

# THE TRIALS OF THE MINISTRY

Acts 21:17—26:32

## Opening Thought

1) In recent years, the public has become fascinated with all things legal. This is evidenced in the number of TV shows, novels, and movies about the criminal justice system as well as cable programs that cover actual judicial proceedings. It is seen in the push to put television cameras in the courtroom.

What do you think is behind this growing interest in the law, this desire to watch real-life (as well as fictional) lawyers and trials?

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## Background of the Passage

In this lengthy section dominated by charges and trials and defense testimony, Luke first recorded Paul's arrival at Jerusalem where he was warmly welcomed by believers. Due to the strong Jewish animosity toward Paul, however, James and the elders encouraged the apostle to participate in a public Jewish ceremony of purification at the temple. Such an act, they felt, would quell the false rumors circulating that he was actively undermining the Mosaic law.

This attempt to placate the enemies of the gospel was an utter failure, with a group of Jews from Asia making false and highly inflammatory accusations against the apostle. Only the quick action of a detachment of Roman soldiers saved Paul from being beaten to death by an angry mob.

Paul addressed the crowd, presenting his credentials as a devout Jew trained under the highly respected rabbi Gamaliel. He even described his unlikely encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. But when he mentioned Christ's command to go "far from here to the Gentiles" (22:21), the mob erupted in anger.

Barely escaping a flogging, Paul was brought before the Jewish high council. The atmosphere was highly charged, and the high priest ordered Paul slapped after he had uttered the first sentence of his defense! The situation became even more fractious when Paul raised the issue of the resurrection of the dead. While the Pharisees and Sadducees squared off against one another in a heated debate, Paul was led back to the safety of his cell.

Despite a murder plot by the Jews, Paul received divine assurance of reaching Rome (23:11). He arrived safely in Caesarea accompanied by an armed escort of almost five hundred soldiers.

Chapters 23–26 record three trials of Paul, the first before Felix the Roman governor in Caesarea. Tertullus, a lawyer from Jerusalem arrived with Ananias, the high priest and presented the Jews' baseless case against Paul. Paul responded brilliantly, winning a reprieve from Felix. This legal postponement lasted about two years, during which time, Paul had many opportunities to speak about faith in Christ to Felix and his wife, Drusilla.

When Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus, the Jews once again made their case against Paul. During this trial before the new governor Festus Paul, using his rights as a Roman citizen, asked for, and received the promise

of, a hearing before Caesar. This legal decision reflects the final failure and judgment of the Jews. The good news, embodied in Paul the evangelist, would not return to Jerusalem. In fact, in less than one decade hence, Jerusalem would be surrounded by foreign armies (see Luke 21:20–24). King Agrippa, in Caesarea with his sister Bernice for a political visit with the new governor Festus, became embroiled in the controversy over Paul. Festus, mindful of Agrippa’s familiarity with Jewish law and practice, and needing to prepare some kind of legal brief/paperwork for Caesar, arranged a special audience with Paul. Festus found Paul’s testimony absurd; Agrippa found it pointed and a bit too personal. Nevertheless, Paul took advantage of this situation to share his encounter with Christ and his fervent belief in the truth of the gospel. He did not let the goal (reaching Rome) obscure opportunities that surfaced along the way to his destination.

## Bible Passage

Read 21:17—26:32, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

### Acts 21:17—26:32

<sup>17</sup> *And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.*

<sup>18</sup> *On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.*

<sup>19</sup> *When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.*

<sup>20</sup> *And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law;*

<sup>21</sup> *“but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.*

<sup>22</sup> *“What then? The assembly must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come.*

<sup>23</sup> *“Therefore do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow.*

