

# Monday - Acts 21:37–22:29

## Paul makes his defense before the mob

### Insight

The Asian Jews who had seized Paul riled up the crowd by falsely accusing him of not caring about the law. They said he had violated the Old Testament law by bringing a Greek into the temple area. Paul's defense to the mob centered on their accusation. Paul spoke about his formal training in Judaism and how he persecuted the Christians for the same reason the mob was persecuting him. He told why he had changed and that the Lord had told him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. He explained how the man who baptized him, Ananias, carefully followed the law.

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. The digest of Paul's speech to the mob is given above. Look at each section as you answer the following question: How did Paul defend himself against the charges of the Asian Jews?
  - Verses 2-5 Paul was a Jew with high credentials. Gamaliel was one of the most famous teachers of the day. Paul had been brought up in Jerusalem. He was trained in the law and zealous for its honor. He had persecuted Christians in Jerusalem and Damascus.
  - Verses 6-11 Paul had not become a Christian on a whim. Jesus had appeared to him.
  - Verses 12-16 As noted above, Paul was baptized by a man who held the Jewish laws in high regard and as a Christian used them to worship God.
  - Verses 17-21 Paul did mission work among the Gentiles because God had told him to do so.
2. How much good did Paul's sermon accomplish? How did this work out for Paul's good?
3. What benefit did Paul's Roman citizenship have for him?

### Apply

4. After his conversion, Paul had returned to Jerusalem. Why did the Lord tell him to leave Jerusalem immediately? Why did Paul think he would be especially qualified to stay in Jerusalem and witness there? How did God react to Paul's idea? At times we may think a situation would best be handled in a particular way, but the Lord chooses to follow a very different direction. Into what temptation can our human logic lead us? How does Paul's experience encourage us?

*Summary - Paul defended himself by explaining his former training in Judaism and why he had stopped persecuting Christians, but to no avail. He ended up safely in Roman hands.*

### Answers

- 1) See above
- 2) The crowd resisted and then rejected his words. Paul was now safely in the hands of the Roman government.
- 3) Paul was not afraid of being beaten. In Philippi, he had not told the Romans that he was a Roman citizen until after he was beaten. Here in Jerusalem, however, it would be of benefit to the spread of the gospel if Paul were protected from Jewish courts and plots.
- 4) Paul thought that he would be a particularly good witness since everyone knew how much he had hated Jesus. Perhaps he figured, "If they see I've changed, surely they'll think seriously about my message." God did not debate with him but simply said, "Go to the Gentiles." When we see events playing out in a way different than we thought best, we may be tempted to list all the reasons why our way is better. Paul's experience reminds us that the best human logic isn't good divine reasoning. God always does what is best.

# Tuesday - Acts 22:30–23:11

## Paul defends himself before Sanhedrin

### Insight

The events of this section follow closely on the events of the previous section. When Paul was first captured, he made use of his Roman citizenship for protection. He was hauled before the Sanhedrin, the court that had condemned Jesus to death. He soon realized he would not be given a fair trial, so he used the antagonism between the Pharisees and Sadducees to subvert the hypocrisy of the trial and go back under the Roman court system.

23:3            *“You whitewashed wall!”* Paul here accuses the high priest of hypocrisy (see Ezekiel 13:10-12). “Your outside is pure, but I can see past the white paint. Inside you are rotting.” Jesus used a similar picture, describing the teachers of the law and the Pharisees as whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:27,28).

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Why did Paul feel that the slap was a show of hypocrisy? Yet Paul apologized. Why?
2. How did the Pharisees and the Sadducees differ in their public confessions of faith? On these particular points, which of the groups was correct? How did Paul make use of these conflicting confessions in his defense?
3. How did this conflict serve Paul’s good?
4. What message did the Lord give to Paul the night after his appearance before the Sanhedrin? Why would a visit from the Lord have been especially comforting at that particular time?

### Apply

5. When Paul found out that the one ordering the slap was the high priest, he was concerned about showing disrespect for authority. He quoted from Exodus, emphasizing the special honor owed God’s representatives, even when they were evil. In what ways can we show respect for leaders even when they are going against God’s will?

