

# Chapter 21

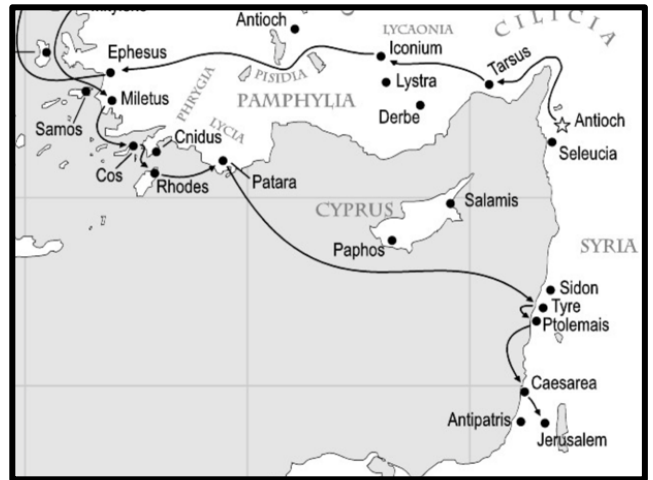
In 20:15-16, Paul said *we came to Miletus* (on the mainland, about 30 miles south of Ephesus). *For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus so that he would not have to spend time in Asia*

**Verse 1**—*When we* [including Luke] *had parted* [lit. “tear away”] *from them*—shows the great emotional trauma of Paul leaving the Ephesians (chapter 20).

- *and had set sail, we ran a straight course to Cos* [the capital city of the island of the same name] *and the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara*—

Each of these ports is about a day’s voyage. It

seems the ship would sail during the day and anchor in a port at night because the wind would die down at night but blow from the north, especially in the early hours of the day.



**Verse 2**—*and having found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, we went aboard and set sail*—compared to the small coastal ships he was just on, this one was probably a larger ship crossing the Mediterranean Sea, similar to Acts 27:39, which carried 276 people.

**Verse 3**—*When we came in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left* [without stopping], *we kept sailing to Syria and landed at Tyre* [a journey which normally would take five days]; *for there the ship was to unload its cargo*—

**Verse 4**—*After looking up the disciples, we stayed there seven days* [while the cargo was unloaded]; *and they kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem*—The question here is whether Paul was receiving a direct command from the Holy Spirit, which he then disobeyed. My opinion is that these disciples were probably prophesying of the persecution that would await Paul in Jerusalem and giving their own conclusions—that Paul should, therefore, not go there. Reasons:

- (1) The phrase *through the Spirit* is inconclusive. It means someone spoke from a spiritual gift of prophecy. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:29, every manifestation of the gift of prophecy is to be examined (this gift practiced before the Bible was completed).
- (2) Paul was sensitive to the Spirit’s leading. He has a record of obeying the Spirit, not disobeying Him (see Acts 16:6-7, 9-10).
- (3) The Holy Spirit had not before kept Paul from going to Jerusalem. According to 20:22-23, He warned Paul about what would happen when he got there, but did not tell him not to go.
- (4) Paul described his mission to Jerusalem as *the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus* (20:24). How could the Holy Spirit forbid Paul from doing what the Lord Jesus had commanded him to do? (See also 19:21; 20:22.)
- (5) Nowhere do the Scriptures suggest that Paul sinned by going to Jerusalem. In fact, Paul said when he got there, *I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day* (23:1; 24:16).

**Verses 5-6**—*When our days there were ended, we left and started on our journey, while they all, with wives and children, escorted us until we were out of the city. After kneeling down on the beach and praying, we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home again.*

**Verse 7**—*When we had finished the voyage from Tyre, we arrived at Ptolemais*—In the Old Testament times this city was called Acco (Judges 1:31). It is about 25 miles south of Tyre.

- *after greeting the brethren, we stayed with them for a day* (presumably while the ship was doing something—like getting or unloading cargo)

**Verse 8**—*On the next day we left and came to Caesarea*—40 miles south along the coast, it was the port city for Jerusalem (about 60 miles southeast of Caesarea)

- *and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him*—chosen by the early church, about 20 years prior to this, to oversee the distribution of food to widows (Acts 6:5-6). He also preached the Gospel in Samaria (8:5, 40) and to the Ethiopian eunuch (7:26ff). This title *evangelist* is given to no one else in Acts (although Timothy was told to do the work of an evangelist in 2 Timothy 4:5). He also evangelized the coastal cities between Gaza and Caesarea (8:40), and settled in Caesarea.

**Verse 9**—*Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses*—All we know of these women is what is in this verse: (1) Philip the evangelist was their father, (2) there were four of them, (3) all four were women, (4) it sounds like they lived with Philip, (5) they were all prophetesses. In the early church, before the New Testament was written, prophets (and prophetesses) sometimes received special revelation from God that would later sometimes be covered in Scripture. This aspect ceased at the close of the time of the apostles and with the completing of the Scripture. For example, it is mentioned in the early book of 1 Corinthians but not in the later epistles. It is impossible to know how often these women prophesied or even if they did it more than once. But whatever they did, they did not prophesy now with Paul. A prophet who came from Jerusalem did (see the next verse).

**Verse 10**—*As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea*—Earlier, Agabus came from Jerusalem to Antioch and prophesied about a great famine over all the world (Acts 11:28).

**Verse 11**—*And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands*—similar to the drama done by the Old Testament prophets (for example, 1 Kings 11:29-39; Isaiah 20:2-6; Jeremiah 13:1-11; Ezekiel 4-5). It illustrated his message in a dramatic way.

- *and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says*—This was special revelation from God regarding the future for Paul.
- *'In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles'*—This was a warning to Paul of what waited for him in Jerusalem.

**Verse 12**—*When we had heard this, we [Luke and those who had returned with him from the missionary team] as well as the local residents [from Caesarea] began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem*—Their love and concern for Paul caused them to try to persuade him not to go and be captured. However, while the Spirit, through the prophet, did not specifically say, "Go to Jerusalem," it is implied in the fact that it was a sure prophecy that the Jews at Jerusalem *will bind the man*.

**Verse 13**—*Then Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but even to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus"*—Their response was an additional burden for him to bear, it was breaking his heart to have to hear them and respond to them in addition to the knowledge of what he would have to endure in Jerusalem.

**APPLICATION**—I have mentioned this before, but you must ask yourself if your response to another believer's suffering is, in fact, furthering their suffering. We should not make them feel sorry for themselves for what they have to endure. Instead, we should encourage them and build them up in their faith.