<sup>24</sup> *“Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law.*

<sup>25</sup> *“But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality.”*

<sup>26</sup> *Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them.*

<sup>27</sup> *Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,*

<sup>28</sup> *crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.”*

<sup>29</sup> *(For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

<sup>30</sup> *And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.*

<sup>31</sup> *Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.*

<sup>32</sup> *He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.*

<sup>33</sup> *Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.*

<sup>34</sup> *And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.*

<sup>35</sup> *When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.*

36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"  
37 Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He  
replied, "Can you speak Greek?"  
38 "Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out  
into the wilderness?"  
39 But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me  
to speak to the people."  
40 So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people.  
And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying,  
22:1 "Brethren and fathers, hear my defense before you now."  
2 And when they heard that he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, they kept all the more silent. Then he  
said:  
3 "I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught  
according to the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.  
4 "I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women,  
5 "as also the high priest bears me witness, and all the council of the elders, from whom I also received  
letters to the brethren, and went to Damascus to bring in chains even those who were there to Jerusalem to  
be punished.  
6 "Now it happened, as I journeyed and came near Damascus at about noon, suddenly a great light from  
heaven shone around me.  
7 "And I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'  
8 "So I answered, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said to me, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are  
persecuting.'  
9 "And those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him  
who spoke to me.  
10 "So I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said to me, 'Arise and go into Damascus, and there you  
will be told all things which are appointed for you to do.'  
11 "And since I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of those who were with me, I  
came into Damascus.  
12 "Then a certain Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good testimony with all the Jews who  
dwelt there,  
13 "came to me; and he stood and said to me, 'Brother Saul, receive your sight.' And at that same hour I  
looked up at him.  
14 "Then he said, 'The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One,  
and hear the voice of His mouth.  
15 'For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard.  
16 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the  
Lord.'  
17 "Now it happened, when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple, that I was in a trance  
18 "and saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your  
testimony concerning Me.'  
19 "So I said, 'Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You.  
20 'And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and  
guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.'  
21 "Then He said to me, 'Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles.'  
22 And they listened to him until this word, and then they raised their voices and said, "Away with such a  
fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!"  
23 Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air,  
24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under  
scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him.  
25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge

*a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?”*

*26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, “Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.”*

*27 Then the commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” He said, “Yes.”*

*28 The commander answered, “With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.” And Paul said, “But I was born a citizen.”*

*29 Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.*

*30 The next day, because he wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews, he released him from his bonds, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down and set him before them.*

*23:1 Then Paul, looking earnestly at the council, said, “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”*

*2 And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.*

*3 Then Paul said to him, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”*

*4 And those who stood by said, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”*

*5 Then Paul said, “I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”*

*6 But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!”*

*7 And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided.*

*8 For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.*

*9 Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees’s party arose and protested, saying, “We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”*

*10 Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks.*

*11 But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”*

*12 And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.*

*13 Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy.*

*14 They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, “We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul.*

*15 “Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near.”*

*16 So when Paul’s sister’s son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.*

*17 Then Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, “Take this young man to the commander, for he has something to tell him.”*

*18 So he took him and brought him to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to say to you.”*

*19 Then the commander took him by the hand, went aside and asked privately, “What is it that you have to tell me?”*

*20 And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire more fully about him.*

*21 “But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for*

the promise from you.”

22 So the commander let the young man depart, and commanded him, “Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me.”

23 And he called for two centurions, saying, “Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night;

24 “and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor.”

25 He wrote a letter in the following manner:

26 Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix: Greetings.

27 This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman.

28 And when I wanted to know the reason they accused him, I brought him before their council.

29 I found out that he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains.

30 And when it was told me that the Jews lay in wait for the man, I sent him immediately to you, and also commanded his accusers to state before you the charges against him. Farewell.

31 Then the soldiers, as they were commanded, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris.

32 The next day they left the horsemen to go on with him, and returned to the barracks.

33 When they came to Caesarea and had delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him.

34 And when the governor had read it, he asked what province he was from. And when he understood that he was from Cilicia,

35 he said, “I will hear you when your accusers also have come.” And he commanded him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium.

24:1 Now after five days Ananias the high priest came down with the elders and a certain orator named Tertullus. These gave evidence to the governor against Paul.

2 And when he was called upon, Tertullus began his accusation, saying: “Seeing that through you we enjoy great peace, and prosperity is being brought to this nation by your foresight,

3 “we accept it always and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

4 “Nevertheless, not to be tedious to you any further, I beg you to hear, by your courtesy, a few words from us.