*Summary - Paul defended himself before the Sanhedrin. The Lord promised to protect Paul.*

### Answers

- 1) There was no just cause for the blow. Therefore, the act violated God’s law. The one supposed to uphold God’s law had violated God’s law. At this time, you may wish to use question 5.
- 2) The Sadducees denied the existence of bodily resurrection, angels, and spirits. The Pharisees acknowledged the existence of all three. In these areas the Pharisees taught accurately. Paul, a Pharisee, revealed the hypocrisy of their unified opposition against him by pointing out how doctrinally divided they were. He stated that his confidence in the resurrection of the dead was at the heart of his confession of faith, bringing the Pharisees to his side and creating conflict between them and the Sadducees.
- 3) The Roman commander had to step in and take Paul back into the barracks.
- 4) The Lord told Paul he would testify in Rome. This told Paul that the events of the last two days would not continue to repeat themselves and that God would protect him for more witnessing.
- 5) We speak the truth in love, clearly identifying sin, but we also continue to honor the authorities, recognizing that they serve as God’s representatives whether they are evil or good. We properly avoid ridiculing, mocking, or assuming the worst about our leaders.

# Wednesday - Acts 23:12-35

## A plot to kill Paul serves God's purposes

### Insight

Verse 27 *"I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen."*  
Actually, Claudius did not discover that Paul was a Roman citizen until after he had unlawfully chained him and was about to beat him (Acts 22:25-29). This small twist of detail made Claudius look better.

Verse 31 *"The soldiers . . . took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris."* A journey of over 40 miles from Jerusalem.

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. How did the Jewish conspirators reveal the depth of their hatred toward Paul?
2. Describe the Jewish plan to kill Paul.
3. Roman protection was the best in the world. Yet not even the Romans could cover all the bases. But there was one who could! How did the Roman army commander find out about the Jewish plot against Paul?
4. In what different ways did the Jerusalem garrison commander work to ensure Paul's safety once he discovered the plot?

### Apply

5. Read Ephesians 1:18-23. What role does Jesus play in world government? Why is this comforting, especially when, unlike the Romans here, we see governments acting contrary to God's revealed will?

*Summary - The Lord used the Roman government and a little boy to save Paul from a violent plot.*

### Answers

- 1) They hatched a plot to kill him. Not only did they want to kill him, but they vowed not to eat or drink until they had succeeded.
- 2) The 40 men asked the Sanhedrin to request another hearing with Paul present. When Paul was being transported from the Roman barracks to the Sanhedrin's chambers, the conspirators would ambush him. Note: We see how wise Paul was to put himself under Roman protection.
- 3) Although the Lord would use the Romans to protect Paul, it is clear that the Lord himself was behind everything. Somehow Paul's young nephew discovered the plan. He reported it to Paul and then passed along the information to Claudius, the Roman commander.
- 4) He commanded the youth to tell no one that he had reported the conspiracy, not wanting the Jews to revise their plans because their plot had been discovered. He sent a massive armed force to protect Paul. He commanded them to travel in darkness, and he delivered Paul safely to the provincial capital of Caesarea.
- 5) Jesus is far above all rule and authority. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. He governs all that happens for the good of his children, the church. We find comfort in knowing that nothing is ever out of his control. God works in all things, even in the actions of those opposing the truth, for the good of his people. Sometimes his help is obvious, as here. On other occasions, it may seem like an evil government is gaining the victory. However it appears, God assures us that he is frustrating Satan's plans and keeping us safe for eternity.

# Thursday - Acts 24

## Paul testifies before a Roman governor

### Insight

Verse 1 “Five days later”—The Jews lost no time in arriving in Caesarea. Jerusalem is in central Palestine; Caesarea is on the coast. They must have packed up and left immediately after Paul had been rushed to Caesarea at night.

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. The accusations Tertullus made against Paul are noted below. Study Paul’s response, and tell how Paul defended himself against each of these accusations.

- Verse 5a, Tertullus: Paul is a troublemaker. He stirs up riots among Jews all over the world.

Paul: I arrived at Jerusalem no more than 12 days ago, not much time to do the kind of damage they accuse me of. I went to Jerusalem to worship (verse 11). They did not find me in the temple arguing. I did not stir up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else, which they accuse me of doing throughout the world (verse 12). Regarding what I have done throughout the world, some Jews from Asia should be here to accuse me (verse 19).

- Verse 5b, Tertullus: Paul is the ringleader of a sect.

Paul: What they call a sect, I know to be the worship of the true God and the Way, Jesus Christ (verse 14a). I believe everything that agrees with the Law and the Prophets, and I share the same hope as my accusers. I strive to keep my conscience clear (in this case, in regard to sinning against the temple) (verses 14-16).

- Verse 6, Tertullus: Paul tried to desecrate the temple.

Paul: I came to Jerusalem to worship (verse 11). I brought a gift for the poor in Jerusalem. I presented offerings to God. I was not ceremonially unclean when I was in the temple. There was no crowd with me, nor was I stirring up anyone. Let my accusers say exactly what I did so I can defend myself against specific charges (verse 20).