**Verse 14**—*And since he would not be persuaded, we fell silent, remarking, "The will of the Lord be done!"*—This was not a fatalistic resignation but a confident trust in God's sovereign and perfect will (see 1 Samuel 3:18; Matthew 6:10; Luke 22:42). They committed Paul to God's care.

**APPLICATION**—It has to do with attitude. These are not just words to say. It’s recognizing that you are not in control of your life or the events in your life, God is. You can fight Him and complain or you can give your will to Him, knowing He loves you and has your best good in mind (Romans 8:28-30, 37-39).

**Verses 15-16**—*After these days we [Luke still with Paul] got ready and started on our way up to Jerusalem. Some of the disciples from Caesarea also came with us*—They were willing to go with Paul, knowing they would be identifying with him and thus putting themselves at risk. But they gained courage because Paul had courage to face his enemy and to inspire others to do so also.

**APPLICATION**—People, such as your family members, for example, are watching you and how you face adversity. Do they get courage because you have courage? Or do they whine because you whine?

- *taking us to Mnason of Cyprus, a disciple of long standing with whom we were to lodge*—Just as Barnabas (also from Cyprus) evidently had a lodging place in Jerusalem, so did Mnason. Paul and his party planned to stay with him. Mnason had been a disciple for a long time, possibly even converting at the time of Pentecost in Acts 2.

**This ends the time of Paul’s missionary journeys. He would soon be arrested and remain an ambassador in chains (Ephesians 6:20) for the rest of the time recorded in Acts.**

**Verse 17**—*After we arrived in Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly*—Luke is with him. (1) They were surely pleased with the generous much-needed gift offering Paul brought with him from the Gentile believers (Acts 24:17; 2 Corinthians 8:20) and (2) they must have been glad to meet the Gentile converts Paul brought with him who gave testimony to God’s saving grace throughout the Roman world.

**Verse 18**—*And the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present*—The administration of the church in Jerusalem moved from the apostles (Acts 2:42; 4:35-37; 5:2) to choosing the seven to help (6:2-6), to the elders and the apostles (chapter 15; 16:4); to now the elders with no mention of the apostles. James the apostle was already dead. Tradition has the other apostles moving out in missionary endeavors (such as Thomas to India), leaving Jerusalem to the leadership of the elders. Just as Peter seemed to be the spokesman for the apostles, James, the half-brother of Jesus, seemed to be the spokesman for these elders. Paul described James, along with Peter and John, as one of the pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9).

**Verse 19**—*After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one [details] the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry*—Paul did not boast in what he had accomplished. He gave all the credit and glory to God (see 1 Corinthians 3:5-7; 15:10; 2 Corinthians 10:17).

**Verse 20**—*And when they heard it they began glorifying God*—Their response shows the genuineness of Paul’s God-centered report. Their response to sinners being saved is also the response in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10, 32).

- *and they said to him, “You see [lit. “to perceive, discern, or reflect on”], brother, how many thousands [lit. “myriads” or “tens of thousands”] there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law*—a potential problem. These saved Jews did not view keeping the Law as a means of salvation, but they did continue to keep the Law. Why?
  1. The Law had been established by God Himself. Coming to faith in Jesus may have enhanced these Jewish believers’ love for God and a desire to obey Him, resulting in a greater zeal for the ceremonies of the Law. The Temple still existed in the middle of Jerusalem. Would they stop going there? No. Even the apostles would go to the Temple to pray when they were in town (Acts 3:1; 5:42; 22:17). It was “God’s house.”
  2. The apostles and other leaders of the Jerusalem church did not oppose the continuation of these practices. Nowhere in the New Testament are the Jewish believers condemned for observing them. Paul

commands tolerance for such “weaker brothers” (Romans 14:1ff; 1 Corinthians 8–10) until they grow to understand their freedom and can use that freedom with clear consciences. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) forbid imposing the Old Covenant rituals on Gentiles but did not prohibit Jewish believers from continuing to observe them.

3. God Himself seems tolerant during this time of transition, knowing how hard it would be for the Jewish Christians to break with their past. He also knew that in a few years this would no longer be a dominant issue in the church. After the Jewish revolt against Rome in A.D. 66-70, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the Temple, the influence of the Jerusalem church decreased. Eventually, Christianity became a predominantly Gentile faith.

**Verse 21—*and they have been told about you***—The underlying Greek word is *katecheo*, from which we get the word “catechism,” implying learning by repetition. Evidently, it was the Judaizers, who were zealous for Law-keeping, who were repeatedly telling these lies about Paul to the Christian Jews.

- ***that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles [called the “Diaspora Jews”] to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs***—They were obviously trying to destroy Paul’s credibility with the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who still revered the Mosaic Law. Paul nowhere told the Jewish Christians to abandon their Jewish heritage, but in keeping with the decision of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), he did not insist that Gentile Christians observe the ceremonies of the Law. It’s interesting that in Galatia, the Judaizers falsely accused Paul of supporting circumcision (Galatians 5:11), but here in Jerusalem they accuse him of doing away with circumcision. Their charges change to what is expedient for their own purposes.

**APPLICATION**—Believers should be slow to accept accusations against other Christians, especially when such charges originate with those opposing the Christian faith.

**Verse 22—“*What, then, is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come***—Paul’s presence in Jerusalem would not be kept secret, and the elders are afraid of what people will do to Paul.

**Verses 23-24—“*Therefore do this that we tell you. We have four men who are under a vow; take them and purify yourself along with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads***—This would be a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:18). This vow symbolized total separation to God. It involved abstaining from alcohol and all other products from grapes, letting the hair of the head grow long, and avoiding contact with dead bodies. Josephus says the usual length of the vow was thirty days (*Wars* 2.15.1), although Samson (Judges 16:17), Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11), and John the Baptist (Luke 1:15) were Nazirites for life. It showed the highest level of spiritual devotion.

- The most likely explanation is that Paul, having returned to Israel from Gentile lands, was considered ceremonially unclean. As the sponsor of these four men, he could not participate in the end of their vows (when they shaved their hair) unless he underwent the ritual purification himself, thus showing his honor of the Jewish traditions.
- Also, his willingness to pay their expenses would include paying for the hair-cutting ceremony in the Temple as well as several expensive sacrifices (Numbers 6:14ff).
- ***and all will know that there is nothing to the things which they have been told about you, but that you yourself also walk orderly, keeping the Law***—Paul’s willingness to be purified and pay these expenses would be further proof to the Christian Jews that the Judaizers charges were false.

