



Almost Persuaded
Acts 26:1-26:32
(Lesson #34)



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Twelve-point outline of Chapter 25:

- 1) After Festus makes his opening address, King Agrippa II gives Paul permission to speak (26:1).
- 2) Paul starts his address with an introduction where he expresses his thankfulness that Agrippa is presiding over the inquiry since Agrippa is an expert in Jewish matters (26:2-3).
- 3) First, Paul describes his religious background (26:4-5).
- 4) Second, Paul succinctly outlines two key issues that are relevant to what is happening (26:6-8).
- 5) Next, Paul describes how, when, and even why, he persecuted followers of the way (26:9-11).
- 6) Next Paul describes his conversion on the road to Damascus (26:12-18).
- 7) Finally, Paul outlines some of his post-conversion experiences (26:19-23).
- 8) At this point in his discourse, Paul is interrupted by Festus who claims that Paul's leaning has made him crazy (26:24).
- 9) Paul immediately responds to Festus that what he is saying is both true and rational (26:25).
- 10) Then Paul pivots to speak directly to Agrippa, asking him if he believes the prophets (26:26-27).
- 11) Agrippa provides a response to Paul's question, at which Paul responds, and then Agrippa quickly signals he is ending the meeting by standing up (26:28-30).
- 12) After they had withdrawn Festus and Agrippa agreed that Paul was innocent and would have been set free had he not appealed to Caesar (26:31-32).

Vs 1 - So Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and made his defense:

We ended here last week. Festus has set up this whole event for Agrippa, with the hope of finalizing charges against Paul.

Festus having stated the issues, Agrippa then seemingly takes over the enquiry and gives Paul permission to speak for himself.

There is a great deal of irony here, first this is not an actual trial, second Agrippa has no actual authority over Paul, and third the man who has authority over Paul has already conceded he is innocent.

But the words of Jesus are being fulfilled. Remember what Jesus told Ananias (Acts 9:15).

Back to the mock-trial: Then Paul, stretched out his arm and made his defense.

The Greek word translated **defense** is **ἀπολογέομαι (apologeomai)**. It is where we get the **study of apologetics**. Literally, an apologist is one who gives a defense and here Luke records that **Paul stretches out his arm and begins his defense**.

More than likely when Paul stretched out his hand there was a chain attached (26:29).

What you will see is **Paul's defense breaks into five heads:**

- 1) **Paul's background (26:4-5).** The backstory if you will. Often when we give our testimony, we will give some background. Like Paul here, I normally lead with some background.
- 2) **Key issues (26:6-8).**
- 3) **His persecution of the church (26:9-11).** Paul will outline what he was thinking and how he was acting.

- 4) **His conversion on the road to Damascus (26:12-18).** He will outline what happened on the road to Damascus.
- 5) **Paul's post-conversion experiences (26:19-23).** He will discuss activities following his conversion.

What we will see is in the middle of sharing his discourse, Festus interrupts him, and it appears that Paul does not actually get to finish what he had planned to say.

Vs 2-3 - "I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am going to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 especially because you are familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently."

Here we find his pre-defense salutation: Paul declares his fortune in being able to make his defense before Agrippa against the accusations of the Jews.

I consider myself fortunate. The Greek word translated **"fortunate"** is the Greek word **μακάριος (makarios)**. It is normally translated **blessed** or **happy**.

You are **very familiar** with this word (Mat 5:3). **How in the world can Paul say he is happy, he is blessed, he is fortunate in chains?**

Paul is expressing his thankfulness his great fortune in being able to make his defense before King Agrippa II, Festus, Bernice, and other leaders from Caesarea.

Paul He declares that this is especially true because, as we discussed last week. Agrippa is very familiar with the **customs** and to **controversies** of the Jews.

The **Greek word customs** represents those things that are prescribed by Jewish law or extra biblical law like those imposed by the Pharisees.

Agrippa is not only familiar with the customs of the Jews, but he is also familiar with the **controversies**. That **Greek word is used five times** and it means **questions** or **debates** about different topics.

Jesus and people of the way would definitely fall under the broad topic of controversies within the tent of Judaism in the first century.

As we discussed, history tells us the Agrippa had a good understanding of Judaism, and as you will see some understanding of Christianity.

Paul then asks, he pleads for Agrippa to listen to him **patiently**.

Section I – Paul's Background (26:4-5)

Vs 4 - "My manner of life from my youth, spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem, is known by all the Jews."

