

Acts Chapter 26

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, we welcome you to the final September class of the year, and next thing you know it'll be Halloween time, and we'll be looking for those initial snowflakes.
- Can't you just chomp at the bit to get out there with that shovel and start moving that white stuff? Yeah, right. Terrible sense of humor, huh? We are in Acts chapter 26, and we are closing in on the book of Acts, moving rather rapidly.
- And I explained to you that the reason we are doing so is because in this dialogue, there is little need for explanation or elaboration.
- We're not dealing with doctrinal issues per se. We are just dealing with the conversation that took place between Paul and his various captors. So I want to begin with chapter 26 and page 618 down in the lower left-hand corner.
- May I remind you that the reason there are a number of different translations here is because each one is just a little bit different.
- [1 : 0 8] This is taken from the 26th translation New Testament. But, of course, not all 26 translations are given with each verse. Just a few are because of those 26, many are identical one to another, so there's no point in including them.
- But those who have a slight variation, they are included and they are abbreviated, like when you see the TCNT, that's an abbreviation for 20th Century New Testament.
- W-E-Y is an abbreviation for Weymouth's translation. G-S-P-D is a translation for the abbreviation for Goodspeed's translation and so on.
- But the base text from which we are operating is that which is in the bold print. And the bold print that begins each verse is the King James Version.
- So I'm going to rehash just a little bit of this because it is just a fast-moving dialogue. So follow along with me, if you will, with the bold print. Agrippa is a king of sorts, at least.
- [2 : 1 4] He's allowed to wear the title by the German authorities. And the Apostle Paul is being examined by him because of the claims that have been originally laid against him by the Jewish people.
- And they are those whom the Romans, of course, have control over and are occupying their country. And for the most part, the Romans were eager to allow the Jews to deliberate and determine cases that came before them that were of a religious nature.
- And Rome didn't want to get involved in that. However, if there were charges brought against someone that had even an inkling of political significance, then Rome was automatically interested.
- Romans, being polytheistic and worshipping many gods and many deities, just didn't care to get involved with the Jews' religion and their differences.
- But if it had any kind of an inclination of political involvement that could somehow impact Rome or the security and stability of Rome, then, of course, they would move in with a vengeance and deal with the situation.

[3 : 29] And the Jews knew that they could not level a charge against Paul of a religious nature. So they said that he is a threat to Rome and to the security of Rome and so on, primarily because the things that he taught religiously and spiritually to the Jews tended to foment rebellion, disorder, conflict, chaos, which threatened the peace.

And that, of course, made Rome interested. So they are not interested on the religious grounds, but they are on the political grounds. So Paul is giving his defense before Agrippa.

He's given it before. He'll be given it again. And each time, he has an opportunity to reflect his testimony and tell how he came to faith in Christ.

So let's just begin reading. Then Agrippa said to Paul, You are permitted to speak for yourself. Then Paul stretched forth a hand and answered for himself, 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, especially because I know thee to be an expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews.

Wherefore, I beseech thee to hear me patiently. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among my known nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews.

[5 : 13] In other words, Jews know all about me and my background, which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify that after the most straightest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.

Now, this, in order to be a Pharisee, you had to not only sign on to the Jewish religion and the law of Moses and all that it involved, but you had to observe it very meticulously, very strictly.

Had to cross all the T's and dot all the I's. And Paul said, I was a full-fledged Jew in every sense of the word, and nobody could dispute that. And those who knew me from my childhood knew that as I grew up under Gamaliel, who was the principal Jewish rabbi of the time and an exalted teacher, they know that I was thoroughly committed to the whole concept of Judaism and the Mosaic law.

And now, verse 6, Now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers.

A couple things need to be explained here. When he talks about our fathers, he is not talking about his immediate papa. He is talking about the fathers of the nation of Israel.

[6 : 36] And when the scriptures refer to the fathers, Old Testament or New, it always has reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

They are the patriarchs of Israel. They are the ones, for all practical purposes, who are the founders, the originators of the nation of Israel because of the promise that God gave to Abraham, and it starts way back in Genesis chapter 12.

And the hope of the promise made of God to the fathers consists of, well, consists of a number of things, but the principal one that Paul is getting at here is that it involves life after this life.

It involves the resurrection from the dead. And this goes all the way back to Genesis. It goes all the way back to Job. Well, you know the story of Job.

Job says, if a man die, shall he live again? And even though worms destroy this flesh, yet in my body I will see God. Job referred to that.

[7 : 43] So this goes all the way back. And the concept is that man is more than just a body. He has a spiritual dimension to his being.

And that spiritual dimension is that which is regenerated at salvation. It is that which exits the body at physical death and goes to be with the Lord.

And the time is coming when that human spirit and that human body are going to be reunited and we will be a glorified body.

We will then be a finished product. Right now, we are not finished. And that should not be hard to believe, especially those of us who live old enough to develop some aches and pains.

