SMITH FOR CHRIST PUBLISHING · BEREAN DASHBOARD STUDY

Acts 26

Not Disobedient to the Heavenly Vision — O·I·A, integrated with the Deep Dive

OBSERVATION · INTERPRETATION · APPLICATION · 2026-11-10 · NASB 1995

"Seeking God diligently — examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." — Acts 17:11

CHAPTER THEME

A prisoner in chains tells a king how Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus and sent him to open blind eyes and turn men from darkness to light. Paul obeyed that vision for the rest of his life — and the men who heard him called him mad, came almost to faith, and stopped there.

00 The Text

ACTS 26 (NASB95), MARKED

HOW THIS STUDY IS MARKED — God — His character & actions · Command / instruction · Key repeated word · Sin / warning · Promise / blessing · Time / place / contrast

1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for
yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and
proceeded to make his defense:

2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the
Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I
am about to make my defense before you today;

3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and
questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to
me patiently.

4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my
youth up, which from the beginning was spent among
my own nation and at Jerusalem;

5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they
are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee
according to the strictest sect of our religion.

6 "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the
promise made by God to our fathers;

7 the promise to which our twelve tribes hope to
attain, as they earnestly serve God night and day. And for
this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews.

8 "Why is it considered incredible among you people if
God does raise the dead?

9 "So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many
things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10 "And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I
lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received
authority from the chief priests, but also when they were
being put to death I cast my vote against them.

11 "And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I
tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously
enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign
cities.

12 "While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus
with the authority and commission of the chief priests,

13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from
heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me
and those who were journeying with me.

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

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

16 'But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;

17 rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you,

18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'

19 "So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,

20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance.

21 "For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death.

22 "So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place;

23 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles."

24 While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."

25 But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.

26 "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

27 "King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."

28 Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."

29 And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,

31 and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."

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

Marked in the text

- **v2** "I consider myself fortunate" — Time / place / contrast
- **v5** "I lived as a Pharisee" — Time / place / contrast
- **v6** "the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers" — Promise / blessing
- **v7** "our twelve tribes" — Promise / blessing
- **v8** "Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?" — God — His character & actions
- **v9** "hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" — Sin / warning
- **v11** "being furiously enraged at them" — Sin / warning
- **v13** "a light from heaven, brighter than the sun" — God — His character & actions
- **v14** "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" — God — His character & actions
- **v14** "It is hard for you to kick against the goads" — Sin / warning
- **v15** "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" — God — His character & actions
- **v16** "get up and stand on your feet" — Command / instruction
- **v16** "a minister and a witness" — Command / instruction
- **v18** "to open their eyes" — Command / instruction
- **v18** "from darkness to light" — Promise / blessing
- **v18** "from the dominion of Satan to God" — Promise / blessing
- **v18** "forgiveness of sins" — Promise / blessing
- **v18** "sanctified by faith in Me" — Promise / blessing
- **v19** "I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision" — Command / instruction
- **v20** "repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" — Command / instruction
- **v22** "having obtained help from God" — God — His character & actions

- **v23** “the Christ was to suffer” — God — His character & actions
- **v24** “you are out of your mind” — Sin / warning
- **v25** “words of sober truth” — Time / place / contrast
- **v26** “this has not been done in a corner” — Time / place / contrast
- **v27** “do you believe the Prophets?” — Command / instruction
- **v28** “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian” — Sin / warning
- **v29** “except for these chains” — Time / place / contrast
- **v31** “This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment” — Time / place / contrast
- **v13** “light” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v6** “hope” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)
- **v17** “Gentiles” — Key repeated word (every occurrence)

01 Observation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT SAY?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 26:15

"And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said,
'△I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'"

FIGURE · ONE ROAD, THREE TELLINGS

ONE ROAD, THREE TELLINGS · ACTS 9 · 22 · 26

	ACTS 9	ACTS 22	ACTS 26
TOLD BY	Luke, narrating	Paul, to the temple crowd	Paul, to King Agrippa
LANGUAGE	—	Hebrew dialect (21:40)	Jesus spoke Hebrew (26:14)
THE LIGHT	"a light from heaven" (9:3)	"a very bright light" (22:6)	"brighter than the sun" (26:13)
ANANIAS	sent; eyes healed (9:17–18)	"a man who was devout" (22:12)	not mentioned
ONLY HERE	the word to Ananias (9:15)	"the Righteous One" (22:14)	goads; full commission (26:14–18)

The same event each time; Paul tells it to fit his hearers, and saves the fullest commission for a king.

