

ACTS CHAPTER 26- “ALMOST PERSUADE” OR “ALMOST AND ALL TOGETHER”?

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

Monday 7:00pm, H 105 (1st floor, High School--foot of stairs, behind the gym, by the vending machine area), Tuesday 7:00am, Family, Room, CCCM – Phil Twente, cell #714 425 9221; email – ptwente@gmail.com For past studies, audio plus notes, go to: <http://www.missioncalvary.com/> Click on “Bible Studies” on the left column. References include commentaries by numerous pastor/teachers.

PAUL’S EARLY LIFE – VS. 1-11

Act 26:1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." So Paul stretched out his hand and answered for himself:

Act 26:2 "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because today I shall answer for myself before you concerning all the things of which I am accused by the Jews,

Act 26:3 especially because you are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews. Therefore I beg you to hear me patiently.

Act 26:4 "My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.

Act 26:5 They knew me from the first, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

Act 26:6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers.

Act 26:7 To this promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. For this hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused by the Jews.

Act 26:8 Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?

Act 26:9 "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

v. 1 And Paul stretching out his hand - Chained as it was: a decent expression of his own earnestness, and proper to engage the attention of his hearers; answered for himself - Not only refuting the accusations of the Jews, but enlarging upon the faith of the Gospel.

v. 2 King Agrippa - There is a peculiar force in thus addressing a person by name. Agrippa felt this.

v. 3 “because you are expert” - Which Festus was not; with the customs - In practical matters; and questions - In speculative. This word Festus had used in the absence of Paul, Act 25:19, who, by the Divine leading, repeats and explains it. Agrippa had had peculiar advantages for an accurate knowledge of the Jewish customs and questions, from his education under his father Herod, and his long abode at Jerusalem.

v. 4 From my youth, which was from the beginning - That is, which was from the beginning of my youth. **(Phil. 3:4-6)**

v. 5 If they were willing to testify - But they would not, for they well knew what weight his former life must add to his present testimony.

v. 6 And now - Act 26:6-8 are in a kind of parenthesis, and show that what the Pharisees rightly taught concerning the resurrection, Paul likewise asserted at this day. Act 26:9 is connected with Act 26:5. For Pharisaism impelled him to persecute. I stand in judgment for the hope of the promise - Of the resurrection. So it was in effect. For unless Christ had risen, there could have been no resurrection of the dead. And it was chiefly for testifying the resurrection of Christ, that the Jews still persecuted him.

v. 7 Our twelve tribes - For a great part of the ten tribes also had at various times returned from the east to their own country, Jam 1:1; 1Pe 1:1. Worshipping continually night and day - That is, this is what they aim at in all their public and private worship.

v. 8 Is it judged by you an incredible thing - It was by Festus difficulty must be measured by the capacity of the agent doing the work. When God is the agent that is doing the work, talk of difficulty is absurd. Why should you think it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead? Can God raise the dead? Of course! Act 25:19, to whom Paul answers as if he had heard the discourse.

v. 9 I myself thought - When I was a Pharisee: that I ought to do many things - Which he now enumerates.

ACTS CHAPTER 26 - INTRODUCTION:

Herod Agrippa II – He is the great grandson of Herod the Great who built the temple for the Jews. The Jews loved him because of what he did for them, but hated his lifestyle because of his corrupt and immoral behavior. He was Jewish and practiced all the feasts, rituals and requirements of the Jews.

When Agrippa was sixteen years old his saw his dad do the following

1. Put Christians into prisons and tortured them
2. Chop off the head of James the apostle
3. Put Peter in prison
4. Saw his father eaten by worms

The emperor, Claudius, who knew the family well felt sorry for the young boy, so he awarded him two things:

1. He gave him a province in Northern Galilee to rule
2. He made him the head of the Jewish religion in Jerusalem. Claudius did that because there was no one else who knew anything about the Jews.
3. He made him the custodian of the high priest garments which were very valuable.