5 “For we have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.

6 “He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law.

7 “But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands,

8 “commanding his accusers to come to you. By examining him yourself you may ascertain all these things of which we accuse him.”

9 And the Jews also assented, maintaining that these things were so.

10 Then Paul, after the governor had nodded to him to speak, answered: “Inasmuch as I know that you have been for many years a judge of this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself,

11 “because you may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship.

12 “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city.

13 “Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me.

14 “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets.

15 “I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

16 “This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men.

17 “Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation,

18 “in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult.

19 “They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me.

20 *“Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council,*

21 *“unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.’”*

22 *But when Felix heard these things, having more accurate knowledge of the Way, he adjourned the proceedings and said, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case.”*

23 *So he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him.*

24 *And after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.*

25 *Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, “Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.”*

26 *Meanwhile he also hoped that money would be given him by Paul, that he might release him. Therefore he sent for him more often and conversed with him.*

27 *But after two years Porcius Festus succeeded Felix; and Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound.*

25:1 *Now when Festus had come to the province, after three days he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem.*

2 *Then the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him,*

3 *asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem—while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him.*

4 *But Festus answered that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself was going there shortly.*

5 *“Therefore,” he said, “let those who have authority among you go down with me and accuse this man, to see if there is any fault in him.”*

6 *And when he had remained among them more than ten days, he went down to Caesarea. And the next day, sitting on the judgment seat, he commanded Paul to be brought.*

7 *When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove,*

8 *while he answered for himself, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.”*

9 *But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?”*

10 *So Paul said, “I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know.*

11 *“For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.”*

12 *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”*

13 *And after some days King Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet Festus.*

14 *When they had been there many days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying: “There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix,*

15 *“about whom the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, when I was in Jerusalem, asking for a judgment against him.*

16 *“To them I answered, ‘It is not the custom of the Romans to deliver any man to destruction before the accused meets the accusers face to face, and has opportunity to answer for himself concerning the charge against him.’*

17 *“Therefore when they had come together, without any delay, the next day I sat on the judgment seat and commanded the man to be brought in.*

18 *“When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed,*

19 *“but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

20 *“And because I was uncertain of such questions, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there be judged concerning these matters.*

21 *“But when Paul appealed to be reserved for the decision of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I could send him to Caesar.”*

22 *Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”*

23 *So the next day, when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’s command Paul was brought in.*

24 *And Festus said: “King Agrippa and all the men who are here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole assembly of the Jews petitioned me, both at Jerusalem and here, crying out that he was not fit to live any longer.*

25 *“But when I found that he had committed nothing deserving of death, and that he himself had appealed to Augustus, I decided to send him.*

26 *“I have nothing certain to write to my lord concerning him. Therefore I have brought him out before you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the examination has taken place I may have something to write.*

27 *“For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.”*

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

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,*

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.*

4 *“My manner of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation at Jerusalem, all the Jews know.*

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.*

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

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.*

8 *“Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?*

9 *“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

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.*

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.*

12 *“While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,*

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.*

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.’*

15 *“So I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said, ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.*

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.*

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

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.’*

19 *“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,*

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.*

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

22 “Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying  
23 no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come—  
24 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.”  
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!”  
25 But he said, “I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason.  
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.  
27 “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe.”  
28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.”  
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.”  
30 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat  
with them;  
31 and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, “This man is doing nothing deserving  
of death or chains.”  
32 Then Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

**the brethren received us gladly** (v. 17)—due to the much needed offering that had been brought as well as the presence of converted Gentiles with Paul **the elders** (v. 18)—The apostles (away on evangelistic work) had turned over the rule of the Jerusalem church to a group of elders.

**zealous for the law** (v. 20)— These were not Judaizers, but believers who still observed the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic law.

**to forsake Moses** (v. 21)—The Judaizers made the false charge that Paul was teaching Jewish believers to turn their backs on their Jewish heritage (see 16:1–3 and 18:18 for evidence to the contrary); this lie was perpetuated and exaggerated shortly thereafter (see verse 28).