Paul tells Agrippa that his prior manner of life, from a young boy, was spent (**even though he was born in Tarsus**) among **Israelites in Jerusalem**.

We do not know if his parents moved back to Jerusalem sometime after he was born, so we do not know the details, but broadly, we understand that he was raised in Jerusalem among his own people, fellow Jews.

And this was **common knowledge** among the Jews.

Vs 5 - They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.

Second, it is common knowledge among the Jews, **if they are “willing” to testify** that Paul was raised **according to the strictest party of their religion.**

***** I suspect this is a little dig.** Where are my accusers? If they were here, they would testify about my upbringings! I was brought up as a **Pharisee.**

We have talked about this before, but it is worthy of repeating here, that **Paul was trained at the feet of the leading Pharisee of his day**, a man named **Gamaliel**. We ran into Gamaliel in Acts 5. Remember what Paul said in Acts 22.

Section II - Key Issues (26:6-8)

The two key issues that Paul will address are:

- 1) Is Jesus of Nazareth the promised Messiah?**
- 2) Did he really rise from the grave?**

Those were the two issues then and they are still THE two issues now!

Vs 6-7 - And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, 7 to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day. And for this hope I am accused by Jews, O king!

As background, Paul now declares to Agrippa, I am standing on trial, here today, because of “my hope” in the promise made by God to our fathers.

Now we do not know what verses Paul is thinking about, but we are fairly certain what he is talking about when he mentions the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers. **It is the Messianic Hope.** It is the hope in a coming Messiah!

This promise is woven throughout the Old Testament (Gen 3:15; Gen 22:17-18, Deut 18:15; PS 110:1; Isa 9:6-7; Mic 5:2). This is just a small sampling!

The nation lived under this ever-present desire for God to send the Promised Messiah.

Further, continuing on about this hope. Further... **It is this promise** for which our **twelve tribes** serve God zealously day and night, hoping to see it fulfilled. The promise of the coming Messiah.

NOTICE: In Paul’s mind, in 60AD there were people from all 12 tribes worshipping God hoping for the promise of the Messiah.

Look at the end of verse 7: It is about this hope, the promised Messiah, the Messianic hope, O king, that I am being accused by Jews!”

Then Paul asks the question which touches upon the second issue:

Vs 8 - Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

Here we go, is this what I am on trial for, for believing that God could and would raise the dead? Is this the reason Agrippa?

To a person who rejects God, a person rising from the dead seems impossible. It is foolishness in the highest order.

Paul is saying surely King, as one who claims to hold to the Jewish faith, you know, nothing is too hard for God. **Why does that seem incredible by any of you that God would raise someone from the grave?**

The you is **plural in the Greek**, translated by the ESV “**any of you.**” Paul may be addressing Agrippa II, **but he is speaking to all of them.**

Also, notice, Paul wastes no time in getting the resurrection! This is the crown jewel of the Christian faith and already, Paul has brought up the resurrection as he addresses Agrippa II.

These are the two issues. Who Jesus is and that He rose from the grave!

Section III - His Persecution of the Church (26:9-11)

Vs 9 - "I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul lets Agrippa know **how he was convinced**, that **he ought to do many things**, and **in fact everything possible, to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.**

He felt certain that the claims about Jesus being the Messiah were false. He felt certain that he had not rose from the grave. **Thus he felt certain that he ought to do many things against the name of Jesus!**

He was certain that with all his vigor and all his might he ought, he had a **religious duty to oppose the name of Jesus.**

The Greek word **oppose** is the word **ἐναντίος (enantios)**. It means to be **strongly opposed against**, it means to **stand as an adversary against**, it means to be **hostile against**.

Paul was certain in his own mind, no doubt he had thought about it, he had likely prayed about it, and he was convinced that he had to stand in every way possible **against the outbreak of this new sect.**

Vs 10 - And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them.

So, I did, what I had convinced myself needed to be done. I opposed these followers of Jesus of Nazareth. I did so in Jerusalem. After I received authority from the chief priests, I locked up many of the saints. Pause, notice what Paul calls believers in Jesus here, not simply followers of the way or believers, he calls them saints.

Notice who gave the authority, the leading (the chief priests) of Israel. With their authority, Paul became the official persecutor for the Sanhedrin of Jewish believers in Jesus. Both parties, that could agree on little, could agree on persecuting, even to death, those who believed that Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul was executing the will of the “chief priests” and likely the entire Sanhedrin.