Now Bernice was the sister of Herod Agrippa II, and his other sister was Drusilla, Felix’s wife. Bernice and Agrippa decided to live with each other for power. They were committing incest. Because Agrippa was so young, she didn’t think that he would be honored, so she was given to her uncle the King of Calsius until he died and then she came back to live with her brother again. When she felt nothing was progressing well, she married Polomon, the King of Celestica, where Paul came from, but deserted him because he was too old and couldn’t meet her needs. So again she comes back to her brother this time to marry him.

In Acts 26, he is **now thirty one years old, his life corrupted and immoral, following in the footsteps of his father.**

Bernice becomes the mistress of the Emperor Vespasian, the one who ordered the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, by his son, Titus. She was also having an affair with Titus while his father was away and then became the mistress of Titus when he took over.

Now **the review of Paul’s testimony here is one of those special sections of God’s word**, which happened before in *chapter 22*, but there are details here, not in *chapter 22* that he says about his life that again reminds us of the unique place that God had on His program.

ACTS CHAPTER 26- “ALMOST PERSUADE” OR “ALMOST AND ALL TOGETHER”?

OBSERVATION

Act 26:10 This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.

Act 26:11 And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled *them* to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted *them* even to foreign cities.

PAUL RECOUNTS HIS CONVERSION – VS. 12-18

Act 26:12 "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

Act 26:13 at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

Act 26:14 And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Act 26:15 So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

Act 26:16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

Act 26:17 I will deliver you from the *Jewish* people, as well as *from* the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

Act 26:18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

INTERPRETATION

v. 10 I shut up in prison many of the saints - Men not only innocent, but good, just, holy. I gave my vote against them - That is, I joined with those who condemned them. Perhaps the chief priests did also give him power to vote on these occasions.

v. 11 *I punished them* - That is, some of them; to blaspheme - This is the most dreadful of all! Repent, you enemies of the Gospel. If Spira, who was compelled, suffered so terribly, what will become of those who compel, like Saul, but do not repent like him. **(1 Cor. 7:8)**

vs. 12-13 Nobody else has ever experienced the amazing kind of conversion that Paul did. While engaged in his murderous plans, Paul saw the glory of God shining from the heavens. Certainly he had been in spiritual darkness up till then (see *2Co_4:1-6*), but now the Son of God had been revealed to him. See *1Ti_1:12*. The detail, “**brighter than the sun**” is new here.

v. 14 *In the Hebrew language* - St. Paul was not now speaking in Hebrew: when he was, *Act_23:7*, he did not add, In the Hebrew tongue. Christ used this tongue both on earth and from heaven. Here he adds “we all had fallen to the ground”.

v. 15 *And I said, who are You, Lord? and He said,....* Or "the Lord said", as the Alexandrian copy, the Vulgate Latin, and Syriac versions read, *I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*; the Syriac and Ethiopic versions read, "Jesus of Nazareth".

v. 16 to make you a minister and a witness, both of the things which you have seen, and of the things which I will yet reveal to you; so that he was an apostle, not of men, nor by man, but by Jesus Christ, as he himself says, *Gal_1:1*. He was a minister, not of man's making, but of Christ's; and they are the only true ministers of the Gospel, who are made by Christ, who have their mission and commission, their qualifications, gifts, and abilities, their doctrine, work, and wages from him: and the apostle's work, as a minister, was to be a witness; it was to testify what he had seen of Christ corporeally; and what knowledge of his person, office, and grace was now communicated to him by the spirit of wisdom and revelation; and what should hereafter be made known to him, either immediately by Ananias, or immediately by Christ and his Spirit; for the apostle had after appearances, visions, and revelations; see **Act_22:vs. 17-18** 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! Is. 1:18