**do what we tell you** (v. 23)— James and the elders suggested that Paul undergo ritual purification at the temple to quell all the rumors.

**seven days** (v. 27)—the length of the purification process

**Jews from Asia** (v. 27)—likely Ephesus, since they recognized Trophimus as a Gentile (verse 29)

**doors were shut** (v. 30)—by the temple guards to prevent a murder from defiling the temple grounds

**commander** (v. 31)—This tribune was Claudius Lysias, the highest ranking Roman in Jerusalem who commanded a force of a thousand men and was head quartered at Fort Antonia, located adjacent to the temple.

**“Can you speak Greek?”**(v. 37)—Paul’s use of Greek (the language of the learned) startled the Roman commander; he assumed Paul was an uncultured Egyptian troublemaker (verse 38).

**hear my defense** (22:1)—the first of six recorded by Luke

**Hebrew language** (v. 2)— Aramaic, the language of Palestine

**Gamaliel** (v. 3)—That Paul had studied under such a celebrated rabbi was a serious blow to those who wanted to paint him as anti-law and anti-temple.

**I persecuted this Way** (v. 4) —Paul’s former zeal for his Jewish heritage far outstripped the fervor of his accusers.

**wash away your sins** (v. 16)— Grammatically the phrase, “calling on the name of the Lord,” precedes “arise and be baptized.” Salvation comes from calling on the name of the Lord (Romans 10:9, 10, 13), not from being

baptized.

***I will send you far from here to the Gentiles*** (v. 21)—This statement, coupled with Paul’s overriding message that Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jewish proselytes, sent the crowd into a rage; to their ears this was blasphemy.

***threw dust*** (v. 23)—a sign of intense emotion

***examined under scourging***(v. 24)—a brutal Roman interrogation method; the victims who were not maimed for life often died

***who is a Roman*** (v. 25)— Roman citizens were protected from such brutal treatment. When Paul revealed his citizenship, Lysias became alarmed; his impulsive command could have cost him his career and perhaps his life.

***Ananias*** (23:2)—one of Israel’s cruelest and most corrupt high priests; his illegal command for Paul to be struck was in keeping with his evil character

***you whitewashed wall*** (v. 3) —Paul reacted angrily and spoke derisively to Ananias; he later admitted he had violated God’s express prohibition against slandering a ruler, quoting Exodus 22:28, and explained that he didn’t know his accuser was the high priest—a statement most attribute to sarcasm or offer as proof of Paul’s poor eyesight.

***a dissension arose*** (v. 7)—The issue of the resurrection was perhaps the biggest theological hot potato between the Pharisees and Sadducees; the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch, which does not overtly teach the doctrine of the resurrection.

***the Lord stood by him*** (v. 11) —the fifth of six visions recorded by Luke; in this one the Lord assured Paul of eventual arrival in Rome

***bound themselves under an oath*** (v. 12)—Essentially they invoked divine judgment if they did not carry out their plot.

***Paul’s sister’s son*** (v. 16)—the only clear reference in the New Testament to Paul’s family; this nephew somehow learned of the Jewish plot and was able to warn his uncle

***bring him safely to Felix***(v. 24)—Lysias regarded the Jewish threat as serious enough to warrant Paul’s removal to Caesarea; a contingent of almost five hundred men were assigned to protect the apostle.

***concerning questions of their Law*** (v. 29)—Lysias wrote this letter to Felix, painting himself in the best possible light and making no mention of any crimes against Roman law, in essence declaring Paul innocent.

***Herod’s Praetorium*** (v. 35)— Felix’s official residence in Caesarea

***Tertullus began*** (v. 2)— Tertullus may have been a Roman; more likely he was a Hellenistic Jew. His opening statement accuses Paul of sedition (a crime against Roman law), sectarianism (a violation of Jewish law), and sacrilege (a violation of divine law).