**Verse 25—“*But concerning the Gentiles who have believed, we wrote, having decided that they should abstain from meat sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication*”**—In a clarifying statement, James says this action will in no way nullify the decision of the Jerusalem Council in chapter 15. But since Paul was Jewish, his participation in the ceremony would not violate that decision.

**Verse 26—*Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each***

**one of them**—This seems to be one of those instances of Christian liberty and an illustration of the principle he gave in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. Although he had good motives, his actions resulted in his arrest. However, the negative results do not prove he made a mistake. That idea ignores the fact that Paul’s arrest had been prophesied before he arrived in Jerusalem (21:4, 11; and 20:22-23).

**Since his conversion on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:11f), Paul had ministered freely (except for brief imprisonments). But from this point on in Acts, Paul will be a prisoner. As a free man, he preached the Gospel throughout the Roman world. As a prisoner, he preached the Gospel to Roman officials. Paul also wrote four New Testament books (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) during his imprisonment in Rome.**

**Verse 27—When the seven days were almost over**—for the completion ceremonies of the Nazirite vow.

- **the Jews from Asia**—probably from Ephesus because they recognized Trophimus (v. 29) and, of course, they would recognize Paul, who ministered in Ephesus for three years (Acts 20:31).
- **upon seeing him in the temple, began to stir up all the crowd and laid hands on him**

**Verses 28-29—crying out, “Men of Israel, come to our aid! This is the man who preaches to all men everywhere**

- (1) **against our people**—Paul nowhere taught Jewish believers to forsake their customs. He did teach that Gentiles were not to be pressured to observe the Jewish customs.
  - (2) **and the Law**—This was the time of Pentecost (Acts 20:16), the feast of the first fruits of the harvest, which was a celebration of God giving the Law to the Jews, so this was sure to infuriate the crowds.
  - (3) **and this place**, i.e., the Temple, the center of Jewish worship. Jesus (Mark 14:57-58) and Stephen (Acts 6:13) were also falsely accused of speaking against the Temple, accusations that helped lead to their deaths.
- **and besides he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with him, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple**—This is absurd. Paul was in the Temple doing purification from being with Gentiles, he would not bring a Gentile into it. Besides, the Romans allowed the Jews to execute any Gentile who entered there—even a Roman citizen (Josephus, *Wars* 6.2.4). An inscription found in 1935 warns, “No Gentile shall enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the temple, and whoever is caught shall be responsible for himself for his subsequent death” (Blaklock and Harrison, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, p. 389). Paul would never have endangered his friend’s life. And besides, if the Asian Jews had really seen Trophimus there, why had they not seized him then and executed him?

**Verse 30—Then all the city was provoked**—As we’ve seen in other places in Acts, the crowd mentality does not think or reason, they react with emotion, and whether true or not, the accusations spread like wildfire throughout the city.

- **and the people rushed together, and taking hold of Paul they dragged him out of the temple (area)**—so Paul’s death would not defile the Temple (see 2 Kings 11:15)
- **and immediately the doors were shut**—the doors between the Court of the Women and the Court of the Gentiles. Only priests were allowed into the Temple itself.

**Verse 31—While they were seeking to kill him, a report came up to the commander of the Roman cohort that all Jerusalem was in confusion**—The headquarters of the Roman occupation forces was Fort Antonia, located on the northwest edge of the Temple grounds. The sentries had a clear view of the Temple area from the towers. “Commander” is from the Greek word for “one thousand.” When the governor was at his residence in Caesarea, this commander was the ranking Roman official. Luke says his name was Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26).

**Verse 32**—*At once he took along some soldiers and centurions* (plural—a centurion commanded 100 men, so possibly he brought 200 men with him) *and ran down to them*—to stop the riot before it got any worse

- *and when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul*—The show of force from the soldiers risked them getting arrested, so they stopped beating Paul (a Roman citizen they were beating with no trial—they were wise to stop!).

**Verse 33**—*Then the commander came up and took hold of him* (mistaking him for someone else—see v. 38), *and ordered him to be bound with two chains* (fulfilling Agabus’ prophecy in Acts 21:10-11); *and he began asking who he was and what he had done*.

**Verse 34**—*But among the crowd some were shouting one thing and some another, and when he could not find out the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks*—away from the crowd where it was quiet and he could question Paul.

**Verses 35-36**—*When he got to the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob; for the multitude of the people kept following them, shouting, “Away with him!”*—i.e., “Kill him!” (see Luke 23:18; John 19:15; Acts 22:22).

## **Paul’s Arrest (21:37-22:30)**

**Verse 37**—*As Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the commander, “May I say something to you?” And he said, “Do you know Greek?*—Greek was the language of cultured, educated men, not common criminals such as he assumed Paul was (verse 38).

**Verse 38**—*“Then you are not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?”*—His question shows his false assumption of who he thought Paul was.

**Verse 39**—*But Paul said, “I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city*—As a Jew, he the right to be in the Temple. Being from Tarsus explained his speaking Greek. Tarsus was a cultural center with a university rivaling those of Athens in Greece and Alexandria in Egypt.

- *and I beg you, allow me to speak to the people*—Although bruised from his beating and in chains, Paul saw this as an opportunity to give the Gospel to his fellow countrymen.

**Verse 40**—*When he had given him permission, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying—*

## **Chapter 22**

**Verse 1**—*“Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now offer to you”*—Paul’s defense of himself is biographical, showing his motives are not anti-Jewish and his actions were in submission to God. This is one of four New Testament accounts of Paul’s conversion (Acts 9:26; Philippians 3; 1 Timothy 1).

**Verse 2**—*And when they heard that he was addressing them in the Hebrew dialect, they became even more quiet; and he said,*

### **Before Paul’s Conversion**

**Verse 3**—*“I am a Jew*—Far from being anti-Jewish, Paul had impressive Jewish credentials

- *born in Tarsus of Cilicia*—north, in Syria, among the Hellenistic Jews of the Diaspora
- *but brought up in this city*—in Jerusalem
- *educated under Gamaliel*—the most revered rabbi of that time, and one of the greatest of all antiquity (see information in chapter 5).

- *strictly according to the law of our fathers*—carefully and thoroughly instructed in the Old Testament Law and the rabbinic traditions, he was once a Pharisee who was blameless under the law (see Philippians 3:5-6). His own conviction was that the Law was *holy...and righteous and good* (Romans 7:12).
- *being zealous for God just as you all are today*—Paul generously attributed the crowd’s actions as being zealous for God. But Paul was even more zealous because he went after the Christians, even far away, and brought them to prison (see verse 4). He later wrote, *I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions* (Galatians 1:14).