Compare the columns: Acts 26 drops Ananias and the blindness, brightens the light, and alone gives the goads and Jesus' full commission.

Setting. The auditorium at Caesarea, the day after Agrippa asked to hear Paul (25:22–23). King Agrippa II presides at Festus's invitation, with Bernice, the military commanders and the leading men of the city. Paul, in chains (v29), "stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense" (v1).

Structure:

- vv1–8 — **Israel's hope:** permission to speak (v1); "I consider myself fortunate" before an expert in Jewish customs (vv2–3); his life as a Pharisee "according to the strictest sect" (vv4–5); on trial "for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers" (vv6–7); "Why is it considered incredible … if God does raise the dead?" (v8).
- vv9–15 — **the persecutor stopped:** hostile to the name of Jesus (v9); prisons, votes, punishment in the synagogues, foreign cities (vv10–11); the road to Damascus at midday, a light brighter than the sun (vv12–13); "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads" (v14); "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting" (v15).

- vv16–18 — **the commission:** "get up and stand on your feet"; a minister and a witness (v16); rescued and sent to the Jewish people and the Gentiles (v17); to open their eyes, darkness to light, Satan to God, forgiveness, inheritance, "by faith in Me" (v18).
- vv19–23 — **the heavenly vision:** "I did not prove disobedient" (v19); Damascus, Jerusalem, Judea, the Gentiles — repent, turn, deeds appropriate to repentance (v20); seized in the temple (v21); help from God, nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said (v22); the Christ to suffer, first to rise, light to Jews and Gentiles (v23).
- vv24–32 — **almost persuaded:** "Paul, you are out of your mind!" (v24); "words of sober truth" (v25); "not been done in a corner" (v26); "do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do" (v27); "In a short time you will persuade me" (v28); "such as I am, except for these chains" (v29); the verdict aside — nothing worthy of death (vv30–31); "might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (v32).

Repeated words, with counts:

- "God" ×7 — vv6, 7, 8, 18, 20, 22, 29.
- "Jews / Jewish" ×7 — vv2, 3, 4, 7, 17, 21, 23.
- "king" ×7 — vv2, 7, 13, 19, 26, 27, 30; "Agrippa" ×6 — vv1, 2, 19, 27, 28, 32.
- "seen / appeared / saw / vision" ×5 — vv13, 16 (×3), 19.
- "hope" ×3 — vv6, 7 (×2); "promise" ×2 — vv6, 7.
- "light" ×3 — vv13, 18, 23; "Gentiles" ×3 — vv17, 20, 23.
- "defense" ×3 — vv1, 2, 24; "witness / testify / testifying" ×3 — vv5, 16, 22.
- "death" ×3 — vv10, 21, 31; "prisons / imprisonment / chains" ×3 — vv10, 29, 31.
- "Jerusalem" ×3 — vv4, 10, 20; "chief priests" ×2 — vv10, 12.
- "persecute" ×2 — vv14, 15; "turn" ×2 — vv18, 20; "repent / repentance" ×2 — v20 (×2).
- "mind / mad" ×3 — vv24 (×2), 25; "Prophets" ×2 — vv22, 27; "persuade" ×2 — vv26, 28; "dead" ×2 — vv8, 23.

Contrasts: a strict Pharisee ⟷ a servant of Jesus (vv5, 16). Hostile to the name of Jesus ⟷ sent in His name (vv9, 17). Furiously enraged ⟷ words of sober truth (vv11, 25). Darkness ⟷ light; Satan ⟷ God (v18). Disobedient ⟷ obedient (v19). Words ⟷ deeds appropriate to repentance (v20). Small ⟷ great (v22). Out of your mind ⟷ sober truth (vv24–25). Done in a corner ⟷ public (v26). A short time ⟷ a long time; almost ⟷ altogether (vv28–29). Chains ⟷ the freest man in the room (v29).