We are going to trade in this body for one that won't have any aches and pains. And that is the hope of the resurrection. But when I use that word hope, the hope of the resurrection, it is never used in the Bible in a questioning fashion.

[8 : 44] When we use the word hope, there is an element of uncertainty. We say, we're planning a picnic tomorrow and we hope it doesn't rain.

What that means is, we don't want it to rain, but we don't know whether it is or whether it isn't. We sure hope it doesn't. And the Bible does not use the word hope that way.

It uses it in the sense of an absolute certainty. It is something that you can count on. When Paul talks about the hope of the resurrection, he means the certainty, the definite nature of the resurrection.

It isn't, we hope we're going to be resurrected, but we don't know for sure if it's going to happen or not. But we hope. No, no, no, no. It is an absolute certainty.

When he talks about the hope of the resurrection, it's the same way he wrote to the Colossians when he said, Christ is in you. The hope of glory. It doesn't mean because Christ is in you, you may eventually have a glorified body, and maybe you won't.

[9 : 52] We'll have to wait and see after. No, no. It is because Christ is in you, that is the absolute certainty of a glorified body. And that's the way he's using the word hope here. Now I stand and am judged for the hope, that means the confidence of the promise made of God unto our fathers.

The hope of the resurrection is as certain as the integrity of God who gave it. Unto which promise, that is this hope of the resurrection, unto which promise, our twelve tribes, that's the sons of Jacob, who constituted Reuben, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and so on, naming all the twelve tribes, unto which promise, our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come.

No, no. Are confident they will come. And let's go next page. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

Why should it be thought a thing, incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? I mean, is that such a novel idea? You know all about Judaism.

You have a background and an interest in this. I am not proclaiming something that is unknown or new on the scene. This is something that goes all the way back. Why should it be thought a thing, incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

[11 : 30] I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things, contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Now, here's where his testimony begins.

He's telling Agrippa, there was a time, when I was just as a Pharisee, fully engulfed in observing the law of Moses, and when this sect, this sect of the Nazarenes arose, these followers of Jesus of Nazareth, and the things they were proclaiming, and saying that Jesus was the Messiah.

Well, I, as a Pharisee, knew that had no validity, and that these men were just misguided, and they were led astray by Jesus of Nazareth, whom everyone in his group thought he was the Messiah.

And I saw the nature of that threat. And my concern was, this newfangled idea about Jesus being the Messiah, and bringing in the kingdom and everything, is just misleading the people, and it is leading them astray, and these people need to be dealt with.

They need to be stamped out. And I took it upon myself, to set about that task, and eliminate this threat. They were like a cancer, growing on Judaism. Do you have a question?

[12 : 56] Yeah. Any Jew could be a Pharisee or a Sadducee. They did not have to be of a particular tribe. No. Jews were from all different tribes. I mean, I'm sorry, Pharisees were from all different tribes.

And contrary to what a lot of people think, the Pharisees, the Pharisees was a lay movement. It was the Sadducees, that represented the real officialdom of Israel, and they were of the priestly class.

The high priest was the Sadducee. And of course, the Sadducees and the Pharisees were often in conflict, because the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection of the body.

And you've heard the old Saul that says, that's why the Sadducees were so sad, you see, because they had no resurrection of the body. But the Pharisees, of course, accepted the belief in the resurrection of the body, and so on.

And often these groups would clash. But when it came to making up the body of the Sanhedrin, there was a mix, as I understand it. Some were Sadducees, some were Pharisees. And Paul used that difference to actually get them to fighting among themselves, and took a little bit of the pressure off of him earlier.

[14 : 09] So the Pharisees were actually a lay movement. But it was the Sadducees, whom we would consider to be the official religionists of the day, and that was the priestly caste as well.

To be a Pharisee, you had to be, the idea, regulations as they existed, to the extent that we're able to determine them today, you had to be 35 years of age, to be a Pharisee, and you had to be married.

And this is one of the reasons why many believe that the Apostle Paul had been married at one time, because we know he was a Pharisee when he gives his testimony in Philippians 3, he says he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, a Pharisee.

So we know he was at least 35 years old, and the likelihood is that he was married. We do not know what became of his wife. We do not know if his wife passed away.

Never mentioned. Some suggested that when Paul came to faith in Christ, that it so radically revolutionized his whole life, his philosophy, his thinking, and everything else, and his wife refused to come along with him, and she left him.

[15 : 24] We don't know that. That's just speculation. So, truth be told, we don't know to this day what happened to his wife, but the likelihood is somewhere he had one. And he says, I thought within myself, verse 9, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

I need to fight this thing. Before it gets out of hand, I need to nip it in the bud, and cut these people called Nazarenes off at the knees, and eliminate that threat.

Which 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, and now I think he's referring back and thinking probably of Stephen, when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

I voted against them. Ordinarily, the Sanhedrin, if it met as a full complement, consisted of, I don't know if it's 70 or 72, I think it's 70, of the elite elders of Israel, scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, and they met in a large semi-circle.

