. He had known the determined malice of the Jews, and their efforts to take his life. He had been rescued by Lysias, and had made every effort to avoid the danger, and to save his

³³Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:21). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³⁴Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

life; and at the end of all, he traced his safety entirely to the help of God. It was not by any power of his own that he had been preserved; but it was because God had interposed and rescued him. Those who have been delivered from danger, if they have just views, will delight to trace it all to God. They will regard his hand; and will feel that whatever wisdom they may have had, or whatever may have been the kindness of their friends to aid them, yet that *all this also* is to be traced to the superintending providence of God.

Clarke: Witnessing both to small and great—Preaching before kings, rulers, priests, and peasants; fearing no evil, though ever surrounded with evils; nor slackening in my duty, notwithstanding the opposition I have met with both from Jews and Gentiles. And these continual interpositions of God show me that I have not mistaken my call, and encourage me to go forward in my work.

BBC: 22-23. Paul begins marshaling evidence at this point (Acts 26:8) that the faith he represents is in continuity with the Old Testament religion tolerated by the Romans as an ancient and ethnic religion.

Acts 26:23

That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

[That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles] The 20th Old Testament prophecy fulfilled in Acts (Acts 26:23; Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 53; Psalm 16:10). Next, Acts 28:26.

[first that should rise from the dead] The first to be resurrected and the guarantee of the resurrection of all men (1 Cor. 15:1-23; Rev. 1:5).

[to the Gentiles] The prophets predicted the salvation of the Gentiles (Isaiah 11:10; Isaiah 42:1-6; Isaiah 49:6; Isaiah 60:3; Isaiah 62:2; Isaiah 66:12-21; Jeremiah 16:19; Malachi 1:11; Romans 10:9-21).

Clarke: That Christ should suffer—That the Christ, or Messiah, should suffer. This, though fully revealed in the prophets, the prejudices of the Jews would not permit them to receive: they expected their Messiah to be a glorious secular prince; and, to reconcile the fifty-third of Isaiah with their system, they formed the childish notion of two Messiahs—Messiah ben David, who should reign, conquer, and triumph; and Messiah ben Ephraim, who should suffer and be put to death. A distinction which has not the smallest foundation in the whole Bible. As the apostle says he preached none other things than those which Moses and the prophets said should come, therefore he understood that both Moses and the prophets spoke of the resurrection of the dead, as well as of the passion and resurrection of Christ. If this be so, the favourite system of a learned bishop cannot be true; viz. that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul was unknown to the ancient Jews.

Clarke: That he should be the first that should rise from the dead—That is, that he should be the first who should rise from the dead so as to die no more; and to give, in his own person, the proof of the resurrection of the human body, no more to return under the empire of death. In no other sense can Jesus Christ be said to be the first that rose again from the dead; for Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite. A dead man, put into the sepulchre of the Prophet Elisha, was restored to life as soon as he touched the prophet's bones. Christ himself had raised the widow's son at Nain; and he had also raised Lazarus, and several others. All these died again; but the human nature of our Lord was raised from the dead, and can die no more. Thus he was the first who rose again from the dead to return no more into the empire of death.

Clarke: And should show light unto the people—Should give the true knowledge of the law and the prophets to the Jews; for these are meant by the term people, as in Acts 26:17. And to the Gentiles, who had no revelation, and who sat in the valley of the shadow of death: these also, through Christ, should be brought to the knowledge of the truth, and be made a glorious Church, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. That the Messiah should be the light both of the Jews and Gentiles, the prophets had clearly foretold: see Isaiah 60:1: Arise and shine, or be illuminated, for thy LIGHT is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. And again, Isaiah 49:6: I will give thee for a LIGHT to the GENTILES, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the ends of the earth. With such sayings as these Agrippa was well acquainted, from his education as a Jew.

I stand ... saying nothing but what the Prophets and Moshe said would happen. Yeshua had done the same (Lk 24:25–27&N, 44–45), showing how the *Tanakh* pointed to himself. See Section VII of the Introduction to the *JNT*, which lists 54 *Tanakh* prophecies and their New Testament fulfillments. Sha'ul dealt particularly with two questions still raised by many Jewish hearers of the Gospel: Why must the Messiah suffer and die? and, How are the Gentiles included with the Jews as equal sharers in God's promises?³⁵

McGee 2-23: After Paul gives a simple explanation of his conduct, which was the natural outcome of his background, he goes on to tell how he lived a Pharisee, and then of the experience he had on the Damascus road.

He said, "I thought I should do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." The Lord Jesus has never had an enemy more bitter and brutal than Saul of Tarsus. He had an inveterate hatred of Jesus Christ and of the gospel. He tells how he wasted the church in Jerusalem and how he shut up many of the saints in prison. This is one reason he could endure two years of prison and such abuse from the religious leaders. He had been one of them. He knew exactly how they felt.

