

# Acts 26:1-32: If God Reveals Himself to You, How Should You Respond?

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## I. Introduction

Many people live their lives thinking, "This is it, this is my life. This is as good as it's gonna get." They wish it were different, but there it is, fate staring them in the face. What if they were wrong? What if there was another way to live? Does God care, would He let them know that there's a better way? If He did, if He showed up and told them, how should they respond?

## II. Acts 26:1-32: God told Paul, "What you've been told about Me is wrong, it's this way."

**26:1-18**, Festus having set the stage with his deceptive account about how he now had this dilemma of having to send this innocent prisoner named Paul to Caesar without any charges, hands over the proceedings to king Agrippa who permits Paul to speak. The irony is that they're having a trial for a guy who hasn't been charged with anything! But Paul is happy to answer for himself the accusations hurled at him by Israel's leaders, especially before king Agrippa since he's very familiar with Jewish law and Jewish theological issues. And Paul asks Agrippa to bear with him because he's going to give him a detailed account. What Paul says next not only destroys his accusers' arguments, it's one of the strongest proofs to the truth of Christianity. His experience with Christianity leaves no other option but to believe in it and its Messiah: Jesus Christ.

He says that ever since he was a kid, his life's been an open book, i.e., all the Jews who knew him in Tarsus and Jerusalem know, if they were willing to testify, that the goal of his entire life has been to honor Israel's God, which is why he trained in the strictest sect of Judaism: Pharisaism. He's not some religious nut attacking Judaism, to the contrary, he followed Judaism in the strictest sense. Why was he on trial? Because he believed God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that God would one day resurrect them and everyone else who put their faith in Him. Every Israelite someday hoped to attain this resurrection promise from God. Therefore (and Paul now turns to the general audience made up of Gentiles), they should not think it incredible that God raises the dead. But what Paul failed to realize along with every other Jewish individual who thought Jesus of Nazareth was a heretic is that Jesus Christ was the central focus of Judaism. Since Paul failed to see this, he saw Jesus as an offense to God and Judaism so he brutally persecuted every Christian he could get his hands on. He jailed them, chased them out of every synagogue, forced them to blaspheme against God (so they'd be put to death under Jewish law), he even chased them down in cities outside the land.

While thus occupied, on his way to Damascus for more persecution, having been appointed chief persecutor of the Church by the Sanhedrin, something happened. A light from heaven brighter than the sun caused him and his companions to fall to the ground. A voice then said, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads." Paul replied, "Who are you Lord?" The voice said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," and proceeded to give him instructions. Jesus appointed Paul—the chief persecutor of Christianity—as its chief minister, especially to the Gentiles. Paul would bear witness not only to seeing and hearing from the resurrected Christ, but to many other things Jesus would later reveal to him. And if he faced danger from his own people or Gentiles, Jesus would protect him. Paul would open the eyes of the blind and turn them from darkness to light (Isaiah 42:6-7; 49:6), from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith in Jesus.

**26:19-23**, Paul then turns back to addressing Agrippa. What reaction should a Pharisee who dedicated his entire life to honoring God, who was waiting for the Messiah and God's promised hope of resurrection, and who had just heard from that resurrected Messiah who just chose him to spread the goodnews of that resurrection hope to all peoples, what should his reaction be? Obedience of course! He tells Agrippa that this is exactly what he did, first in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all Judea, and to the Gentiles. He urged them all to repent, turn to God and do works befitting repentance. What was the ironic result?! His own people, who've been waiting for Messiah and that resurrection hope, tried to kill him! That's the reason he's on trial, for proclaiming the exact things that Moses and all the prophets predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures: Messiah would suffer and die, be the first to rise from the dead, and proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 4:2). But God helped him, protected him (14:19-20) which is why he's still standing, witnessing to those small and to those great, like Agrippa.

**26:24-32**, Festus abruptly and loudly interrupts Paul, "Paul you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" An appropriate response to someone who clings to their unbelief driven by reason and logic, "People don't rise from the dead, do they? Of course Not!" Paul responds with calm and respect and informs Festus that he's not insane. In fact, what he's just said is driven by truth and reason! Agrippa knows these things because they are well-known and public knowledge. It's been about 25 years since Jesus' ministry which spanned three years. The miracles He did are countless (cf. John 21:25) and His death and resurrection was also public knowledge (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). So he asks Agrippa a question, "Do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." Agrippa's response is not to call Paul crazy. It appears that he's dodging the question, but Paul's words made Agrippa think. And Paul then tells him the desire of his heart: Paul would be willing to take however long it took to see them all become a Christian like him except for the chains around his hands and feet. At this, king Agrippa stood up and everyone followed him. This signaled the end of the trial. In their private conversation, they all, including Agrippa, acknowledged what Felix and Festus had already concluded: Paul had done nothing deserving of death or chains! In fact, Agrippa said, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

**When God speaks, do you listen?** Paul thought all his life that he was honoring God, especially when he was killing Christians. He truly believed that he was doing the right thing. Everything he'd been taught from the Scriptures since he was a boy told him that Messiah would one day come and deliver him and his people, and that he and all of Israel would one day be resurrected to life everlasting with Messiah reigning over the world. He'd been thought that Gentiles were not the chosen ones. If they wanted to become part of God's family, they would have to adopt Judaism and keep the Law. But then to his utter shock, Messiah showed up in front of him. It was Jesus, alive and resurrected. The long-awaited Messiah was now here and He was telling Paul that what he'd been doing was all wrong. Jesus was not just Israel's Messiah, but the Gentiles' too. And salvation and resurrection and a place in God's family was not acquired through keeping the Law, but faith in Him.....has God ever showed up in front of you? Did you hear His voice? If you did, did you obey or were your circumstances more real than His voice?



### III. Conclusion

*"Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 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. 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. While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 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. 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.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. 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. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, 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.' Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, 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."*