2. Why do you think Paul adds to his charges what he had said to the Sanhedrin that ultimately broke up their meeting?

### Apply

3. Discuss the difference between Felix’ fear and the fear and sorrow God desires.

*Summary - Paul confessed the truth of the resurrection. Felix listened but rejected Paul’s message.*

### Answers

- 1) See above
- 2) First, he did create a disturbance on that occasion. He was simply being honest, showing he had nothing to hide. Second, this gave him an opportunity to testify to Jesus’ resurrection.
- 3) Paul spoke about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come. Apparently Felix’ conscience told him, “If what Paul says is true, I will be punished for what I have done.” He was clearly afraid of these consequences. God wants us to see our sin and be terrified, certain that all is lost, so that we might find joy in God’s revelation that righteousness comes not by our obedience but as a gift of God in Christ Jesus. Based on how Felix handled Paul’s case, it is clear he did not repent. First, he enjoyed hearing Paul but was always hoping for a bribe. Second, he kept Paul in prison for two years, and when he was replaced as governor, he still did not release him. Felix had worldly sorrow. He recognized the consequences of sin, but his flesh did not want to give up his sin.

# Friday - Acts 25:1-22

## Lower court injustice brings a higher court appeal

### Insight

Felix had heard Paul's case and promised to make his decision when Lysius, the commander from Jerusalem, arrived and verified the details. But that never happened. Felix unjustly kept Paul in prison for two years until the next governor arrived.

Verse 1      *“Three days after arriving in the province”*—Festus quickly went to Jerusalem, which was natural. He wanted to meet the Jewish leadership and discuss any problems or needs they felt he should address. It was good diplomacy. In their first opportunity to speak with this new governor, the Jews asked that Paul be condemned. Their memories were long. Time had not quenched their thirst for Paul's blood.

Verse 6      *“The next day”*—These little time references show how intent the Jews were on killing Paul and how high his case was on their priority list.

Verses 9,10      *“‘Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?’ Paul answered, ‘I am now standing before Caesar’s court.’”* Festus had no good reason to move the courtroom. Paul saw Festus' question for what it was, a poorly disguised attempt to appease the Jews while maintaining the appearance of fairness toward Paul. While Paul was not afraid to die, he would not willingly assist the Jews in their evil plan.

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Why did the Jews want Paul's case transferred to Jerusalem? How did Festus show good leadership?
2. See the note above on verses 9 and 10. Why did Paul “appeal to Caesar”?
3. What did Festus tell Agrippa was the real point of contention between Paul and the Jews?

### Apply

4. Read Romans 12:19-21. How does God want us to respond when we are treated unjustly?

*Summary - Festus perverted justice for personal benefit. Paul sought justice from Caesar.*

### Answers

- 1) The Jewish leaders wanted to kill him along the way. Until Festus knew more about what was going on, he wanted the prisoner to remain under his care.
- 2) Every Roman citizen had the right to have his case heard before Caesar at Rome. Once the prisoner made this request, he could not change his mind. Paul knew the Jews would never give up trying to kill him. He also knew God had promised that Paul would testify about him in Rome. So Paul protected himself against the Jews, and he found a way to go to Rome.
- 3) It was about a dead man named Jesus, whom Paul claimed was alive. It was about various Jewish religious laws. (Agrippa was a “king.” He was the grandson of Herod the Great, appointed by the Romans to rule territory in northern Israel. Bernice was his sister. More about him in the next lesson.)
- 4) The Lord encourages his children to be unafraid of losing physical things and not to be frightened by acts of injustice. At the same time, Jesus teaches us that when given a God-pleasing opportunity to avoid danger, it is a sin willingly to place oneself in danger.

# Saturday - Acts 25:23–26:11

## You will witness before kings

### Insight

26:3 “[Agrippa,] you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies.” This Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had killed the apostle James (Acts 12:1,2). Though Agrippa’s territory was north of the Sea of Galilee, Rome had also given him control over Jerusalem’s temple. He had the right to name the high priest. Paul knew that Agrippa was well aware of the Jewish Scriptures (Acts 26:27) and Jewish religious disputes.