APPLICATION

Berenice of Cilicia, also known as **Julia Berenice** and sometimes spelled **Bernice** (28 AD – after 81), was a Jewish client queen of the Roman Empire during the second half of the 1st century. Berenice was a member of the Herodian Dynasty that ruled the Roman province of Judaea between 39 BC and 92 AD. She was the daughter of King Herod Agrippa I and a sister of King Herod Agrippa II. What little is known about her life and background comes mostly from the early historian Flavius Josephus, who detailed a history of the Jewish people and wrote an account of the Jewish Rebellion of 67. Suetonius, Tacitus, Dio Cassius, Aurelius Victor and Juvenal, also tell about her. She is also mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. However, it is for her tumultuous love life that she is primarily known from the Renaissance. Her reputation was based on the bias of the Romans to the Eastern princesses, like Cleopatra or later Zenobia. After a number of failed marriages throughout the 40s, she spent much of the remainder of her life at the court of her brother Herod Agrippa II, amidst rumors the two were carrying on an incestuous relationship. During the First Jewish-Roman War, she began a love affair with the future emperor Titus Flavius Vespasianus. However, her unpopularity among the Romans compelled Titus to dismiss her on his accession as emperor in 79. When he died two years later, she disappeared from the historical record. Early life[edit] - Berenice was born in 28^[1] to Herod Agrippa and Cypros, as granddaughter to Aristobulus IV and great-granddaughter to Herod the Great. Her elder brother was Agrippa II (b. 27), and her younger sisters were Mariamne (b. 34) and Drusilla (b. 38).^{[2][3]} According to Josephus, there was also a younger brother called Drusus, who died before his teens.^[4] Her family constituted part of what is known as the Herodian Dynasty, who ruled the Judaea Province between 39 BC and 92. Josephus records three short-lived marriages in Berenice's life, the first which took place sometime between 41 and 43, to Marcus Julius Alexander, brother of Tiberius Julius Alexander and son of Alexander the Alabarch of Alexandria.^{[4][5]} On his early death in 44, she was married to her father's brother, Herod of Chalcis,^[3] with whom she had two sons, Berenicianus and Hyrchanus.^[6] After her husband died in 48, she lived with her brother Agrippa for several years and then married Polemon II of Pontus, king of Cilicia, whom she subsequently deserted.^[7] According to Josephus, Berenice requested this marriage to dispel rumors that she and her brother were carrying on an incestuous relationship, with Polemon being persuaded to this union mostly on account of her wealth. ^[7] However the marriage did not last and she soon returned to the court of her brother. Josephus was not the only ancient writer to suggest incestuous relations between Berenice and Agrippa.

ACTS CHAPTER 26- “ALMOST PERSUADE” OR “ALMOST AND ALL TOGETHER”?

OBSERVATION

PAUL’S POST-CONVERSION LIFE – VS.19-23

Act 26:19 "Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,

Act 26:20 but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and *then* to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance.

Act 26:21 For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill *me*.

Act 26:22 Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—

Act 26:23 that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles."

AGRIPPA PARRIES PAUL’S CHALLENGE – VS. 24-32

Act 26:24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"

Act 26:25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.

Act 26:26 For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner.

Act 26:27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe."

INTERPRETATION

v. 19 From that time - Having received power to obey, **I was not disobedient** - I did obey, I used that power, Gal_1:16. So that even this grace whereby Paul was influenced was not irresistible.

v. 20 but declared - From that hour to this, both to Jew and Gentile, that they should repent - This repentance, we may observe, is previous both to inward and outward holiness.

v. 21 For these reasons - The apostle now applies all that he had said. Having obtained help from God - When all other help failed, God sent the Romans from the castle, and so fulfilled the promise he had made, Act 26:17.

v. 22 Having obtained help from God - When all other help failed, God sent the Romans from the castle, and so fulfilled the promise he had made, Act 26:17.

v. 23 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. Act 26:23). 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. **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.

v. 24 Suddenly there is an interruption. Evidently Governor Festus is on a hot seat.

vs. 25-26 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.

v. 27 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.