Shape of the chapter: a testimony in three parts — before Christ (vv4–11), meeting Christ (vv12–18), serving Christ (vv19–23) — followed by the interruptions and the verdict (vv24–32). Paul starts on trial and ends preaching; the king starts as judge and ends as the one being pressed for a decision.

Chapter theme (my words): The risen Jesus met a furious religious man, turned him around, and sent him to open blind eyes. Paul obeyed that vision all his life and offered the same Christ to a governor and a king, who called him mad and came almost — but almost is not enough.

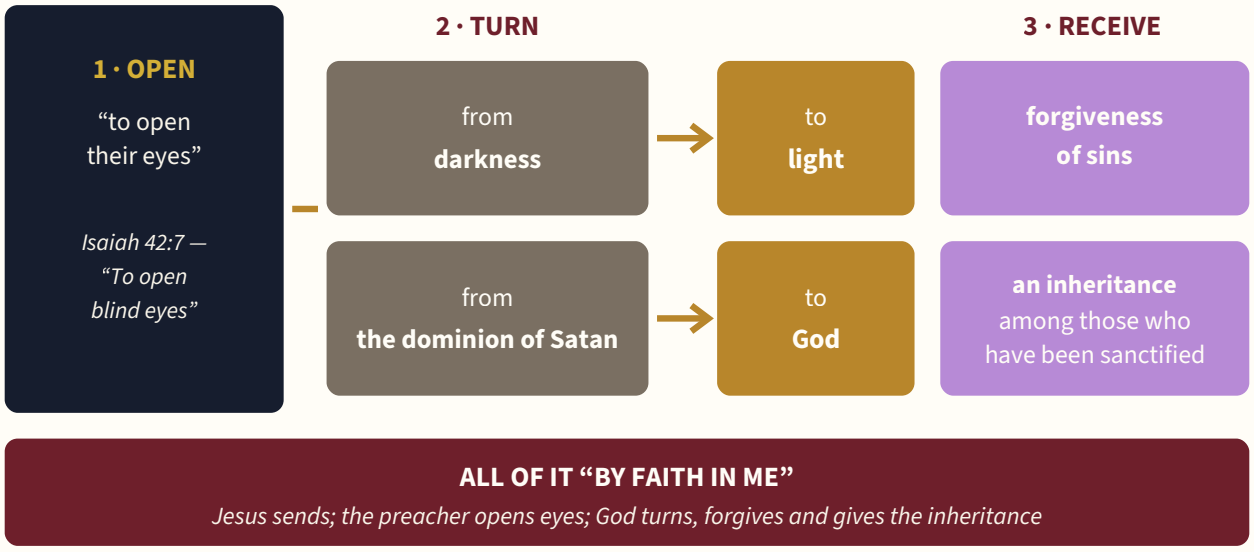
02 Interpretation

WHAT DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 26:20

"but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance."

FIGURE · THE COMMISSION OF 26:18



Read left to right: eyes opened, a man turned from darkness and Satan to light and God, and then forgiveness and an inheritance — all by faith in Christ.

What is "the hope of the promise"? Paul ties it to resurrection (v8) and to the Messiah promised by "the Prophets and Moses" (v22). Guzik: Paul "remained a faithful Jew," and his trust in Jesus "was an outgrowth of his trust in the hope of the promise." Henry: "His religion consists in the hopes of this promise." I note that Paul still speaks of "our twelve tribes" who hope to attain the promise (v7). He does not say the promise has passed to someone else; the hope of Israel is fulfilled in Jesus, and God will keep His word to Israel (Rom 11:26).

Why "incredible"? The question (v8) is about God, not about dead bodies. If God exists and made life, raising the dead is not hard for Him. Guzik: "Why should it be thought incredible that God can do anything?"

Why does this telling differ from Acts 9 and 22? Same event, different audience. Before a king Paul skips Ananias and the blindness, adds the proverb of the goads, and gives the commission as Jesus' own words (vv16–18). Guzik:

"Paul repeats the words from Acts 9:3-6," adapted for his hearers. The differences fill each other out; they do not contradict.