Then in verse 13 he recounts his experience on the Damascus road, how the Lord Jesus waylays him, how he falls to the ground and hears Jesus speak to him. Then Paul realizes he is going against the will of God. Many years later, as he was writing to the Philippians about this experience he said, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of

³⁵Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:22). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:7–8). A revolution really took place in his life. He had trusted religion, but when he met Jesus Christ, he got rid of all his religion. What was gain he counted loss. Jesus Christ, whom he had hated above everything else, became for him the most wonderful Person in his life.

Then Paul describes for Festus and King Agrippa the reality of the vision he had. The Lord commissioned him to preach to the Gentiles and promised to deliver him from them. That was a telling blow since there he stands before these two powerful Gentiles who cannot touch him because he has appealed to Caesar—and yet he is able to preach the gospel to them!

Beginning with verse 19, Paul tells his response to the vision that he had. “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.” The implication is, “What else could I have done. Wouldn’t you have done the same thing?”

From the beginning Paul is making it clear that *The Way* is a development and fulfillment of the Old Testament. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (v. 22). It is not contrary to the Old Testament.

Now Paul presents the gospel to this man King Agrippa—and all the crowd assembled there that day heard it. “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (v. 23). I think Paul emphasized that word *Gentiles* because the king was a Gentile. Notice that he has presented the gospel: that Christ died for our sins, that He was buried, and that He rose again. Paul as always emphasized the Resurrection. Friend, we should never preach the death of Christ without also preaching about His resurrection. Paul confronts that august assembly with the fact that God has intruded into the history of man and that God has done something for man. God demonstrated His love—God so loved the world that He gave His Son.

Suddenly there is an interruption. Evidently Governor Festus is on a hot seat.

Acts 26:24

And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Paul never gets to finish a sermon! He is always interrupted.

[learning] Greek: *gramma* (GSN-1121), letters. As we would say, "a man of letters."

[mad] Was Paul a madman? If he was we should not follow him. If he was not then all should follow him. He was not called mad when he was persecuting Christians!

Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad! The gospel, when properly presented, will make some people think we are crazy. Paul put it this way: *the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Dake: The Case against Paul:

1.Strange conversion—not like others (Acts 9:2-18; Acts 22:6-21; Acts 26:12-18)

2.Strange ministry (1 Cor. 4; 2 Cor. 6):

- (1) Unpopular (Acts 9:20-25,29; Acts 13:8,45,50; Acts 14:2,5,19; Acts 16:19-24,39; Acts 17:5-9,32; Acts 18:12-17; Acts 19:23-41; Acts 21:27-32; Acts 22:22-24; Acts 23:10,12-25; Acts 24:1-9; Acts 28:4,16; 1 Cor. 4:9-14; 2 Cor. 6,11)
- (2) Driven from city to city (Acts 9:20-25; Acts 13:51; Acts 14:6; Acts 16:39)
- (3) A church-splitter (Acts 13:44-52; Acts 14:1-5; Acts 17:34; Acts 18:4-11; Acts 23:6-10)
- (4) A business-destroyer (Acts 16:16-24; Acts 19:18-20,23-27)
- (5) A jail-breaker—ex-convict (Acts 16:25-40; Acts 22:25-30; Acts 23:18,35; Acts 24:27)
- (6) The cause of mobs (Acts 13:45-52; Acts 14:19; Acts 16:19-24; Acts 17:5-8; Acts 18:12-17; Acts 19:23-41; Acts 21:27-40)
- (7) A peace-disturber (Acts 9:23; Acts 13:45,50; Acts 14:19; Acts 16:19-24; Acts 17:5-17; Acts 18:12; Acts 19:23-41; Acts 21:27-40; Acts 22:22; Acts 24:5)
- (8) A religious disputer (Acts 9:22,29; Acts 15:7-12; Acts 17:17; Acts 19:8-10)
- (9) A heretic (Acts 24:5,14)
- (10) Stubborn, dogmatic, uncompromising (Galatians 2:5; Acts 15:2; Acts 16:37)
- (11) Long-winded (Acts 20:7-12)
- (12) A fanatic (Acts 17:3; Acts 19:19)

3.Strange experiences:

- (1) Shaking off dust (Acts 13:51)
- (2) Shaking raiment at men (Acts 18:6)
- (3) Making a man blind (Acts 13:11)
- (4) Anointed handkerchiefs and aprons and sent them to the sick (Acts 19:11-12)
- (5) Prayed and sang in a loud voice at midnight and in jail (Acts 16:25)
- (6) Fell into trances (Acts 9:2-18; Acts 16:9-10; Acts 18:9; Acts 22:17; Acts 23:11; Acts 27:23)
- (7) Spoke and sang in tongues and interpreted (1 Cor. 14:13-18)
- (8) Laid hands on people to impart spiritual gifts and prophesied over them (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; Romans 1:11; Acts 19:1-7; Hebrews 6:2)
- (9) Healed the sick, cast out devils, and did special miracles (Acts 14:3-18; Acts 15:12; Acts 16:18; Acts 19:11-20; Romans 15:18-29)
- (10) Discerned spirits and brought judgment on people (Acts 13:6-11; Acts 16:18; 1 Cor. 4:18-21; 1 Cor. 5:5-6)
- (11) Ignored natural remedies when bitten by a viper (Acts 28:3-5)
- (12) He got up from stonings, beatings, and other personal sufferings and went about his work without hospitalization (Acts 14:19-20; Acts 16:22-40; Acts 21:27-40; 2 Cor. 11:24-28; 2 Cor. 12:5-10)