**APPLICATION**—Paul would later write that men *have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge* (Romans 10:2). You can have sincere enthusiasm for God, such as Paul had at first, but yet without the knowledge of who God really is.

**Verse 4**—*“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and putting both men and women into prisons—* His reputation as a persecutor of Christians was well known, as he said to the Galatians, *You have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it* (Galatians 1:13).

**Verse 5**—*as also the high priest and all the Council of the elders can testify*—if they doubted Paul’s word, they could ask the high priest and any of the elders of the Sanhedrin

- *From them I also received letters to the brethren, and started off for Damascus in order to bring even those who were there to Jerusalem as prisoners to be punished*—Paul’s zeal was so highly regarded that the highest Jewish authorities chose him for the mission of arresting and bringing back to Jerusalem the Christians, even as far away as Damascus.

## Paul’s Conversion

The account of Paul’s dramatic conversion appears three times in Acts (9:1ff; here; and 26:4-18), thus stressing its significance.

**Verses 6-8**—*“But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me, and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ ‘And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’*

**Verse 9**—*“And those who were with me saw the light, to be sure, but did not understand the voice of the One who was speaking to me*—they were witnesses to the fact that this happened. They didn’t see Jesus or hear the words, but they saw the light and heard a sound.

**Verse 10**—*“And I said, ‘What shall I do, Lord?’*—In that instant of time, he went from being a persecutor to being the servant of the Lord. Paul was a man of action. When he had beliefs, he dedicated his life to living those beliefs with zeal. First it was against Jesus, then he applied that same zeal for living and witnessing for Jesus.

**APPLICATION**—This should be our daily prayer: *What shall I do, Lord?* Where are you today? What are you doing today? Here’s a very specific example: you are shopping for clothes. 1 Timothy 2:9 says, *women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly....* How do you apply that when shopping for clothes? Is having your breasts exposed modest (“dressing to avoid attracting sexual attention” —dictionary) or discreet (“inconspicuous, subtle, understated” —dictionary)? Read the rest of that verse, if you really want to be convicted!! And what are we teaching our daughters? Remember, you will give an account to God someday for what **you** do (1 Corinthians 3:13f; 4:5).

- *And the Lord said to me, ‘Get up and go on into Damascus, and there you will be told of all that has been appointed for you to do’*—Jesus told Ananias what was appointed for Paul: *for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel* (Acts 9:15).

This was not Paul's idea. He was going in a totally different direction. But God had a plan for Paul's life and turned him around and headed him in the direction God wanted him to go.

**APPLICATION**—You don't have to seek God's plan for your life. He will direct you. You need to be faithful and Christ-honoring where you are, and God will put you where you are. I'm still amazed how we ended up going from Dallas to West Michigan to Romania! Everything in your life is a test as to whether you will obey Him and His Word.

**Verse 11**—*“But since I could not see because of the brightness of that light, I was led by the hand by those who were with me and came into Damascus.*

**Verse 12**—*“A certain Ananias, a man who was devout [“totally committed”] by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there*—As a Christian, He was a Jew (1) devoted to keeping the Law and (2) of good reputation to the other Jews.

**Verse 13**—*came to me, and standing near said to me, ‘Brother Saul*—The first person to call Saul “brother,” that is, fellow believer in Jesus. A relationship not available under the Law.

- *receive your sight!’ And at that very time I looked up at him.*

**Verses 14-15**—*“And he said, ‘The God of our fathers has appointed you (1) to know His will and (2) to see the Righteous One and (3) to hear an utterance from His mouth. (4) For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard’*—Even though Paul knew he was to go to the Gentiles with the Gospel, what did that look like? Sometimes he got specific direction (Acts 16:8) and sometimes he didn't, he just decided what to do and where to go (Acts 17:16).

**APPLICATION**—Paul did know God's will for his life, but it was a general will. Sometimes he received a very specific will. I think we know that, too, sometimes. For example, we were given an opportunity to go to Romania in 1983. We keep asking, Should we go? They keep saying, Come. We evaluate that. When Dave had his eye surgery, we couldn't go. Or another example, James' brain condition. It's put Debbie and Jon on a certain path. Or who your child marries puts you on a certain path. I'm NOT saying to be led by circumstances, but certainly circumstances need to be evaluated and are part of our decision of what to do and how to be obedient and to serve our Lord.

**Verse 16**—*‘Now why do you delay? Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name’*—We've looked at this in detail earlier in the book. Baptism does not save. It's the evidence that one has been saved (see Acts 10:44-48; 16:31; Romans 3:28; 10:8-13).

## **After Paul's Conversion**

After his conversion and a brief period of ministry in Damascus (Acts 9:20-25), he spent three years in Nabataean Arabia, somewhere in the area south of Damascus (Galatians 1:17-18).

**Verse 17**—*“It happened when I returned to Jerusalem and was praying in the temple*—Paul didn't reject Judaism. He returned to Jerusalem, and he went to the temple to pray.

- *that I fell into a trance*—This Greek word *εκστασις* describes a unique apostolic experience of being transported beyond the normal senses to the supernatural realm to receive divine revelation. This word is used two times to describe Peter's vision at Joppa (Acts 10:10; 11:5).

**Verse 18**—*and I saw Him saying to me, ‘Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about Me’*—While in Jerusalem, Paul proclaimed the Gospel (9:28-29).

Unbelieving Jews viewed him as a blasphemer and plotted to kill him. The Christians got Paul out of town and he returned to Tarsus (Acts 9:30).

**Verses 19-20**—*“And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves understand that in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in You. And when the blood of Your witness Stephen was being shed, I also was standing by approving, and watching out for the coats of those who were slaying*



*him*’—Paul thought if the Jews could understand his spiritual transformation they would believe the truth of the Gospel. But God knew they wouldn’t.

**Verse 21**—“*And He said to me, ‘Go! For I will send you far away to the Gentiles’*”—God sent Paul out of Jerusalem and to the Gentiles, far away in the Roman Empire. It was God’s idea and God’s sovereignty that both converted Paul and sent him to the Gentiles. Paul had merely obeyed God who communicated to him. How could the crowd question that? How could they condemn him?