***Felix*** (v. 3)—the brutal and largely ineffective governor of Judea from A.D. 52 to 59

***Then Paul ... answered***(v. 10)—the third of Paul’s six defenses recorded in Acts; here he reiterated the facts surrounding his arrest and essentially argued that he was standing before Felix for no other reason than his belief in the resurrection of the dead (that is, theological beliefs rather than criminal acts)

***having more accurate knowledge of the Way*** (v. 22)—probably from his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish (25:24)

***adjourned the proceedings*** (v. 22)—Since Paul’s original accusers (that is, the Jews from Asia) had not appeared, no compelling case had been made by Tertullus, and a “not guilty” verdict would upset the peace,

Felix reasoned that the best decision was no decision.

**heard him concerning the faith in Christ** (v. 24)—A private audience with Paul, who spoke bluntly about the things of God, left Felix afraid—he was involved in a sinful relationship with Drusilla, a woman he had lured away from her husband.

**ambush** (25:3)—a second murderous plot instigated after Porcius Festus succeeded Felix

**Caesar's judgment seat**(v. 10)—Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar and request a trial in Rome; this insured that he would be safe from his enemies.

**King Agrippa** (v. 13)—Herod Agrippa II, son of the Herod who had killed James and had imprisoned Peter

**Bernice** (v. 13)—not Herod's wife, but his sister; their incestuous relationship was the talk of Rome

**I was uncertain** (v. 20)—Festus was a pagan Roman who knew that the charges against Paul involved religious, not civil, matters about which he knew very little.

**I also would like to hear**(v. 22)—The Greek verb tense suggests that Herod had been wanting to hear Paul for some time; as an expert on Jewish affairs, he relished hearing Christianity's leading spokesman. This pleased Festus, who needed help in outlining the charges against Paul in his official report for Nero.

**stretched out his hand** (26:1)—a common gesture at the beginning of an address

**I cast my vote** (v. 10)—literally, "I threw my pebble"—a reference to the ancient practice of recording votes by means of small colored stones; this may indicate Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin

**works befitting repentance** (v. 20)—Genuine repentance is inseparably linked to a changed lifestyle.

**you are beside yourself!**(v. 24)—Shocked that an obviously learned man like Paul could actually believe that the dead can live again, Festus accused Paul of being insane.

**not done in a corner** (v. 26) —Paul asserted that Christ's life and works were common knowledge in Palestine.

**do you believe in the prophets?** (v. 27)—This shrewd question put Agrippa in a bind, for if he said yes, he would have to agree with Paul's statements and look foolish in the eyes of the Romans. If he said no, he would outrage his Jewish subjects.

**You almost persuade me**(v. 28)—The idea is, "Do you think you can convince me to become a Christian in such a short time?" Agrippa evaded Paul's pointed inquiry.

## Understanding the Text

2) What happened when Paul got to Jerusalem and went to the temple to undergo ritual purification? Why did Paul feel the need to submit to this Jewish rite?

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3) How did Paul's Roman citizenship end up being a tremendous blessing? What were some of his other credentials that enhanced his ability to relate to people?

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4) What subject caused an uproar during Paul's address to the Sanhedrin? Why? What two factions in the Jewish council began bickering?

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## Cross Reference

Read Mark 6:14–29.

## Exploring the Meaning

5) In what ways was John the Baptist's relationship with Herod similar to the relationships Paul had with Felix and Agrippa?

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6) The Jews were filled with a murderous hatred towards Paul. They engaged in several concerted and intense efforts to kill him but failed. What does this say about God? About the purposes of God? About the people's evil intent?

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7) On more than one occasion, Paul utilized his privileges and protections as a Roman citizen to avoid certain harm. What principle(s) do you see for—modern-day believers in the apostle’s example? When should we submit and suffer quietly? When should we insist on our rights?

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### **Summing Up ...**

“Paul used his circumstances as an opportunity. The crowd [21:30–31] had not gathered to hear him preach but to beat and kill him. Paul, however, used that occasion to proclaim to them how God’s saving power had transformed his life.” —*John MacArthur*

### **Reflecting on the Text**

8) In what negative situations in your life might you, like Paul, be able to shine for Christ? How?

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9) What practical and helpful principles of evangelism can we glean from Paul’s experiences in these chapters?

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10) Re-read 26:18. How can you properly express your gratitude this week to God for the wonderful gift of salvation?

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