When they had the opportunity to put some of the to death. I voted to have them executed. **The Greek is interesting here.** The English phrase “I cast my vote against them.” Is actually two Greek words: **καταφέρω (kataphero)** – which means to drop or throw down, **ψῆφος (psephos)** – which means stone.

In ancient times they would vote with stones. A white stone for acquittal and a black stone for guilty.

What Paul is saying is when there was a vote to be cast to determine their guilt or innocence, I cast the black stone (consider Rev 2:17).

Vs 11 - And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities.

I punished them often in all the synagogues. Here Paul is talking about how he persecuted believers beyond Jerusalem. The Greek word translated **punish** is the word **τιμωρέω (timoreo)**, it is only used twice in the entire New Testament. It means to avenge. It is likely that Paul is saying he saw his role as taking God's vengeance out on these wayward believers in Jesus.

But he simply did not punish them physically. **He tried to make them blaspheme Jesus.** The Greek word translated **"tried"** is in the imperfect tense and the active voice, indicating that Paul repeatedly tried to make believers in Jesus, blaspheme Him!

We can imagine that **Paul did some pretty horrible things** to those who were followers of Jesus in an attempt to make them blaspheme Jesus' name.

There is more and listen to his words. I was filled with rage and in a fury against them. I persecuted them from town to town, even to foreign cities, even to cities outside the borders of Israel.

I wanted, with all my might and all my effort to eradicate these followers of the way. I hated them! **I was filled with a furious rage against them!**

This was one of the indicators that exposed to Paul's true condition. He was a religious man, but he was also a man filled with rage. Consider (Pro 16:32).

I hope you sense how much Jesus changed the life of Paul. I hope you get a sense that no one is too far from the Lord or His grace. I hope this also spurs you to continue praying for those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior, regardless of how far they may be from Him. Jesus can close the gap quickly!

Lastly, notice Paul said that he persecuted them even **to foreign cities** (plural), even outside the boundaries of Israel. It was not just Damascus, but other cities outside of Israel as well, where Paul would travel to persecute and arrest followers of the way.

Section IV - His Conversion on the Road to Damascus (26:12-18)

Vs 12 - "In this connection I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

It was in connection with arresting Jewish people who had become followers of Jesus, it was to that connection that Paul journeyed with the authority and commission of the chief priests.

- **Authority** – the power of their authority. Paul was operating under their authority.
- **Commission** – Their permission and commission. He came with their command.

Paul had not only their **permission**, he had **their blessing**, and he was **operating under their authority!**

Vs 13 - At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.

At midday, the **brightest portion of the day**. At midday, as Paul was approaching the city, he saw a light from heaven. **Paul, saw the light literally**, before he saw the **light spiritually!**

Now it would be enough to say you saw a light in the brightest part of a middle eastern day. But Paul says he not only saw this light during the brightest portion of the day, but it was brighter than the sun.

As we have discussed multiple times, but worthy of repeating, this light was likely the **shekinah glory of God**.

This light, Paul says shone around him and those who traveled with him.

Vs 14 - And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

So, Paul and his traveling companions were knocked to the ground during this event. There lying in the dust, and Paul hears a voice speaking to him in the Hebrew language.

The voice asks a question followed by an observation. **First the question:**

1) Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

Imagine Jesus saying in great love, Saul, Saul. Why are you doing this.

We have talked about this before, but imagine all that is going through Paul's mind. Who is saying this, why is he saying this? What is happening?

APPLICATION: All persecution of believers is persecution against Jesus. We do not need to worry about avenging ourselves, we have the Creator who will one day avenge us.

Then the observation:

2) It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

This is the first time we are learning that Jesus also said this. Goads are pointed sticks used in agricultural settings, primarily for driving cattle. They serve a practical purpose, urging animals to move forward and stay on course.

What is Jesus saying to Paul? In all that you are doing, you are like a foolish animal that is kicking against the goad which is only damaging you. **The goad was being used to direct Paul for his own spiritual good, but he was kicking against it!**

Vs 15 - And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

I do not believe Paul knew. Nor at this point do I even suspect, that he suspects, it is Jesus. The Greek term Lord, can be used as a term of respect, like mister.

Then the Lord responds to his question: ***"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting."*** We can imagine that this rocked Paul's world!