## **The Crowd’s Response**

- **Verse 22**—*They listened to him up to this statement*—When Paul mentioned the Gentiles, that ended it for the crowd. The idea that Gentiles could be spiritually equal to the Jewish people before God was heresy.
- *and then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he should not be allowed to live!”*

**Verse 23**—*And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks* [possibly indicating their preparation to stone him—Acts 7:58) *and tossing dust into the air.*

## **Paul’s Response**

**Verse 24**—*the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way*—the commander still does not understand why the crowd was so hostile to Paul. But trying to stop another riot, he brings Paul inside, and his method to make Paul tell the truth was to scourge him. A scourge was a wooden handle to which were attached leather thongs tipped with bits of metal and bone. Many men died from loss of blood or infection after enduring scourging. Jesus endured it before His crucifixion (John 19:1).

**Verse 25**—*But when they stretched him out with thongs*—which would make his body taut and increase the effects of the scourging.

- *Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman*—Roman citizens were exempted from such brutal methods by the Valerian and Porcian laws (F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, p. 445).
- *and uncondemned?”*, i.e., with no trial.

**Verse 26**—*When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and told him, saying, “What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman.”*

**Verse 27**—*The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you a Roman?” And he said, “Yes”*—To subject a Roman citizen, without a trial, to scourging could destroy Lysias’ military career or even cost him his own life.

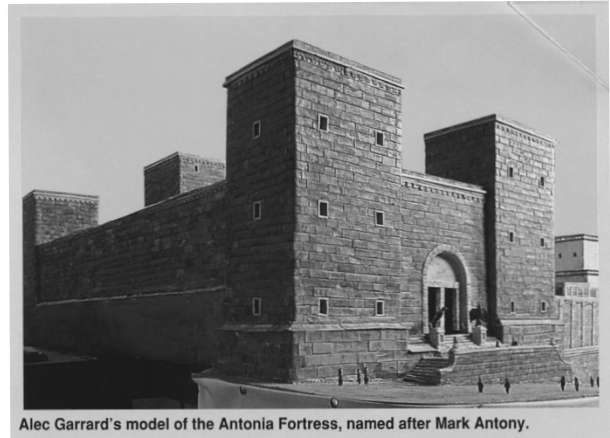
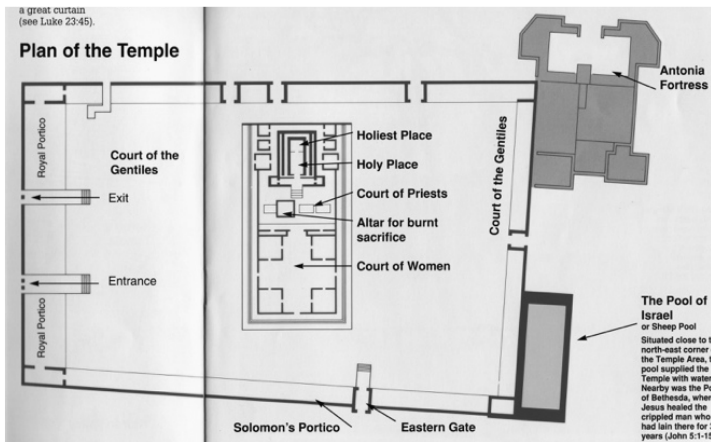
**Verse 28**—*The commander answered, “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money”*—Supposedly, Roman citizenship was officially not for sale, but it could be acquired by bribing corrupt officials. And, obviously, it cost a *large sum of money*.

- *And Paul said, “But I was actually born a citizen”*—Unlike Lysias, Paul did not get his citizenship by bribery but by birth. Lysias, again, badly misjudged his prisoner.

**Verse 29**—*Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately let go of him*—This news brought an abrupt end to the scourging that was about to begin.

- *and the commander also was afraid when he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had put him in chains*—i.e., without a trial, also illegal to do to a Roman citizen.

**Verse 30**—*But on the next day, wishing to know for certain why he had been accused by the Jews, he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the Council to assemble, and brought Paul down and set him before them*—Five times the Sanhedrin was called upon to evaluate the claims of Christ: (1) Jesus Himself stood before it (Mark 14:53-65); (2) Peter and John stood before it (Acts 4:5-22); (3) the arrest of



Alec Garrard's model of the Antonia Fortress, named after Mark Antony.

all the apostles (Acts 5:21ff); (4) the trial of Stephen (Acts 6:12ff); and (5) now Paul stands before them. Five times the members rejected Christ. They were the religious ruling body of the Jews in Roman-occupied Israel. They originated in the postexilic times and died out after the revolt against Rome in A.D. 66-70. They were mostly made up of Sadducees and Pharisees. This seems to be an informal gathering of the Sanhedrin next to the Antonio Fortress.

## Chapter 23

**Verse 1**—*Paul, looking intently [“to stare”] at the Council, said, “Brethren [probably because he had been a Pharisee and had close ties to some of them in the past, see verse 6], I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day”*—Paul could “look them in the eye” because he was innocent of the charges they were bringing against him.

**Verse 2**—*The high priest Ananias*—Not the former high priest Annas (Luke 3:2). Ananias reigned for 12 years beginning in A.D. 47. He was one of the most cruel, evil, corrupt high priests ever to hold office. According to Josephus, he was hated by the Jewish nationalists because of his pro-Roman stand. When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out in A.D. 66, Ananias was promptly killed by the Jewish rebels (Josephus, *Wars* 2.17.9).

- *commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth*—This was not just a slap in the face. The word for *strike* is also translated “beat” (Acts 21:32; Matthew 27:30).

**Verse 3**—*Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?”*—Paul had not even been charged with a crime, let alone convicted of one. As a Roman citizen, it was highly illegal for him to be struck.

**Verse 4**—*But the bystanders said, “Do you revile [“to insult,” “to abuse”] God’s high priest?”*—The people obviously saw what Paul did as very wrong, which Paul admitted also in verse 5.

**Verse 5**—*And Paul said, “I was not aware, brethren, that he was high priest*—Probably because (1) Paul had not been in Jerusalem hardly at all in the last years, so he wouldn’t recognize him by sight and (2) they were in an informal gathering somewhere near Fort Antonio. If this was an official gathering, the high priest would have been wearing his high priestly garments and sitting in his official seat, then Paul would have surely recognized who he was.

- *for it is written, ‘YOU SHALL NOT SPEAK EVIL OF A RULER OF YOUR PEOPLE’*—quoting Exodus 22:28.

**APPLICATION**—Paul explained he was ignorant of the fact that this man was the high priest. But notice that Paul did not use ignorance as an excuse. He quickly admitted he had violated God’s prohibition against slandering a ruler (Exodus 22:28). He even quoted the passage to show his respect for and submission to the Word of God. His reaction was that of a mature Christian who saw his sin in relation to how holy God was, not how bad the high priest was. And when he realized his sin, he immediately confessed it and submitted to the authority of Scriptures.