4.Strange doctrines—unusual doctrines, as salvation without works (Romans 3:24-31; Romans 4:1-8); gifts of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12); the fullness of God for believers (Ephes. 3:19); second coming of Christ (2 Thes. 1:7-10); freedom from sin (Romans

6:14-23; Romans 8:1-13; Galatians 5:16-26); and many other prophetic and doctrinal subjects so strange to millions today.

Was Paul a madman? To men like Festus he was, but to Christians all he experienced and taught confirms the true Christian faith "of truth and soberness" (Acts 26:25).³⁶

Clarke: Paul, thou art beside thyself—"Thou art mad, Paul!" "Thy great learning hath turned thee into a madman." As we sometimes say, thou art cracked, and thy brain is turned. By the *τα πολλά γραμματα* it is likely that Festus meant no more than this, that Paul had got such a vast variety of knowledge, that his brain was overcharged with it: for, in this speech, Paul makes no particular show of what we call learning; for he quotes none of their celebrated authors, as he did on other occasions; see Acts 17:28. But he here spoke of spiritual things, of which Festus, as a Roman heathen, could have no conception; and this would lead him to conclude that Paul was actually deranged. This is not an uncommon case with many professing Christianity; who, when a man speaks on experimental religion, on the life of God in the soul of man—of the knowledge of salvation, by the remission of sins—of the witness of the Spirit, etc., etc., things essential to that Christianity by which the soul is saved, are ready to cry out, Thou art mad: he is an enthusiast: that is, a religious madman; one who is not worthy to be regarded; and yet, strange to tell, these very persons who thus cry out are surprised that Festus should have supposed that Paul was beside himself!

I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason: Yet, Paul knows that not only is his gospel *true*, it is also *reasonable*. Our God may sometimes act *above* reason, but never *contrary* to reason. Paul's gospel was characterized by **truth** and **reason**, because it was based on *historical events* (such as the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus), things which were not done in a corner, but open to examination.

Barnes: Much learning. It is probable that Festus was acquainted with the fact that Paul had been well instructed, and was a learned man. Paul had not, while before him, manifested particularly his learning. But Festus, acquainted in some way with the fact that he was well educated, supposed that his brain had been turned, and that the effect of it was seen by devotion to a fanatical form of religion. The tendency of long-continued and intense application to produce mental derangement, is everywhere known.

BBC: Undoubtedly referring to Paul's Jewish learning (Acts 26:4-5) but perhaps also to his mastery of Greco-Roman rhetoric, Festus gives the usual answer that educated Romans gave to concepts so foreign and barbarian to them as resurrection. In Greek circles, madness was sometimes associated with prophetic inspiration, but Festus, a Roman, undoubtedly means it less charitably.

LAN: Paul was risking his life for a message that was offensive to the Jews and unbelievable to the Gentiles. Jesus received the same response to his message (Mark 3:21; John 10:20). To a worldly, materialistic mind, it seems insane to risk so much to

³⁶ Dake Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

gain what seems to be so little. But as you follow Christ, you soon discover that temporary possessions look so small next to even the smallest eternal reward.

JNTC: Festus could no longer contain himself. Sha’ul had not even been talking to him, but to the King, whom he had addressed no less than four times. Perhaps Festus thought Sha’ul was wasting the king’s time with nonsense and felt embarrassed at having arranged the session, so that he was trying to excuse himself by pre-empting the critic’s role. A more likely explanation of his interruption is that he was troubled by the Gospel message itself and attempted to blunt its impact by discrediting its proclaimer. The same tactic is often used today by hearers of the Gospel, both Jewish and Gentile, who would rather not relate seriously to it. Sha’ul’s calm and measured reply (vv. 25–27) gives the lie to Festus’ charge and in fact makes *him* sound like the **crazy** one!