The goads. Spurgeon: the rebuke is tender — the ox only hurts itself, and the Owner has paid too much to lose it. Henry: Paul's "spirit at first perhaps began to rise," and then he yielded. Guzik: Saul repented of misguided religious zeal, not of immorality — a warning that sincere religion can still be fighting Jesus.

What is the commission? Open eyes, turn from darkness to light and from Satan's dominion to God, so men receive forgiveness and an inheritance among the sanctified "by faith in Me" (v18). Henry: the mind must be enlightened, and then "converting grace turns them from under the dominion of Satan." Guzik: "he is called to serve the message."

Repentance and works (v20). Sproul guards the line: "Paul's not here articulating a doctrine of justification by works." "No one was ever a more clear advocate of justification by faith alone." Henry: "It is not enough to speak penitent words, but we must do works agreeable to those words." Faith alone saves, and saving faith is never alone.

Is Paul mad? Festus thinks so. Guzik: "The gospel, when properly proclaimed and lived, will make some people think we are crazy." Paul answers with facts — "this has not been done in a corner." Sproul: "Christianity did not begin as a mystery religion." "If your faith is private, it's not Christian faith you're talking about."

What did Agrippa mean (v28)? The Greek *en oligō* can mean "in a short time" (NASB) or "almost" (KJV). He may have been deflecting with a smile — "You think you can make me a Christian that fast?" — or admitting he was close. Sproul and Spurgeon read it as the tragedy of almost; Guzik: "However close Agrippa was to becoming a believer, it wasn't close enough." Either way, the king stood up and walked out (v30).

Was the appeal a mistake (v32)? Agrippa says Paul could have gone free. Guzik: the appeal could not be retracted and it fit God's plan — Rome, as the Lord said (23:11).

Word study (Greek):

- **hope — *elpis* (G1680), *elpizō* (G1679):** confident expectation of God's promise (vv6–7).
- **incredible — *apistos* (G571):** unbelievable (v8).
- **furiously enraged — *emmainomai* (G1693) / mad — *mainomai* (G3105):** the persecutor raged; Festus says Paul raves.
- **goads — *kentron* (G2759):** an ox-goad; death's "sting" in 1 Cor 15:55–56.
- **minister — *hypēretēs* (G5257) / witness — *martys* (G3144):** servant of the message, eyewitness.
- **dominion — *exousia* (G1849):** Satan's ruling power (Col 1:13).
- **sanctified — *hagiazō* (G37):** perfect participle, set apart for good.
- **vision — *optasia* (G3701):** the risen Christ appearing from heaven.
- **repent — *metanoeō* (G3340):** a turning of mind that shows in deeds (*axia erga*).
- **sober — *sōphrosynē* (G4997):** sound-mindedness; **corner — *gōnia* (G1137).**
- **persuade — *peithō* (G3982) / short time — *oligos* (G3641) / Christian — *Christianos* (G5546).**
- **chains — *desmos* (G1199):** the bonds Paul excepts (v29).

Key insights to carry (from the Deep Dive):

1. **Accused by Jews for the hope of the Jews** (vv6–7).

2. **Not "can a man rise?" but "can God raise him?"** (v8).
3. **Who was really mad?** — *emmainomai* (v11) and *mainomai* (v24).
4. **The goad hurts the one who kicks** (Spurgeon).
5. **To persecute the church is to persecute Christ** (vv14–15).
6. **A blind man sent to open eyes** (Guzik; Isa 42:7).
7. **The whole gospel in one verse** (v18).
8. **Works show repentance; they do not buy it** (Sproul, Henry).
9. **Not done in a corner** — the gospel is public truth (Sproul).
10. **Almost is not enough** (Spurgeon, Henry).

Cross-references: Ps 16:10; Isa 42:6–7; 49:6; 53; Luke 3:8; 24:46–47; Acts 9:1–19; 11:26; 22:1–21; 23:11; 24:15; Rom 11:26; 1 Cor 15:20, 55–56; 2 Cor 4:4–6; Phil 3:5–6; Col 1:13; 1 Tim 1:13–15; 1 Pet 4:16.