**Verse 6—But**—his confrontation with the high priest made him realize he would not get a fair hearing from this group, so he changed tactics.

- *perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees*—These two groups were socially, politically, and theologically at odds with each other.
- *Paul began crying out in the Council, “Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!”*—see verse 8.

**Verses 7-8—As he said this, there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all**—The Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch (first five books of the Bible) as authoritative and they rejected any concept of an afterlife (see Matthew 22:23-33), claiming it was not found in the Pentateuch. The priests were Sadducees. The Pharisees’ beliefs were more compatible with Christianity than those of the Sadducees. F. F. Bruce says, “a Sadducee could not become a Christian without abandoning the distinctive theological position of his party; a Pharisee could become a Christian and remain a Pharisee—in the early decades of Christianity, at least” (*The Book of Acts*, p. 453). The Bible records Pharisees who became Christians, including Nicodemus (John 3:1) and others (Acts 15:5), but no Sadducees.

**Verse 9—And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, “We find nothing wrong with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”**—The theological feud between the Sadducees and Pharisees was so bitter that the Pharisees actually defended Paul against the Sadducees!

**Verse 10—And as a great dissension was developing, the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them and ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force, and bring him into the barracks**—Not only did Lysias not find out the crime to which the Jews were charging Paul, the situation grew worse. Once again, the Romans had to rescue Paul from his own people.

**Verse 11—But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side** [as He had at other times of need—Acts 18:9; 22:17-21) *and said,*

- (1) *“Take courage*—As Paul wrote, God is *the God of all comfort* (2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 7:4, 6)
- (2) *for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem*—God commended Paul. He had successfully completed the task the Lord had for him in that city.
- (3) *so you must witness at Rome also*—God gave Paul hope. He promised Paul that his life would not end in Jerusalem. He would get his heart’s desire, to give the Gospel in Rome. But Paul would endure many trials before he got to Rome.

**APPLICATION**—This is the help we can give others who are suffering or going through tribulation: comfort them, commend or speak kindly to them, and give them hope.

## The Plot Formed

**Verses 12-13—When it was day, the Jews formed a conspiracy and bound** [Grk. “bound under a curse”] *themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who formed this plot*—They couldn’t depend on the Romans to kill Paul, so they

needed all these men to get Paul away from the Romans. Also, with so many men, blame could not be put on any one individual.

**Verse 14**—*They came to the chief priests and the elders* [who were the Sadducees, who also wanted Paul dead—they did not inform the Pharisees, who had defended Paul] *and said, “We have bound ourselves under a solemn oath to taste nothing until we have killed Paul.*

**Verse 15**—*“Now therefore, you and the Council notify the commander* [Lysias] *to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation; and we for our part are ready to slay him before he comes near the place”*—The conspirators assumed the Sanhedrin’s leadership would take part in the murder plot. Shows the corruption of Israel’s highest court.

## **The Plot Found Out**

**Verse 16**—*But the son of Paul’s sister heard of their ambush, and he came and entered the barracks and told Paul*—With so many conspirators, the plot was soon found out. Except for Paul’s mention of “kinsmen” in Romans 16:7, 11, 21, this is the only reference to Paul’s family in the New Testament. We don’t know why his nephew was in Jerusalem, and we don’t know if he was a Christian or not. And we don’t know how he heard about the plot. All we know is when he heard about the plot he immediately went and told Paul, who was being held in protective custody by the Romans.

**Verses 17-18**—*Paul called one of the centurions to him and said, “Lead this young man to the commander* [Lysias], *for he has something to report to him.” So he took him and led him to the commander and said, “Paul the prisoner called me to him and asked me to lead this young man to you since he has something to tell you”*—This shows the respect the Romans had for Paul because he was a Roman citizen.

**Verse 19**—*The commander* [Lysias] *took him by the hand and stepping aside, began to inquire of him privately, “What is it that you have to report to me?”*—He realized this was private confidential information, which had not even been told to the centurion.

**Verses 20-21**—*And he said, “The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down tomorrow to the Council, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more thoroughly about him. So do not listen to them, for more than forty of them are lying in wait for him who have bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they slay him; and now they are ready and waiting for the promise from you”*—The boy informed Lysias of the plot and urged him to not give in to the Jews’ request.

**Verse 22**—*So the commander let the young man go, instructing him, “Tell no one that you have notified me of these things”*—If the Jews realized Lysias knew of their plot, they might form a new plot, one of which he wouldn’t know about that might succeed in killing Paul. Also, if the Jews were not aware that he knew about the plot, they would not be able to challenge his motives for moving Paul to Caesarea.

## **The Plot Frustrated**

Realizing the situation was getting out-of-hand, Lysias wisely decided to get Paul out of Jerusalem before the prisoner in his custody, a Roman citizen, was assassinated, which could also result in a full-scale revolt by the Jews. So he passed the whole situation on to his superior, the Roman governor Felix in Caesarea.

**Verse 23**—*And he called to him two of the centurions and said, “Get two hundred soldiers ready by the third hour* [9:00 P.M.] *of the night to proceed to Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen”*—Taking no chances on an ambush (such as the Jews had been planning—v. 15), he sent a strong, heavily armed force of nearly half of his thousand-man garrison to escort Paul to Caesarea.

**Verse 24**—*They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on and bring him safely to Felix the governor*—and for speed, to get Paul to Caesarea as quickly as possible.

Verses 25-30—*And he wrote a letter having this form:*

*“Claudius Lysias, to the most excellent governor Felix, greetings.*

*When this man was arrested by the Jews and was about to be slain by them, I came up to them with the troops and rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman. And wanting to ascertain the charge for which they were accusing him, I brought him down to their Council; and I found him to be accused over questions about their Law, but under no accusation deserving death or imprisonment* [basically, declaring Paul was innocent]. *When I was informed that there would be a plot against the man, I sent him to you at once, also instructing his accusers to bring charges against him before you.*”—A reasonably accurate summary of the events. However, he did put himself in the best possible light, not mentioning, for example, that he did not discover Paul was a Roman until after he rescued him and that he had ordered Paul scourged.

**Verse 31**—*So the soldiers, in accordance with their orders, took Paul and brought him by night to Antipatris*—about 35-40 miles west of Jerusalem, it was a Roman military post often used as a rest stop for travelers between Jerusalem and Caesarea. It had been built by Herod the Great and named in honor of his father, Antipater. It marked the border between Judea and the largely Gentile region of Samaria.