One hears much about “deprogramming” people whose beliefs and practices, like Sha’ul’s, have suddenly changed. One justification offered by deprogrammers and those who hire them is that the person being deprogrammed is **out of his mind, ... crazy**— exactly what Festus thought of Sha’ul. It is true that sometimes transformations of belief-systems turn out for the worse. But can that justify capturing an adult Jew whose life has noticeably improved because he has come to faith in Yeshua and subjecting him to involuntary psychological manipulation and abuse, in order to change him from being a supposedly **crazy** believer in the Gospel into a supposedly sane unbeliever? One such horror story is reported by the person to whom it happened, Ken Levitt, writing with Ceil Rosen, in the book *Kidnapped For My Faith* (Glendale, California: Bible Voice, 1978). Fortunately these ill-advised and illegal efforts usually fail, since faith is not acquired by force, and people do not trust Yeshua the Messiah because they are crazy but because they are convinced that the Gospel is true.³⁷

Paul was making his defense before King Agrippa, who was visiting Governor Festus. In his defense, Paul wisely stresses the fact that the Hebrews persecuted him for something which they themselves believed, namely, that the hope of Israel was the resurrection of the dead. Paul observed that all the striving and serving of the twelve tribes of Israel throughout the centuries had been for this “hope’s sake” (v. 7). Paul appealed further to the idea that it was not “incredible” that God should raise the dead (v. 8). Paul completed his appeal with great stress on the resurrection of the dead, concluding with his usual claim that he had encountered Christ personally on the road to Damascus shortly after Christ had suffered and been raised from the dead (v. 23). Although Paul apparently was talking more directly to King Agrippa (v. 19), it was Festus to whom the message got through and who cried with a loud voice, “Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!” The word “mad” is the Greek *manian*, from which comes the modern English “mania.” This is one of the accusations that the unbelieving world sometimes makes against the believer.³⁸

³⁷ Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:24). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

³⁸ Believer’s Study Bible

Acts 26:25

But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

[**I am not mad ...**] I am not insane, but speak truth.

Clarke: I am not mad, most noble Festus—This most sensible, appropriate, and modest answer, was the fullest proof he could give of his sound sense and discretion. The title, Κρατῖτε, most noble, or most excellent, which he gives to Festus, shows at once that he was far above indulging any sentiment of anger or displeasure at Festus, though he had called him a madman; and it shows farther that, with the strictest conscientiousness, even an apostle may give titles of respect to men in power, which taken literally, imply much more than the persons deserve to whom they are applied. Κρατῖτος, which implies most excellent, was merely a title which belonged to the office of Festus. St. Paul hereby acknowledges him as the governor; while, perhaps, moral excellence of any kind could with no propriety be attributed to him.

Speak forth the words of truth and soberness— Words of truth and of mental soundness. The very terms used by the apostle would at once convince Festus that he was mistaken. The σωφροσύνη of the apostle was elegantly opposed to the μανία of the governor: the one signifying mental derangement, the other mental sanity. Never was an answer, on the spur of the moment, more happily conceived.

BBC: A term in Paul’s reply (“utter”—NASB; “saying”—NIV) may imply that he *is* speaking under inspiration (the same term is used in Acts only at Acts 2:4, 14). But “sober” (or “reasonable”—NIV) speech was a virtue appreciated by Romans, related to the ideas of dignity and respectability.

McGee: It seems unfortunate that Paul is interrupted at this point. But notice how courteously Paul answers him. Certainly his calm response demonstrates that he is not a madman and he is not a fanatic.

In our day, friend, there are many witnesses, especially ministers, who are so afraid that they won’t appear intellectual, but will be considered fanatical, that they do not declare the great truths of the gospel. Friend, we ought to be willing to take the place of madmen—but not act like them. We should present the gospel soberly as Paul did.

Notice that having answered Governor Festus, Paul went right back to King Agrippa with the question.

Acts 26:26

For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

[for this thing was not done in a corner] Agrippa knew these words to be true for the life of Christ was well known.

Clarke: Before whom also I speak freely—This is a farther judicious apology for himself and his discourse. As if he had said: Conscious that the king understands all these subjects well, being fully versed in the law and the prophets, I have used the utmost freedom of speech, and have mentioned the tenets of my religion in their own appropriate terms.

Clarke: This thing was not done in a corner—The preaching, miracles, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, were most public and notorious; and of them Agrippa could not be ignorant; and indeed it appears, from his own answer, that he was not, but was now more fully persuaded of the truth than ever, and almost led to embrace Christianity.

Barnes: Was not done in a corner. Did not occur secretly and obscurely; but was public, and was of such a character as to attract attention. The conversion of a leading persecutor, such as Paul had been, and in the manner in which that conversion had taken place, could not but attract attention and remark. And although the Jews would endeavour as much as possible to conceal it, yet Paul might presume that it could not be entirely unknown to Agrippa.

BBC: The charge “speaking in a corner” had long been used to deride philosophers who avoided public life. By the second century Christians were often charged with being secretive (although sometimes they were meeting secretly to avoid being arrested), but Paul argues that Christian claims are public facts, dismissed or ignored by others only because of the others’ bias.

LAN: Paul was appealing to the *facts*—people were still alive who had heard Jesus and seen his miracles; the empty tomb could still be seen; and the Christian message was turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). The history of Jesus’ life and the early church are facts that are still open for us to examine. We still have eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ life recorded in the Bible as well as historical and archaeological records of the early church to study. Examine the events and facts as verified by many witnesses. Strengthen your faith with the truth of these accounts.