APPLICATION

Berenice indeed spent much of her life at the court of Agrippa, and by all accounts shared almost equal power. Popular rumors may also have been fueled by the fact that Agrippa himself never married during his lifetime.^[9] Like her brother, Berenice was a client ruler of the parts of the Roman Empire that lie in the present-day Syria. The Acts of the Apostles records that during this time, in 60, Paul of Tarsus appeared before their court at Caesarea.^[10] In 64 emperor Nero appointed Gessius Florus as procurator of the Judaea Province. During his administration, the Jews were systematically discriminated against in favor of the Greek population of the region.^[11] Tensions quickly rose to civil unrest when Florus plundered the treasury of the Temple of Jerusalem under the guise of Imperial taxes.^[11] Following riots, the instigators were arrested and crucified by the Romans. Appalled at the treatment of her countrymen, Berenice travelled to Jerusalem in 66 to personally petition Florus to spare the Jews, but not only did he refuse to comply with her requests, Berenice herself was nearly killed during skirmishes in the city.^[12] Likewise a plea for assistance to the legate of Syria, Cestius Gallus, met with no response.^[13] Emperor Nero then appointed Vespasian to put down the rebellion, who landed in Judaea with fifth and tenth legions in 67.^[16] He was later joined by his son Titus at Ptolemais, who brought with him the fifteenth legion.^[17] With a strength of 60,000 professional soldiers, the Romans quickly swept across Galilee and by 69 marched on Jerusalem.^[17] **Affair with Titus[edit]** - It was during this time that Berenice met and fell in love with Titus, who was eleven years her junior.^[18] The Herodians sided with the Flavians during the conflict, and later in 69, the Year of the Four Emperors—when the Roman Empire saw the quick succession of the emperors Galba, Otho and Vitellius—Berenice reportedly used all her wealth and influence to support Vespasian on his campaign to become emperor.^[19] When Vespasian was declared emperor on December 21 of 69, Titus was left in Judaea to finish putting down the rebellion. The war ended in 70 with the destruction of the Second Temple and the sack of Jerusalem, with approximately 1 million dead, and 97,000 taken captive by the Romans.^[20] Triumphant, Titus returned to Rome to assist his father in the government, while Berenice stayed behind in Judaea. Upon the accession of Titus as emperor in 79, she returned to Rome, but was quickly dismissed amidst a number of popular measures of Titus to restore his reputation with the populace.^[24] It is possible that he intended to send for her at a more convenient time.^[21] However after reigning barely two years as emperor, he suddenly died on September 13, 81.^[25] It is not known what happened to Berenice after her final dismissal from Rome. an end. In modern history, her aspirations as a potential empress of Rome have led to her being described as a 'miniature Cleopatra'.^[26]

ACTS CHAPTER 26- "ALMOST PERSUADE" OR "ALMOST AND ALL TOGETHER"?

OBSERVATION

Act 26:28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, **"You almost persuade me to become a Christian."**

Act 26:29 And Paul said, **"I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."**

Act 26:30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them;

Act 26:31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains."

Act 26:32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar

At Your Name (Yahweh, Yahweh)"-Phil Wickham

At Your name The mountains shake and crumble

At Your name The oceans roar and tumble

At Your name Angels will bow

The earth will rejoice/ Your people cry out

[Chorus:]

Lord of all the earth/ We shout Your name, shout Your name

Filling up the skies With endless praise, endless praise

Yahweh, Yahweh/ We love to shout Your name, oh Lord

At Your name The morning breaks in Glory

At Your name Creation sings Your story

At Your name Angels will bow

The earth will rejoice/ Your people cry out

[Chorus]

There is no one like our God/ We will praise You, praise You

There is no one like our God We will sing, we will sing [x3]

[Chorus x2]

INTERPRETATION

vs. 28-29 Agrippa was an intelligent man. He answered, **"Almost you persuade me to become 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. There is no such thing as a middle ground. It cannot be *almost*. It must be all. That you would take that next step. Not just almost, but all together into the kingdom, you would be.

