

15. Acts 24-26



Caesarea

Acts 24:1-5

Five days later the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and an attorney, a certain Tertullus, and they reported their case against Paul to the governor. When Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying: ‘Your Excellency [ἡρώτιστε. since 44AD the Governor was a Procurator of equestrian rank), because of you we have long enjoyed peace, and reforms have been made for this people because of your foresight. We welcome this in every way and everywhere with utmost gratitude. But, to detain you no further, I beg you to hear us briefly with your customary graciousness. We have, in fact, found this man a pestilent fellow, an agitator among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

Acts 24:6-9

He even tried to profane the temple, and so we seized him. By examining him yourself you will be able to learn from him concerning everything of which we accuse him.' The Jews also joined in the charge by asserting that all this was true.

Acts 24:10-13

When the governor motioned to him to speak, Paul replied: “I cheerfully make my defence, knowing that for many years you have been a judge over this nation. As you can find out, it is not more than twelve days since I went up to worship in Jerusalem. They did not find me disputing with anyone in the temple or stirring up a crowd either in the synagogues or throughout the city. Neither can they prove to you the charge that they now bring against me.

Acts 24:14-19

But this I admit to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect (24:5), I worship the God of our ancestors, believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets. I have a hope in God — a hope that they themselves (the Pharisees, 23:6-9) also accept — that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous. Therefore I do my best always to have a clear conscience toward God and all people. Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation (see 2Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:25, 31) and to offer sacrifices (Acts 21:26-27). While I was doing this, they found me in the temple, completing the rite of purification, without any crowd or disturbance. But there were some Jews from Asia (see Acts 21:27) — they ought to be here before you to make an accusation, if they have anything against me.

Acts 24:20-21

Or let these men here tell what crime they had found when I stood before the council, unless it was this one sentence that I called out while standing before them. “It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today”.

Acts 24:22-25

But Felix, who was rather well informed about the Way, adjourned the hearing with the comment, “When Lysias the tribune comes down (see his letter, Acts 23:26-30), I will decide your case.”

Then he ordered the centurion to keep him in custody, but to let him have some liberty and not to prevent any of his friends from taking care of his needs.

Some days later when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish (another Herodias?), he sent for Paul and heard him speak concerning faith in Christ Jesus. And as he discussed justice, self-control (see Galatians 5:23), and the coming judgment, Felix became frightened and said, “Go away for the present; when I have an opportunity, I will send for you.”

Acts 24:26-27

At the same time he hoped that **money** would be given him by Paul, and for that reason he used to send for him very often and converse with him. **After two years** had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius **Festus** [59AD]; and since he wanted to grant the **Jews** a favour, Felix left Paul in prison.

Time for Luke's investigating (Luke 1:3)

Circular Letter 'to the **Ephesians**'?

Acts 25:1-7

Three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem where the chief priests and the leaders of the Jews gave him a report against Paul [high priest Ishmael appointed in 58AD]. They appealed to him and requested, as a favour to them against Paul, to have him transferred to Jerusalem. They were, in fact, planning an ambush to kill him along the way (see Acts 23:14-15). Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself intended to go there shortly. “So,” he said, “let those of you who have the authority come down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them accuse him.” After he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. When he arrived, the Jews who had gone down from Jerusalem surrounded him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove.

Acts 25:8-12

Paul said in his defence, “I have in no way committed an offence against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor.” But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favour, asked Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and be tried there before me on these charges?” Paul said, “I am appealing to the emperor’s tribunal; this is where I must (δεῖ. see Acts 19:12; 23:11) be tried (Paul is a Roman citizen, Acts 23:27). I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you very well know. Now if I am in the wrong and have committed something for which I deserve to die, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can turn me over to them. **I appeal to the emperor.**” Then Festus, after he had conferred with his council, replied, “You have appealed to the emperor; to the emperor you will go.”

‘I appeal to the emperor’ (Acts 25:11).

Three years earlier, ‘in the Spirit’, it was revealed to Paul that he should go to Jerusalem and ‘after I have gone there, I must also see Rome’ (19:21).

When he was first made a prisoner in Jerusalem, ‘the Lord stood near him and said, “Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome”’ (Acts 23:11).

Paul discerns that the time has come, and he asserts his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to the tribunal of the emperor. After consulting with his council the governor accedes.

Acts 25:13

After several days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus.

On the death of his father, Herod Agrippa I, in 44AD (see Acts 12:20-23), King Agrippa II (the last king of the Herodian line) inherited only a small part of the kingdom in the north (the tetrarchy of Philip, Luke 3:1). The emperor Claudius returned Judea to the control of a Roman governor. However in 56AD Nero gave him part of Galilee and Perea as well, plus a certain supervisory role over affairs in Jerusalem. He had the right to appoint the high priest.

At the time of this visit to Caesarea he was thirty-three years old and it was widely rumoured that he was living in an incestuous relationship with his younger sister, Bernice. She had already been married three times, and a few years later was to become the mistress of the Roman general, Titus, till he became emperor and rejected her.

Acts 25:14-19

Since they were staying there several days, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a man here who was left in prison by Felix. When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me about him and asked for a sentence against him. I told them that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before the accused had met the accusers face to face and had been given an opportunity to make a defence against the charge. So when they met here, I lost no time, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. When the accusers stood up, they did not charge him with any of the crimes that I was expecting. Instead they had certain points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.

Acts 25:20-22

Since I was at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there on these charges. But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of his Imperial Majesty (Σεβαστος, Nero), I ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor.” Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he said, “you will hear him.”