**Verse 32**—*But the next day, leaving the horsemen to go on with him, they returned to the barracks*—the danger of ambush was now greatly reduced, so the foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem and the horsemen continued on to Caesarea the next day.

**Verses 33-34**—*When these had come to Caesarea and delivered the letter to the governor, they also presented Paul to him. When he had read it, he asked from what province he was, and when he learned that he was from Cilicia*—therefore, under the jurisdiction of Felix

**Verse 35**—*he said, “I will give you a hearing after your accusers arrive also,” giving orders for him to be kept in Herod’s Praetorium*—the governor’s official residence, waiting for the first of Paul’s Roman trials.

God had providentially protected Paul from the Jews and had him safely delivered to the Romans in Caesarea and even provided the best accommodations when he arrived there.

## Chapter 24

### Paul’s Trial before Felix

Felix was similar to Judas. Judas lived with Jesus for more than 3 years; Felix had Paul in his palace for 2 years. Judas had many opportunities to talk with Jesus; Felix *used to send for [Paul] quite often and converse with him* (v. 26). Judas betrayed Jesus for money; Felix *was hoping that money would be given him by Paul* (v. 26). Judas betrayed Jesus to the Jewish authorities; Felix, fearing those same authorities, betrayed Paul by refusing to release him in spite of his innocence.

### The Prosecution

**Verse 1**—*After five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with an attorney named Tertullus, and they brought charges to the governor against Paul*—To put their case together, get an attorney, and travel 65 miles to Caesarea, all in only five days, required fast action. Ananias was one of the most corrupt high priests in Israel’s history. That he and some elders came in person shows how serious a threat Paul posed to them.

**Verses 2-3—After Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him**—It’s not known whether Tertullus was a Roman or a Hellenistic Jew, but he must have been good at Roman law to be chosen by the Jews to represent them in this Roman legal proceeding.

- **saying to the governor**—Felix was procurator (governor) of Judea from A.D. 52 to 59. A former slave, Felix owed his position to the influence of his brother Pallas, a favorite of Emperor Claudius. The Roman historian Tacitus disdainfully dismissed him with the comment, ‘He exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave’ (F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, p. 355).
- **“Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation, we acknowledge this in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness**—Opening with a flowery, flattering, complimentary speech that stretched the truth to the breaking point. Felix did suppress some roving bands of anti-Roman terrorists (21:38), but his methods were so brutal that he outraged and alienated the Jews, causing even more unrest. If he carried out any reforms, history does not record them. His inept rule led to his removal from office by Nero two years after this hearing (24:27) [MacArthur, *Acts*].

**Verse 4—“But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing**—Yes, it would be brief because there was little good he could say about Felix and little bad he could say about Paul.

**Verse 5—(1) “For we have found this man a real pest**—certainly what the Jews felt about Paul but not really a specific charge.

- **a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world**—If they could have proved this charge, Paul would be in serious trouble, but they couldn’t prove it. He was in riots, but he was the victim in the riots, not the instigator. Tertullus avoided naming any specific instance because then the trial might be transferred to another jurisdiction in which the riot occurred and under a ruler over whom the Jews had no influence.

**APPLICATION**—In every case in Acts when Christianity is the issue in a Roman court, the charges that Christians were political revolutionaries could not be proven. They did not violate Roman civil law (see Romans 13:1-7; Titus 3:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17). The real issue was the Jewish hostility to the Gospel. The same holds true today. People may accuse you of all sorts of things, but the real issue is their hatred of the Gospel (see Matthew 10:22; Luke 21:17; John 15:18; 25; 17:14).

- **(2) a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes**—an insulting term for the followers of Jesus, who was from Nazareth and called a Nazarene (see John 1:46; 7:41, 52). This must have been commonly used because Tertullus did not explain it to Felix. The implication was that Paul was the head of this sect that was trouble to Israel and thus to Rome.

**Verse 6-8a—“And (3) he even tried to desecrate the temple**—the original charge for which he was arrested. Notice their wording “tried” or “attempted.” There was no evidence that he had actually done so. If he had, the Jews had the right to handle the matter themselves without bringing Paul before the Roman court (see 21:28-29).

- **and then we arrested him**—No—they dragged him out of the temple and were seeking to kill him by beating him (21:30-32).
- **[We wanted to judge him according to our own Law. But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, ordering his accusers to come before you.]**—This part is not in many of the ancient manuscripts. If it was included in the text, they were falsely accusing Lysias of undermining proper Jewish legal procedure and of abusing his authority. Although Paul was the one beaten, they were accusing Lysias of the violence.

**Verse 8—By examining him yourself concerning all these matters you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him**—If the parenthetical statement is not part of the text, then the Jews in this verse are

talking about Paul. If the statement is part of the text, then they would be talking about Lysias, which would help explain why Felix wanted to postpone a verdict until he heard from Lysias (v. 22).

**Verse 9—*The Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so***—they were testifying that the charges brought by their attorney were true. They ended their case—still with no evidence.

## **The Defense**

**Verse 10—*When the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded***—He had no attorney, so he made his own defense.

- ***“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation***—Felix had been governor for about five years and had served under Cumanus, governor of Samaria, for several years before that. Unlike Tertullus, however, Paul was stating a fact, not flattering him. Paul was merely reminding Felix that he had been in Palestine long enough to be acquainted with Jewish beliefs and customs.
- ***I cheerfully make my defense***—Because Felix was obligated to make a fair decision.

**Verse 11—*since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship***—Five of those 12 days, Paul was on his way back to Caesarea and in Herod’s Praetorium (23:32-35; 24:1). Hardly enough time to do all the Jews were charging him of.

**Verse 12—*Neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot***—Paul did not have any public debates while in Jerusalem. In fact, he went to Jerusalem to bring an offering for the poor (v. 17; Romans 15:25-28; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1ff).

**Verse 13—*Nor can they prove to you the charges of which they now accuse me***—The Jews had no proof—only their accusations. The remaining charges were religious and outside the ability of the Roman court to judge. Therefore, Felix should have dismissed the charges right now.

**Verse 14—*But this I admit to you, that according to the Way***—Tertullus had called Christians “Nazarenes” (v. 5), but Paul called Christianity “the Way” (see v. 22; Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23).