Up until this moment, Paul saw Jesus as the **false Messiah** who had been **crucified for his crimes**. The one **who was dead**, but his **dilutional followers** keep saying is **alive**.

But now, Paul clearly understands Jesus Is alive and that Jesus was the promised Messiah!

**** Most scholars believe that Paul is telescoping versus 16-18. ****

Vs 16-18 - But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, 17 delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles — to whom I am sending you Vs 18 to open their

eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

First, Vs 16 - Jesus tells Paul to rise, stand on his feet.

Second, Vs 16 - Jesus speaking I have **appeared to you** for a **purpose**. The Greek word appeared is **ὀπτάνομαι (optanomai)**, means **to look upon, the behold, or to appear**.

Then Jesus tells Paul I have a **purpose for your life**. I have appointed you as a **servant** and a **witness**.

APPLICATION: Like Paul, God has a purpose for all of our lives!

For Paul God was going to make him a servant and a witness. **A witness of the things of me that you have seen, as well as ones you will see!**

Third, in Vs 17 - I will deliver you from the Jews (your people) and the **Gentiles** (to whom I am sending you).

Here Jesus implies many will be against Paul, both Jews and Gentiles and he then tells Paul he is sending him to the Gentiles.

Fourth Vs 18 - Then Jesus outlines to Paul his mission:

1) **To open their eyes.** So that they might see the spiritual reality of who Jesus is and what He has done. In the other two accounts we are told that at this moment Paul was struck with blindness. Are you like me? Do you find it at least a little ironic, that God is taking a man He has just blinded, and he will be the one that will open the eyes of others. **But that was part of his purpose!**

2) **So that they can turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.**

To turn people out from the kingdom of Satan, to call them out of the darkness that is in Satan's kingdom.

This is the idea behind repentance. **It is a turning from light to darkness** (Col 1:13).

In my opinion, Paul had opened Felix's eyes, but he did not turn, I believe Paul has opened Agrippa's eyes, but he too, as you will see, fails to turn.

3) **That they may receive forgiveness of sins.**

Here Paul as he recounts what the Lord had called him to do, his mission. Surely Agrippa gets it. In the gospel, God is offering forgiveness of sins. Which is only possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Act 2:38)!

This is the message of the gospel, God loves you and has made a way for you to be forgiven!

4) In the gospel, God is offering people **a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.**

God is offering the opportunity for us to become His people, **sanctified and set apart by Him** and for Him, **through faith in Jesus Christ!** Sanctified means to be set apart. It means to be set apart from the darkness to the light. It means to be set apart from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of Christ.

Paul is right now offering forgiveness of sins to King Agrippa, to Festus, to Bernice, and to the other leaders in the auditorium, along with the chance to be sanctified by faith in Jesus!

Section V - Paul's Post-Conversion Experiences (26:19-23)

Vs 19-20 - "Therefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance."

Then Paul states what is obvious to anyone. O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. **Stated in the positive**, O King, I obeyed what the heavenly vision had called me to do!

I immediately went and declared the gospel to those in Damascus! The Greek word declared is a verb and it is in the imperfect tense, active voice, indicating that Paul not only declared in Damascus, **but kept declaring**.

Then in Jerusalem. Throughout the region of Judea. And also to the Gentiles.

His message that he declared was two-fold:

1) They should repent and turn to God,

Repentance is a matter of the mind that is followed by an action of the will. In the Bible, the word *repent* means **"to change one's mind."** The Bible also tells us that true repentance will result in a change of actions. We could say it is a change of mind that results in a change of actions. **If you do not have both, you truly have neither.**

2) Performing deeds in keeping with their repentance.

Paul is not teaching a works-based salvation, but instead a salvation that works. If we have repented (change of mind that is followed by a change of actions) then we will start performing various deeds that are in keeping with our repentance.

Stated differently, we will start performing deeds as evidence of the salvation which we possess by faith.

Vs 21 - For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me.

Paul says, this is the **actual reason** the Jews seized me and tried to kill me. This is why when **Lysias found me**, the Jews were beating me to death.

They hated my message! So much so they tried to kill me.

Vs 22-23 - To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: Vs 23 that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles."

In spite of all that has occurred it did not stop Paul from sharing the gospel.

Paul says next: To this day, I have been **helped by the help that comes from God** and so I stand here, in front of you, testifying to both small and great.