Acts 25:23-27

So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in. And Festus said, “King Agrippa and all here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish community petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death (see Luke 23:14-15; Acts 23:29); and when he appealed to his Imperial Majesty (Σεβαστὸς), I decided to send him. But I have nothing definite to write to our sovereign [‘lord’: κυρίως] about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write – for it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him.”

Acts 26:1-8

Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself: “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defence today against all the accusations of the Jews, because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently. “All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a **Pharisee**. And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

Paul consistently returns to the accusation that God is offering us the grace of resurrection from the dead:

‘Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. I am on trial concerning the hope of the resurrection of the dead’ (Acts 23:6).

‘I have a hope in God — a hope that they themselves also accept — that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous’ (Acts 24:15).

‘It is about the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today’ (Acts 24:21).

Acts 26:9-11 (compare Acts 9:1; 22:4-5)

“Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests, I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

Throughout the Acts, Luke is constantly making the point that what Paul is doing is not against Judaism. Quite the contrary. It is his zeal for Judaism that impels him to carry out faithfully the mission given to Israel. What made the difference for Paul was when he came to see that fidelity to the God of Abraham, Moses and David demanded that he embrace Christianity, not persecute it.

Acts 26:12-14 (compare Acts 9:1-5; 22:5-8)

“With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, when at midday along the road, O king, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. 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 hurts you to kick against the goads.’ I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.’



Acts 26:16-18

But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve (carry out my will) and to testify to this vision in which you have seen me and to others in which I will appear to you. I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

'I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness' (Isaiah 42:6-7).

The key to his defence is that he is teaching the way he does because he has been directed to do so by 'the Lord'. The focus in this account is clearly on mission. We know from earlier accounts the part played by Ananias in mediating God's will to Paul. Ananias is not mentioned here, because Paul does not want anything to distract from the truth that the mission which he is carrying out is in obedience to God.

A comparison can be drawn here with Paul's account of his conversion and mission in his Letter to the Galatians. We know from elsewhere how important it was for Paul that his teaching was in conformity with the teaching of the others who, like him, were sent by the Lord. In writing to the Galatians, however, he feels constrained to stress the fact that his mission comes, not from them, but from the Lord. So here, he is highlighting the fact that his teaching is in obedience to a divine command.

In his prologue, Luke referred to those who were ‘eyewitnesses and servants of the word’ (Luke 1:2). It was to be one of these, with a special vocation to the Gentiles, that Paul was called. Furthermore, in his vocation as a witness and a servant, he was to be a symbol for every Jew, for this is the call given to Israel by God. God chose to enlighten Paul, and to send him to open the eyes of ‘your people’ and ‘the Gentiles’:

‘Here is your God ... He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened’ (Isaiah 35:4-5).

‘I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness’ (Isaiah 42:6-7).

Jesus, the risen Lord, is continuing his mission through Paul whom he has commissioned to be his witness. It is the will of God to call everyone into communion with him through faith in Jesus. He offers forgiveness from sin – an offering available to all who are willing to be converted.

Acts 26:19-23

“After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: that the Messiah 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.”

Paul has spoken of the commission given to him from heaven. Now he points to his life to demonstrate that he has been faithful to his vocation to proclaim in Damascus (see Acts 9:19-22), in Jerusalem (see Acts 9:26-29), throughout the countryside in Judea (see Acts 11:29), and also to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46), 'that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance'.

Paul claims that in his testimony he says ‘nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place’. We recall the words of the risen Jesus to the apostles: ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled’. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’ (Luke 24:44-48).

Paul is portrayed here by Luke as having carried out the mission given to the apostles by the risen Jesus. When the aged Simeon embraced the infant Messiah in the temple, he cried out with joy: 'My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (Luke 2:30-32).

Standing in the audience hall before this gathering from the Jewish and Gentile worlds, Paul is a symbol of those who have been faithful to their Jewish heritage by accepting 'the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus' (Acts 13:32-33).

Acts 26:24-29

While he was making this defence, Festus exclaimed, “You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. I am speaking the sober truth. Indeed the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?” Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am – except for these chains.”

Acts 26:30-32

Then the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those who had been seated with them; 31and as they were leaving, they said to one another, ‘This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.’

Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor.’

The scene concludes with a final statement, this time from the Jewish king, that Paul is innocent (see Acts 23:9,29; 25:25). Luke directs our attention towards Rome.

Jesus

1. “Passion Predictions”

Luke 9:22

Luke 9:34

Luke 18:31

2. Farewell Address

Luke 22:14–38

3. Resurrection: Sadducees Oppose

Luke 20:27–39

4. Staff of High Priest Slap Jesus

Luke 22:63–64

Paul

1. “Passion Predictions”

Acts 20:23–25

Acts 21:4

Acts 21:11–13

2. Farewell Address

Acts 20:17–35

3. Resurrection: Sadducees Oppose

Acts 23:6–10

4. Staff of High Priest Slap Paul

Acts 23:1–2

Jesus

5. Four “Trials” of Jesus

- A. Sanhedrin: Luke 22:66–71
- B. Roman Governor: Luke 23:1–5
- C. Herodian King: Luke 23:6–12
- D. Roman Governor: Luke 23:13–25

6. Declarations of Innocence

Pilate: Luke 23:14 (cf. 23:4, 22)

Herod: Luke 23:14

Centurion: Luke 23:47

7. Mob Demands Execution

Luke 23:18

Paul

5. Four “Trials” of Paul

- A. Sanhedrin: Acts 22:30–23:10
- B. Roman Governor: 24:1–22
- C. Herodian King: 26
- D. Roman Governor: 25:6–12

6. Declarations of Innocence

Lysias (Tribune): Acts 23:29

Festus: Acts 25:25

Agrippa: Acts 26:31

7. Mob Demands Execution

Acts 22:22