Paul answered, **"I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."** 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.**

v. 30 When he had said these things, the king stood up,- An unspeakably precious moment to Agrippa. Whether he duly improved it or no, we shall see in that day.

v. 31 This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.- They speak of his whole life, not of one action only. And could you learn nothing more than this from that discourse?

v. 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus,...As declaring his sense, and by way of advice and counsel; but not as determining anything himself, for that lay in the breast of Festus, the Roman governor and judge: **this man might have been set free**; from his bonds and imprisonment; for ought that appears against him, or any law to the contrary: **if he had not appealed to Caesar**; wherefore an inferior judge could not release him; but so it was ordered in divine Providence, that he should appeal to Caesar, that he might go to Rome, and there bear a testimony for Christ; however, this declaration of Agrippa, and what he and the governor said among themselves, are a considerable proof of the innocence of the apostle.

- **ARE YOU KICKING AGAINST THE GOADS?**
- **DO YOU HAVE A CLEARER UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF JESUS CHRIST PERSONALLY APPREHENDING PAUL-AND AS IT OFFERS PROOF OF JESUS' RESURRECTION?**
- **HAVE YOU TAKEN THE VISION GIVEN TO PAUL AS YOUR OWN?**

APPLICATION

Questions:

1. V. 4 How important is your personal testimony in your witness?
2. Vs. 6-7 What reason does Paul state to Agrippa as the reason he is on trial? - the key issue in Paul's trial?
3. V. 14 How **significant is Jesus Christ personally apprehending Paul in proving the resurrection of Christ?**
4. V. 14 Why or in what ways do or are you "kicking against the goads"?
5. Can it ever be said that when an unbeliever is kicking hardest against goads, that they are actually close to conversion?
6. V. 16 Can you see in this verse that Paul is going to have his own personal tutoring by Jesus?
7. In verses 16-18, what things did Jesus promise and instruct Paul to do? Is that the vision also for you and me?
8. V. 19 Was Paul obedient to his heavenly vision from Jesus?
9. In verses 22-23 how does Paul use the Scriptures in his defense of the resurrection of Jesus?
10. V. 32 Did Paul miss the Lord's calling when he made the appeal to Caesar? Could Paul have conceived that he was going to witness in person to Nero? How does today's study enter into that fact?
11. How significant is the difference between "almost persuaded" and "almost and altogether" persuaded?

Gilbert West and Lord Lyttelton: - In the 1740s, Lord Lyttelton, the famous English jurist and [Gilbert West](#) went to Oxford. There, they agreed to research two key points of Christianity, with the aim of proving them false. **Lyttelton set out to prove that Saul of Tarsus was never really converted to Christianity, and West intended to demonstrate that Jesus never really rose from the dead.** Each planned to do a painstaking job, taking a year to establish his case. But as they proceeded, they eventually concluded that Christianity was true and became Christians. West eventually wrote "*Observations on the History and Evidences of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*". Lyttelton wrote a lengthy text titled "*Observations on the Conversion and Apostleship of St. Paul. in a Letter to Gilbert West, Esq.*" West became convinced of the truth of the Resurrection, and Lyttelton of the genuine conversion of Saint Paul on the basis of it. For example, Lyttelton wrote to West in 1761, "Sir, in a late conversation we had together upon the subject of the Christian religion, I told you that besides all the proofs of it which may be drawn from the prophecies of the Old Testament, from the necessary connection it has with the whole system of the Jewish religion, from the miracles of Christ, and from the evidence given of his reflection by all the other apostles, **I thought the conversion and apostleship of Saint Paul alone, duly considered, was of itself a demonstration sufficient to prove Christianity a divine revelation.**"^[2]