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. What embarrassing position was Festus in, which prompted him to arrange this hearing? (verses 23-27)
2. Agrippa was the more seasoned leader, who understood the Jewish laws and writings. Agrippa motioned with his hand to let Paul have the floor. Examine Paul’s defense by stating the main point or points in each of the following sections:
  - Verses 2,3 Paul considered himself fortunate to make his defense before Agrippa. In fact, as it turned out, if Agrippa had been at Paul’s earlier trials, Paul may have been released.
  - Verses 4,5 Paul lived as a strict Pharisee. This should make clear his knowledge of the law, his zeal for the law, and the fact that he would never change his allegiance easily.
  - Verses 6-8 Paul’s conversion was not a rejection of Moses’ laws but stemmed from the knowledge that Jesus Christ had fulfilled those laws. Paul was teaching the fulfillment of the hope the 12 tribes were waiting for, and Paul was being condemned for this hope of the resurrection in Christ.
  - Verses 9-11 Paul began to talk about what changed him from persecutor to Christian, and he was certainly no lightweight persecutor who might change easily.

### Apply

3. As he recounted his past, we can see him shuddering at the many children of God he had imprisoned or killed. Read 1 Timothy 1:15,16. As we consider Paul’s life and then tremble at the many sins we have committed against others, what comfort does the Lord give us?

*Summary - Festus needed help finding charges against Paul. He enlisted the help of a ruler familiar with the Jewish nation, Herod Agrippa. Paul began his speech, showing from his life that he was a sincere Jew who really had come to know that Jesus had fulfilled the hope of Israel.*

### Answers

- 1) Festus admitted that he had a prisoner whom he must soon send to Rome for trial, but he didn’t know what the charges were. Festus had gotten himself into this predicament. By playing politics and trying to please the Jews, he had forced Paul to appeal to Rome.
- 2) See above
- 3) Sometimes we take Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 1:15,16 as words we ourselves should confess. But that doesn’t do justice to what Paul says. Paul says that he is the worst of sinners. The reason Christ showed patience to him was to prove the unlimited nature of his mercy. If Paul is not the worst of sinners, then some very sinful unbeliever might say, “Yes, Christ died for Paul, and he died for you, but neither of you are worse sinners than me.” But if Paul is truly the worst of sinners, then his life history, and the fact that Jesus appeared to him and led him to faith, gives each of us lesser sinners great comfort. Without doubt, Jesus’ mercy extends to us also.

# Sunday - Acts 26:12-32

## I pray that you may become what I am

### Insight

Verse 14      *“It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”* An ox driver prods his animals with a sharp goad, pointed stick. To kick against the goad is to fight in vain and to be hurt in the process. As Paul was battling Jesus, he was doing just that.

### Points to Ponder/Discussion

1. Continue working through Paul’s speech to Agrippa. State the main point of each section.
  - Verses 12-14 Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. He pointed out that Paul was fighting against him in vain.
  - Verses 15,16 Jesus gave Paul his commission. Paul did not take it on himself.
  - Verses 17,18 Everything Paul did fit in with Jesus’ commission to him. In speaking about his commission, Paul preached the gospel and described in a beautiful way the blessings of faith in Christ. God would open the eyes of Jews and Gentiles, turning them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Those rescued would receive forgiveness of sins and a place (literally, a share or inheritance) among those who have been made holy.
  - Verses 19-23 Paul worked to fulfill Christ’s commission. He proclaimed only what Moses and the prophets said would happen through God’s Savior—that he would die and rise from the dead for the sake of his people Israel and for the Gentiles.
2. In his defense before Agrippa, Paul connected the Old Testament and Jesus. Why is this connection especially significant in Paul’s witness to Agrippa?
3. What did Paul mean when he said in verse 29, “I pray God that [all of you] become what I am”?

### Apply

4. What two reactions did Paul receive from his message, and what were his answers? How does this pattern repeat itself today?

*Summary - Paul explained his faith and life to two rulers. He confidently declared that Jesus fulfilled the prophets’ words. He prayed that God would create faith in the hearts of those who heard him.*

### Answers

- 1) See above
- 2) Paul knew that Agrippa believed the Old Testament prophets. Paul demonstrated that the Scriptures Agrippa already believed pointed to Jesus.
- 3) Paul was a Christian. He desired that God would change the hearts of all listening. The only qualification Paul made concerned the chains in which he was bound.
- 4) Festus said Paul’s great learning had driven him insane, implying that Paul’s words were the irrational ramblings of a madman. Agrippa said that Paul was trying to rush him into becoming a Christian. Paul told Festus that everything he said was true and reasonable. He appealed to Agrippa’s knowledge of the facts drawn from a long acquaintance with the Jewish nation. All he could say to Agrippa was that he prayed someday Agrippa would come to faith. People think Christians today are insane, or at least foolish and naïve to believe in Jesus. All we can do is point them to Scripture and compare our faith with what Scripture says. Many don’t want to be rushed into Christianity. All we can do is pray that someday they will take the message to heart.