I am testifying nothing other than what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass. Namely that Christ must suffer, that he would rise from the grave (the first fruits of those who would rise from the grave), and he would be a light to Jews and Gentiles.

What verses does Paul have in mind? Of course, we cannot be sure, but some possible candidates include (Is 53:8-10; Ps 16:8-10; Dan 9:24-36a). Also, the idea of Jesus being a light was also prophesied (Is 42:5-6).

Paul is declaring the gospel, but before he can actually finish his declaration, we read that this happens.

Vs 24 - And as he was saying these things in his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind."

As he was saying these things, while he was declaring these things, with the words fresh in his mouth.

Festus the new governor interrupts and says with a LOUD voice: ***"Paul, you are out of your mind; your great learning is driving you out of your mind."***

The most powerful man in the area at the time, the one who had called his whole assembly together for the benefit of Agrippa hearing what Paul had to say, interrupts and accused Paul of being crazy!

Vs 25 - But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking true and rational words."

Again, we see Paul is calm and cool and immediately responds respectively to Festus and what he had said.

He tells Festus, I am NOT out of my mind. He tells Festus, rather, I am speaking **true** and **rational words**.

True – They are objectively true, they are factual, they are based on the facts, they are certain. **Rational** – The word really means of sound speech or sober. These are sober words, they are **serious**, and they are **logical**.

Vs 26 - For the king knows about these things, and to him I speak boldly. For I am persuaded that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this has not been done in a corner."

Then I can imagine in my mind, Paul's gaze shifts from Festus and back to Agrippa. Then Paul says:

- 1) The king knows about these things, that is why I have spoken so boldly. The king has knowledge of these things. I am persuaded, that none of these things involving Jesus and those who have become His followers have escaped the king's notice.
- 2) For this was not done in a corner.

Quite the opposite, this was all done in the wide open, this was common knowledge. Much of what Paul has said might have gone over Festus' head, he lacked a lot of the background, but it did not go over Agrippa's head!

Vs 27 - King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."

Then Paul, no doubt looking in the eyes of King Agrippa asks: ***Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe."***

He immediately puts **King Agrippa in the dock** and Paul is now interrogating Agrippa. Here is his probing question to the king. **Do you believe, surely you believe!**

In the ESV, they translate what Paul says as **I know that you believe**. The Greek word is **οἶδα (oida)**. The word means to **perceive**. What Paul says is King Agrippa, **Do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe!**

Robertson in his commentary writes this: "Paul had interpreted the prophets about the Messiah in a way that fell in with his claim that Jesus was the Messiah risen from the dead. To say, "Yes" would place himself in Paul's hands. To say "No" would mean that he did not believe the prophets. Agrippa had listened with the keenest interest, but he slipped out of the coils with adroitness and a touch of humor."

Vs 28 - And Agrippa said to Paul, "In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"

Agrippa then responds to Paul: ***"In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?"*** This shows that Agrippa is fully aware about Jesus, and even one of the titles given to his followers, he is not hearing these things for the first time.

He asks Paul would you in so short of a time “persuade” me to be a Christian. But notice he does not answer “Do you believe the prophets”, he does not reject Paul’s interpretation of the prophets, instead he rejects becoming a follower of Jesus.

Vs 29 - And Paul said, "Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am — except for these chains."

Then Paul responds, whether short or long, I would to God that you not only believed, but my wish is that all who are hearing me right now, this day, might become just like me, **minus these chains**.

Paul is saying, my wish is that everyone here in the auditorium might become believers in Jesus, including you King Agrippa!

Vs 30 - Then the king rose, and the governor and Bernice and those who were sitting with them.

At that, the king rose, along with the governor, Bernice, and those who were seated with them, thus marking the end of the inquiry.

This is the goodness, the kindness, and the mercy of God. These men and even this vile woman have the gospel presented to them by Paul the apostle.

Vs 31 - And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment."

They withdrew and as they discuss this with one another, they said to one another: ***"This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment."***

Vs 32 - And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

You sense, as you read this, that they understand they are required to send Paul to Rome. But, here is the bottom line as it relates to Paul and any charges against him.

In closing. If Acts, is a letter written by Luke, with the intent to accompany Paul when he went to Rome. What Nero would have concluded in reading this section (chs 22-26) is that Paul was innocent of all charges.

- Lysias had determined he was innocent.
 - Felix had determined he was innocent.
 - Festus had determined he was innocent.
 - King Agrippa had determined he was innocent.
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