Acts 26:27

King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

[**believest thou the prophets?**] This is question 75 in Acts. The last question in Acts.

Clarke: Believest thou the prophets?—Having made his elegant compliment and vindication to Festus, he turns to Agrippa; and, with this strong appeal to his religious feeling, says, Believest thou the prophets? and immediately anticipates his reply, and, with great address, speaks for him, I know that thou believest. The inference from this belief necessarily was: “As thou believest the prophets, and I have proved that the prophets have spoken about Christ, as suffering and, triumphing over death, and that all they say of the Messiah has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, then thou must acknowledge that my doctrine is true.”

Barnes: I know that thou believest. Agrippa was a Jew; and, as such, he of course believed the prophets. Perhaps, too, from what Paul knew of his personal character, he might confidently affirm that he professed to be a believer. Instead, therefore, of waiting for his answer, Paul anticipates it, and says that he knows that Agrippa professes to believe all these prophecies respecting the Messiah. His design is evident. It is

(1) to meet the charge of derangement, and to bring in the testimony of Agrippa, who well understood the subject, to the importance and the truth of what he was saying.

(2.) To press on the conscience of his royal hearer the evidence of the Christian religion, and to secure if possible his conversion. "Since thou believest the prophecies, and since I have shown that they are fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth, that he corresponds in person, character, and work with the prophets, it follows that his religion is true." Paul lost no opportunity of pressing the truth on every class of men. He had such a conviction of the truth of Christianity, that he was deterred by no rank, station, or office; by no fear of the rich, the great and the learned; but everywhere urged the evidence of that religion as indisputable. In this lay the secret of no small part of his success. A man who *really* believes the truth, will be ready to defend it. A man who truly loves religion, will not be ashamed of it anywhere.

Paul returns to his argument from Scripture, directed toward Agrippa although incomprehensible to Festus (Acts 26:22-24).

It is possible to believe the facts without them being meaningful to you. You may know the facts of the gospel—that Jesus died for your sins and rose again—but your relationship to these facts is the thing that is essential.

Acts 26:28

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

Very controversial phrase. Many get the impression that Agrippa was almost persuaded. Other scholars feel that it is a more cynical comment than that.

[Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian] This is to be taken literally, that he was almost persuaded to embrace Christianity. At least, this is the way that Paul understood it and so answered it in Acts 26:29.

Clarke: Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian—This declaration was almost the necessary consequence of the apostle’s reasoning, and Agrippa’s faith. If he believed the prophets, see Acts 26:22, 23, and believed that Paul’s application of their words to Christ Jesus was correct, he must acknowledge the truth of the Christian religion; but he might choose whether he would embrace and confess this truth, or not. However, the sudden appeal to his religious faith extorts from him the declaration, Thou hast nearly persuaded me to embrace Christianity. How it could have entered into the mind of any man, who carefully considered the circumstances of the case, to suppose that these words of Agrippa are spoken ironically, is to me unaccountable. Every circumstance in the case proves them to have been the genuine effusion of a heart persuaded of the truth; and only prevented from fully acknowledging it by secular considerations.

You almost persuade me to become a Christian: The literal idea behind almost is “in a little, you seek to persuade me to act a Christian.” The meaning of *little* could be “in a short time” or it could mean “there is little distance between me and Christianity”. If the sense is “almost,” Agrippa’s reply is especially sorry. Of course, **almost** being a Christian means that you **almost** have eternal life and will **almost** be delivered from the judgment of hell; but **almost** isn’t enough. Far from being admired for how far he did come, Agrippa condemned himself even more by admitting how close he has come to the gospel and how clearly he has understood it, while still rejecting it.

BBC: Although some commentators have read this as an ironic question (see, e.g., NIV), the whole apologetic structure of the narrative suggests that Agrippa instead takes Paul’s case seriously; this could thus be a statement or a rhetorical overstatement (“You are so convincing that you may soon convert me!”).

Agrippa seems to give more than an implied admission that he thought Paul was right. The context here is an example of evangelicalism and evangelism at their best. This is a difficult passage, but it does reveal clearly that Paul was reasoning and preaching forcefully. Regretfully, Agrippa, a great man whose mind was apparently drawn toward the reality of the gospel of Christ, turned his back on the God-given privilege.³⁹

What stopped Agrippa short? Why did he only **almost** become a Christian?

³⁹ Believer’s Study Bible

Why was Agrippa only **almost** persuaded? One answer is the person sitting next to him - Bernice. She was a sinful, immoral companion, and he may have rightly realized that becoming a Christian would mean losing her and his other immoral friends. He was unwilling to make that sacrifice!