03 Application

HOW DOES IT CHANGE ME?

KEY VERSE · ACTS 26:29

"And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, ☆ might become such as I am, ◷ except for these chains.""

FIGURE · FOUR RESPONSES IN ONE HALL

FOUR RESPONSES IN ONE HALL · ACTS 26:24–32

FESTUS the Roman	AGRIPPA the king who knows	THE COURT aside, privately	PAUL the prisoner
"Paul, you are out of your mind!" (v24)	"In a short time you will persuade me" (v28)	"not … worthy of death or imprisonment" (v31)	"such as I am, except for these chains" (v29)

MAD · ALMOST · INNOCENT · ALTOGETHER

Spurgeon: Paul "almost persuaded him to be a Christian altogether" — but almost is not enough.

The same speech, four answers: the skeptic, the almost-believer, the private verdict, and the free man in chains.

Example to follow — Paul telling his story. Paul had one testimony and he told it to a mob, a council, a governor and a king. Who I was, how Jesus met me, what He sent me to do. Many of the men I serve have a past as dark as Saul's — some literally voted against people, locked them up, hurt them. Paul's story says the worst man in the room can become the freest. This week I will write my own story in those three parts and be ready to tell it.

Sin to confess — kicking against the goads. I know the feeling of God pressing on me — a word from Scripture, a brother's warning, a consequence I could not dodge — and of kicking back. It only drove the point deeper. I confess the places where I am still resisting Him, and I stop kicking.

Promise to trust — darkness to light. Verse 18 is my story: eyes opened, turned from darkness and from Satan's dominion to God, forgiven, given an inheritance among the sanctified — all by faith in Christ. No record, no past, no prison can take that inheritance away.

Command to obey — don't be disobedient to the vision. Jesus told Paul to get up and stand on his feet, and Paul obeyed for thirty years. Repent, turn to God, and do deeds that fit repentance. Not words only. If I say I have turned, the people closest to me should be able to see it — in how I talk at home, how I handle money, how I treat the man who wronged me.

Warning to heed — almost. Agrippa was close enough to hear, to believe the prophets, to feel the pull — and he stood up and walked out. I have watched men come almost to Christ and stay there for years. Almost is not enough, for them or for me. Paul's wish is my prayer: that every man I sit with would become such as I am in Christ — except for these chains.

Questions for the table (from the Deep Dive):

1. Before Christ, Saul was sincere, religious — and furious. Where has my religion or my zeal made me angry and hard rather than loving? (26:9–11; 1 Tim 1:13) *His great rage showed his relationship with God was not right (Guzik).*
2. What "goads" has God used on me — people, consequences, His Word — and where am I still kicking? (26:14) *The goad hurts the one who kicks (Spurgeon).*
3. Jesus said, "Get up and stand on your feet" — and gave Paul a job. What has He given me to do with my story? (26:16–18) *Serve the message, don't make it serve you (Guzik).*
4. Which part of verse 18 do I most need to remember about my own life: eyes opened, turned to God, forgiven, or given an inheritance? (26:18; Col 1:13) *All of it "by faith in Me."*
5. What "deeds appropriate to repentance" would show the people around me that I have really turned? (26:20; Luke 3:8) *Not penitent words only, but works agreeable to them (Henry).*
6. Agrippa was close and stayed put. Is there any part of my life where I am "almost" — and what is holding me back? (26:27–29) *The flaw is in the hearer's nature, not the preacher's logic (Spurgeon).*

Worship. The risen Jesus stopped a furious persecutor with a light brighter than the noonday sun and called him by name. He is the Christ who suffered and rose first from the dead, the light promised to Israel and the nations, the One who opens blind eyes and turns men from Satan to God, who forgives sins and gives an inheritance to everyone who trusts Him.

Prayer. Lord Jesus, You met me on my own road when I was fighting You. Forgive me for kicking against the goads. Open my eyes wider, keep me turned from darkness to light, and make me a man who is not disobedient to what You have shown me. Let my deeds match my repentance. Give me Paul's boldness to tell my story to small and great, and his heart to wish that every man who hears me would become altogether Yours. Amen.

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