And at one end of the circle was the youngest member of the whole group, according to their birth date. And at the extreme end was the oldest member of the group.

[17 : 01] And whenever it came time to vote, they all voted individually and audibly. They gave a voice vote, yea or nay.

And they always started with the younger rather than the older because they didn't want younger men on the Sanhedrin to be influenced by the vote of the older men.

So they started with the younger and came around, and Paul says, when it came time to vote regarding Stephen, I gave my vote against him. And of course, it appears that the whole vote was pretty much unanimous.

And he says in verse 11, And I punished them off, oftentimes, in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme, forced them to say things against God.

Actually, I think they forced them to say things against Christ, not against God. Because the big issue here, in Paul's persecution, it had nothing to do with people believing in God, in the God of Israel.

[18 : 09] Because Paul was very adamant in his belief of the God of Israel. It was these Christians, these Nazarenes, that they were against.

And it is really important to note that difference, that here is a Jew. And by the way, this is kind of ironic, but you know how during World War II, we know of all kinds of horrendous stories and people give testimonies in Germany about the Gestapo breaking into their homes at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning and hauling these Jewish people off to concentration camps, how feared the Gestapo was.

Well, Germany didn't originate the Gestapo tactics. Saul of Tarsus did. And Saul of Tarsus was implementing Gestapo tactics before Germany was ever thought of.

Kind of ironic, the Jew during World War II was on the receiving end by the Germans. And he says, I strove to make them blaspheme and to say things against Christ, of course.

to make them renounce their faith. And being exceedingly mad against them, frantic against them, in my wild fury.

[19 : 34] And Goodspeed says, mad rage against them. One of the places Paul wrote to Timothy uses the expression of ubrus and that he persecuted in such a way and this is a terrible thing to assign to a human being but Paul actually admits to it when he was Saul of Tarsus when he said that he persecuted them and he violated them in every way he could.

And the word that is used in the Greek is a word that conveys the idea that Saul of Tarsus enjoyed it. he enjoyed inflicting pain and discomfort upon these people.

That's a kind of perverse way of a human being to feel in their treatment toward other human beings. But that's exactly the way it was.

And I'm sure he wasn't proud of it. He said, I persecuted them and I did so ignorantly and in unbelief. And this too is a fulfillment of what our Lord earlier said when he gathered together with his apostles.

Remember, he looked his 12 apostles around and he says, fellas, the time is coming when those who would kill you will think they are doing God a service.

[21 : 07] They will kill you in the name of their God. And, you know, this has gone on from time immemorial. We've got people today who are killing others and beheading others.

Actually, cutting off people's heads and they're doing it in the name of their God. They think it pleases their God. They think that their God requires that and they are being obedient to Him.

I don't know that there is any deception like religious deception and it has brought a lot of heartache upon this earth and we certainly have not seen the end of it.

Being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon, as I went to Damascus, where was Damascus?

Good grief, Damascus was 90 miles away. That's a long, you've got to have some real hatred in your heart to be willing to pursue these people who fled from you and went to a strange country, went to a foreign country.

[22 : 16] By the way, this is the country right now that we are presently bombing. This is Syria. Damascus is the capital of Syria. And Christians, by the carloads, got out of Jerusalem.

It was too hot to be there. People were being imprisoned, they were being tortured, and the word was, get out of town while you can. So a whole host of these people got on the Damascus road, left Jerusalem probably through the Damascus gate, and headed out for Damascus in Syria, thinking that they would be safe if they got clear out of the country.

Well, they weren't safe because Paul, or Saul of Tarsus, went to the chief priests who had all of the religious clout and authority, and said, I've got on good authority that a whole bunch of these Nazarene Christians, these followers of Jesus of Nazareth, have fled Jerusalem, and are taking refuge in Damascus, 90 miles to the north.

Give me a letter of introduction to the authorities in Syria, so that they will let me in the country to do this business, explain what this is all about, because obviously they were on good terms with them at the time, and I'll go after them, and I'll bring them back in chains, and we'll make them stand trial here, and we'll persecute them, we'll put them in jail, and all the rest, and of course the chief priests and scribes were all too willing to go along with that.

So whereupon, as I went to Damascus, with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, probably close to twelve noon, high noon, on the Damascus road, I saw in the way, a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun.

[24 : 03] Well if it was midday, and in this part of the world you can be sure that the sun is going to be out at midday, but Paul is saying the brightness that I saw, dwarfed the sun in its brightness.

I never saw a brightness like this before, and that's because this is a supernatural brightness. This is the Shekinah. This is the brightness that accompanies God.

This is the light that filled the temple when Solomon dedicated the temple originally. This is the light that Moses saw when he went into the mount and came down with the light of God on his face and his face was shining and he didn't know it, but everybody looked at Moses and said, whoa, what is this?

This is a supernatural light. That's what he saw from heaven. And a book has been written by that title called A Light From Heaven. It's an interesting read.