On the other side of Agrippa sat Festus - a man's man, a no-nonsense man, a man who thought Paul was crazy. Perhaps Agrippa thought, "I can't become a Christian! Festus will think I'm crazy too!" And because he wanted the praise of men, he rejected Jesus. "Alas, how many are influenced by fear of men! Oh, you cowards, will you be damned out of fear? Will you sooner let your souls perish than show your manhood by telling a poor mortal that you defy his scorn? Dare you not follow the right through all men in the world should call you to do the wrong? Oh, you cowards! You cowards! How you deserve to perish who have not enough soul to call your souls your own, but cower down before the sneers of fools!" (Spurgeon)

In front of Agrippa is Paul - a strong man, a noble man, and man of wisdom and character - but a man in chains. Does Agrippa say, "Well, if I became a Christian, I might end up in chains like Paul! Or at least, I would have to associate with him! We can't have that - I'm an important person!" "O that men were wise enough to see that suffering for Christ is honour, that loss for truth is gain, that the truest dignity rests in wearing the chain upon the arm rather than endure the chain upon the soul." (Spurgeon)

Acts 26:29

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

Clarke: I would to God, etc.—So fully am I persuaded of the infinite excellence of Christianity, and so truly happy am I in possession of it, that I most ardently wish that not only thou, but this whole council, were not only almost, but altogether, such as I am, these CHAINS excepted. Thus, while his heart glows with affection for their best interests, he wishes that they might enjoy all his blessings, if possible, without being obliged to bear any cross on the account. His holding up his chain, which was probably now detached from the soldier's arm, and wrapped about his own, must have made a powerful impression on the minds of his audience. Indeed, it appears they could bear the scene no longer; the king was overwhelmed, and rose up instantly, and so did the rest of the council, and went immediately aside; and, after a very short conference among themselves, they unanimously pronounced him innocent; and his last word, BONDS! and the action with which it was accompanied, had made such a deep impression upon their hearts that they conclude their judgment with that very identical word δεσμων. Would to God, says the apostle, that all who hear me this day were altogether such as I am, except these BONDS! The whole council say—This man hath done nothing worthy of death nor of BONDS! δεσμων, BONDS, is echoed by them from the last words of the apostle; as we may plainly perceive that, seeing such an innocent and eminent man suffering such indignity had made a deep impression upon their hearts. Alas! why should such a man be in B-O-N-D-S!

Agrippa responded to Paul's presentation with a sarcastic remark. Paul didn't react to the brush-off, but made a personal appeal to which he hoped all his listeners would respond. Paul's response is a good example for us as we tell others about God's plan of salvation. A sincere personal appeal or personal testimony can show the depth of our concern and break through hardened hearts.

Paul's heart is revealed here in his words: he was more concerned for the salvation of these strangers than for the removal of his own chains. Ask God to give you a burning desire to see others come to Christ—a desire so strong that it overshadows your problems.

JNTC: In short, you're trying to convince me to become Messianic (Greek *Christianos*, usually rendered "a Christian"). See 11:26, which explains that the word "Christian" referred to Gentile believers, since the Jewish believers were called *Natzratim* (24:5&N). Agrippa's remark shows that he has become aware of Sha'ul's evangelistic purpose (see 26:1). But his use of the word "*Christianos*" instead of "*Natzrati*" may carry a mildly twitting overtone: "you're trying to convince me to become a Gentile as well as a believer in Yeshua"—a response heard to this day from Jewish people presented with the Gospel. No Messianic Jew wants an unbelieving Jew to stop being Jewish and become a Gentile, he only wants him to trust in Yeshua. This is what Sha'ul implies in his answer: refusing to relate to Agrippa's term "*Christianos*," he instead points with earnest intensity to himself as an example of the kind of faith he covets for Agrippa and for all the rest of his audience.⁴⁰

McGee: Agrippa was an intelligent man. He answered, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Friend, do you know that you can almost be a Christian and then be lost for time and eternity? How tragic that is! "Almost" will not do. It must be all or nothing. Either you accept Christ or you don't accept Christ. No theologian can probe the depths of salvation and its meaning. Yet it is simple enough for ordinary folk like most of us to understand. Either you have Christ or you don't have Christ. Either you trust Christ or you don't trust Christ. Either He is your Savior or He is not your Savior. It is one of the two. There is no such thing as a middle ground. It cannot be *almost*. It must be all.

Paul answered, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds." Paul is saying that he longs for them to have a relationship to Christ and be like he is—except for the chains. He wouldn't want chains on anyone. This is the man who had been a proud and zealous Pharisee. This is the man who a few years before bound Christians in chains and put them to death. Now his attitude is different. He wants all people to become Christians and to have a vital and personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

One cannot help but be struck by the mighty transformation that had taken place in Saul of Tarsus. What is the explanation? It is that Jesus was *alive*! He was back from the dead. This is why Paul said very early in his testimony before Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" There is nothing unreasonable about that. Nineteen hundred years of man's development in knowledge in

⁴⁰Stern, D. H. (1996, c1992). *Jewish New Testament Commentary : A companion volume to the Jewish New Testament* (electronic ed.) (Ac 26:28). Clarksville: Jewish New Testament Publications.

many fields makes the Resurrection even more credible in our day. Actually, it should be easier for you to believe in the Resurrection than it was for folk in that day.

Since Jesus is back from the dead, there is another and coming judgment. There is another throne, and Jesus is seated upon it. And there is another prisoner—the prisoner is you or me. Either you have bowed to Him and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, or you will be accountable to Him in that day. The Resurrection is very important to the unsaved man as well as to the saved man.

ESV: In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? Realizing that Paul was pressing for a “Christian” commitment, Agrippa put him off, quipping that it was too “short” a time for making such a decision. Paul picked up on Agrippa's remark: short or long, he wanted everyone to trust Christ. The translation of this verse is not easy, because (1) “in a short time” (Gk. *en oligō*) might also mean “with a small effort”; (2) some take Agrippa's words to be a statement rather than a question; (3) “to be” (Gk. *poieō*) could also mean “to act like”; and (4) there is some variation in the Greek manuscripts. However, most commentators favor a sense similar to that given in the esv.

Acts 26:30

And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

Agrippa realized that Paul was doing more than just defending his faith; he was actually trying to persuade Agrippa to become a follower of Jesus Christ. If Agrippa had told those gathered that he did not believe the prophets, he would have angered the Jews. If he had acknowledged that he did believe the prophets, he would have had to give weight to Paul's words. Agrippa avoided being maneuvered into an embarrassing corner by sidestepping the issue. The interview was becoming too personal for Agrippa's comfort, so he ended the dialogue.⁴¹

Acts 26:31

And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

[nothing worthy of death or of bonds] Clear testimony that Paul was innocent of any wrongdoing against the Jews.

Barnes: This man doeth nothing worthy of death. This was the conclusion to which they had come, after hearing all that the Jews had to allege against him. It was the result of the whole investigation; and we have, therefore, the concurring testimony of Claudius Lysias, Acts 23:29, of Felix, Acts 24 of Festus, Acts 25:26,27, and of Agrippa, to his innocence. More honourable and satisfactory testimony of his innocence Paul could not have desired. It was a full acquittal from all the charges against him; and though he was

⁴¹ The Nelson Study Bible

to be sent to Rome, yet he went there with every favourable circumstance of being acquitted there also.

Paul is not guilty before Roman law, and this is the only conclusion to which Roman hearers could come. Nor is he offensive to Agrippa's more liberal form of Judaism, which cared nothing for revolutionaries and did not accede to the demands of the Jerusalem aristocracy.

Acts 26:32

Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

[**This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar**] No doubt Agrippa wanted to see the immediate release of Paul, but the appeal to Caesar was on record and it was now impossible to change it.

Barnes: Then said Agrippa unto Festus, etc. This is a full declaration of the conviction of Agrippa, that Paul was innocent. It is an instance also where boldness and fidelity will be attended with happy results. Paul had concealed nothing of the truth. He had made a bold and faithful appeal Acts 26:27 to Agrippa himself, for the truth of what he was saying. By this appeal, Agrippa had not been offended. It had only served to impress him more with the innocence of Paul. It is an instance which shows us that religion may be commended to the consciences and reason of princes, and kings, and judges, so that they will see its truth. It is an instance which shows us that the most bold and faithful appeals may be made by the ministers of religion to their hearers, for the truth of what they are saying. And it is a full proof that the most faithful appeals, if respectful, may be made without offending men, and with the certainty that they will feel and admit their force. All preachers should be as faithful as Paul; and whatever may be the rank and character of their auditors, they should never doubt that they have truth and God on their side, and that their message, when most bold and faithful, will commend itself to the consciences of men.

Because Paul had used his Roman right to appeal to Caesar's tribunal, Agrippa and Festus can only refer him there with a letter specifying their own opinion. This appeal had earlier saved Paul's life (Acts 25:3), and now it provides him free passage to Rome (Acts 19:21) and a public forum for the gospel there.

The appeal to the Emperor cannot be annulled because Festus accepted it publicly before Sha'ul's accusers.

McGee: It is obvious that Paul is going to Rome now. We have mentioned before that there are those who question whether Paul did the right thing when he appealed to Caesar. Some feel that Paul made a mistake. I don't think it was a mistake at all.

In the Epistle to the Romans Paul expressed his longing to go to Rome. "Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established" (Rom. 1:10–11).

He is going to Rome all right. You may question whether or not he had a "prosperous journey." I have a friend in the ministry who ran a series of messages for young people (which were tremendous, by the way), and the title of the series was "Paul's Prosperous Journey to Rome." It was a prosperous journey in that it was the will of God that he should go to Rome.

This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains: Agrippa also sees there is no *evidence* offered to support the accusations against Paul, and he respects Paul's great integrity, even while rejecting Paul's gospel. So, Agrippa and the others pronounced a "not guilty" verdict.

This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar: Yet, Paul cannot be **set free**, because he has **appealed to Caesar**. It seems that once an appeal was made, it could not be retracted.

Clarke: Then said Agrippa, etc.—The king himself, who had participated in the strongest emotions on the occasion, feels himself prompted to wish the apostle's immediate liberation; but this was now rendered impracticable, because he had appealed to Caesar; the appeal was no doubt registered, and the business must now proceed to a full hearing. Bp. Pearce conjectures, with great probability, that Agrippa, on his return to Rome, represented Paul's case so favourably to the emperor, or his ministers of state, that he was soon set at liberty there, as may be concluded from Acts 28:30, that he dwelt two whole years in his own hired place; and to the same cause it seems to have been owing that Julius, who had the care of Paul as a prisoner in the ship, treated him courteously; see Acts 27:3, 43. And the same may be gathered from Acts 28:14, 16. So that this defense of the apostle before Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, etc., was ultimately serviceable to his important cause.

1. THE conversion of Saul was a wonderful work of the Spirit of God; and, as we have already seen, a strong proof of the truth of Christianity; and the apostle himself frequently appeals to it as such.
2. His mission to the Gentiles was as extraordinary as the calling of the Gentiles itself. Every thing is supernatural in a work of grace; for, because nature cannot produce the effects, the grace of God, which implies the co-operation of his omniscience, omnipotence, and endless mercy, undertakes to perform the otherwise impossible task.
3. From the commission of St. Paul, we see the state in which the Gentile world was, previously to the preaching of the Gospel.
 1. Their eyes are represented as closed; their understanding was darkened; and they had no right apprehension of spiritual or eternal things.

2. They were in a state of darkness; living without the knowledge of the true God, in a region where nothing but ignorance prevailed.
3. They were under the dominion and authority of Satan; they were his vassals, and he claimed them as his right.
4. They were in a state of guiltiness; living, in almost every respect, in opposition to the dictates even of nature itself.
5. They were polluted; not only irregular and abominable in their lives, but also impure and unholy in their hearts. Thus far their state.

Behold what the grace of the Gospel is to do for these Gentiles, in order to redeem them from this state:—

1. It opens their eyes; gives them an understanding, whereby they may discern the truth; and, without this illumination from above, the truth of God can never be properly apprehended.
2. It turns them from the darkness to the light; a fine metaphor, taken from the act of a blind man, who is continually turning his eyes towards the light, and rolling his eyes upwards towards the sun, and in all directions, that he may collect as many of the scattered rays as he can, in order to form distinct vision. In this way the Gentiles appeared to be, in vain, searching after the light, till the Gospel came, and turned their eyes to the Sun of righteousness.
3. They are brought from under the bondage and slavery of sin and Satan, to be put under the obedience of Jesus Christ. So that Christ and his grace as truly and as fully rule and govern them as sin and Satan did formerly. This is a proof that the change is not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.
4. He pardons their sin, so that they are no longer liable to endless perdition.
5. He sanctifies their nature, so that they are capable of loving and serving him fervently with pure hearts; and are thus rendered fit for the enjoyment of the inheritance among the saints in light.

Such a salvation, from such a bondage, does the Gospel of Christ offer to the Gentiles—to a lost world. It is with extreme difficulty that any person can be persuaded that he needs a similar work of grace on his heart to that which was necessary for the conversion of the Gentiles. We may rest assured that no man is a Christian merely by birth or education. If Christianity implies the life of God in the soul of man—the remission of sins—the thorough purification of the heart, producing that holiness without which none can see the Lord, then it is evident that God alone can do this work, and that neither birth nor education can bestow it. By birth, every man is sinful; by practice, every man is a transgressor; for all have sinned. God alone, by faith in Christ Jesus, can save the sinner from his sins. Reader, has God saved thee from this state of wretchedness, and brought thee “into the glorious liberty of his children?” Let thy conscience answer for itself.

It seems that Paul might have been set free here if he had not appealed to Caesar. So, was Paul’s appeal to Caesar a good thing or a bad thing?

Some people believe it was a bad thing, and that Paul was trusting in the power of the Roman legal system instead of in the power of God. They say that Paul might have been set free by Agrippa if he had not appealed to Caesar.

However, we should see the fulfillment of God's plan through all these events. By his appeal to Caesar, Paul will have the opportunity to preach to the Roman Emperor the way he had to Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, thus fulfilling the promise that Paul would *bear My name before . . . kings* (Acts 9:15).

The appeal to Caesar, and his subsequent journey to Rome at the Empire's expense, were also the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit's purpose that Paul go to Rome (Acts 19:21, 23:11). This also answered a long-standing desire in the heart of Paul to visit the already present Christian community there (Romans 1:9-13).