- ***which they call a sect***—a faction or splinter group
- ***I do serve the God of our fathers***—the historic title for the God of Israel (Genesis 48:15; Exodus 3:15; Ezra 7:27; Daniel 2:23; Acts 3:13; 5:30). To be a Christian was not to forsake worshipping the true God but to be even more devoted to Him.
- ***believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets***—The Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch (first five books) as divinely inspired. The Pharisees accepted the entire Old Testament. But both groups rejected the clear testimony of the Law and the prophets to Jesus (John 1:45; 5:39, 46; Luke 24:27, 44). Paul was not a heretic. He was more orthodox than his accusers because he served the God of his fathers, believed in the inspiration of the entire Old Testament, and accepted everything it taught.

**Verse 15—*having a hope in God***—Believing in the entire Old Testament gives one hope of the resurrection (Job 19:25-27; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2), which the Sadducees did not believe, not accepting the rest of the Old Testament outside of the first five books.

- ***which these men cherish themselves***—This would refer to the Pharisees, and most of the Jews
- ***that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked***—This is the only time in either Acts or the epistles that Paul explicitly refers to a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (see Matthew 25:31ff; John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15).

**Verse 16—*In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men***—This isn’t just a belief to Paul. It impacted his life, everything he did. John also wrote, *...everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure* (1 John 3:2-3). Peter wrote,

...the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness... (2 Peter 3:10-11).

**Verse 17**—“*Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings*—Far from causing trouble, Paul came on a mission of mercy, to bring an offering for the needy Jewish Christians from the Gentile Christians and to present offerings in the temple.

**Verse 18**—*in which they found me occupied in the temple, having been purified*—from being with the Gentiles, something any Jew would do (see 21:24, 26).

- *without any crowd or uproar*—he was doing this privately, with no crowd around him
- *But there were some Jews from Asia*—Their false charge started the riot (21:27-29). They had seen Trophimus from Ephesus in the city with Paul and *they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple*, thereby defiling the temple (21:28-29).

**Verse 19**—*who ought to have been present before you and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me*—That the eye-witnesses of Paul’s alleged desecration of the temple failed to show up undermined the Sanhedrin’s case. “Roman law was very strong against accusers who abandoned their charges” (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament*).

**Verse 20**—“*Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council*—The only thing these men at the trial could testify to was what Paul said when Paul stood before them (23:1-10).

**Verse 21**—*other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today’*—The only “crime” they could accuse him of was this statement. But belief in the resurrection was not a crime, even under Jewish law (the Pharisees accepted it), much less the Roman law. The issues were theological, not civil or criminal, and therefore did not belong in a Roman court.

## The Verdict

**Verse 22**—*But Felix*—Caught in a predicament. His prisoner was a Roman citizen, against whom no eye-witnesses had come to verify any of the alleged crimes. Nor had the highest Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, found him guilty of anything specific. Felix should find Paul innocent, but that would infuriate the Jewish leaders and possibly lead to further unrest. He couldn’t have that happen.

- *having a more exact knowledge about the Way*—possibly from his Jewish wife Drusilla (v. 24)
- *put them off*—Trapped between justice and popularity, he decided the wisest thing was to make no decision at all
- *saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case”*—But Felix already had Lysias’ testimony of what happened in the letter Lysias wrote to Felix (23:29), and Lysias plainly stated his belief that Paul was not guilty of any crime (23:29). It is unlikely that Lysias had any further information to add. There is no evidence that Felix ever summoned Lysias.

**Verse 23**—*Then he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody*—thereby keeping Paul away from the Jews

- *and yet have some freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him*—because he was a Roman citizen and not convicted of a crime. So he was kept under guard but not in close confinement.

**Verse 24**—*But some days later Felix arrived*

- *with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess*—History records that she was the youngest daughter of Herod Agrippa 1 (the Herod of Acts 12), was Felix’s third wife (his first had been a granddaughter of Anthony



and Cleopatra). While still in her teens, Drusilla had been given in marriage to the king of Emesa (located in the province of Syria). Struck by her renowned beauty, Felix contrived (with the help of a Cypriot magician) to lure her away from her husband. At age 16 she became his wife and bore him a son, who was killed in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius (A.D. 79). At this time, she was not yet twenty years old. According to some manuscripts, it was at her urging that Felix sent for Paul [MacArthur, *Acts*].

- **and sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus**—This is the first ruler on Paul’s journey—as Jesus said of Paul, *...he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings...* (Acts 9:15).

**Verse 25**—**But as he was discussing righteousness**—the absolute standard demanded by God’s holy nature (see Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

- **self-control**—man’s required response to bring him or her into conformity with God’s law
- **and the judgment to come**—the inevitable result of failing to control oneself so as to live up to God’s standards
- **Felix became frightened**—since Felix is living with a woman he lured away from her husband. Because he lacked the first two virtues, he would face divine judgment.
- **and said, “Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you”**—He let his opportunity to believe pass. His fear did not lead to repentance, only alarm. (See 2 Corinthians 6:2.)

**Verse 26**—**At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him**—His motive for talking with Paul was not spiritual but materialistic. Perhaps because of Paul’s comment in verse 17 about the money he brought with him to Jerusalem, Felix may have thought Paul would bribe his way out of custody or perhaps because Paul was a Roman, Felix thought he had money to buy his freedom.

**Verse 27**—**But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.**

- Felix’s brutal suppression of a riot in Caesarea so infuriated the Jews that they managed to get him removed from office. Emperor Nero recalled him to Rome, where he would have faced severe punishment had his influential brother Pallas not interceded for him. After his recall, Felix vanished from history. Although he knew Paul was innocent, he refused to the end to release him [MacArthur, *Acts*].

**APPLICATION**—Felix is an example of someone who hardened their heart. Hebrews 3:7-8 says, *Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”* You can’t depend on another opportunity. Even though Felix talked to Paul more times, it was only this one time that he had a nudging of his spirit in being frightened of the judgment to come. The other times his motives were not spiritual at all.

## Chapter 25:1-12

### Paul’s Trial before Festus

Felix’s brutal term in office had culminated in the ruthless subduing of a riot in Caesarea. When the outraged Jews sent a delegation to Rome to protest Felix’s actions, Emperor Nero recalled the governor to Rome in disgrace. Festus soon arrived in Judea to replace him.

Unlike Felix, who was a former slave, Festus was a member of the Roman nobility. Little is known of his brief term as governor (he died about two years after taking office). Since the first-century Jewish historian Josephus described him as better than his predecessor Felix and his successor Albinus, he appears to have been an able leader. [MacArthur, *Acts*, pp. 314-315]

**Verse 1**—**Festus then, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea**—to meet the Jewish authorities (the high priest and Sanhedrin). Because of Felix’s cruelty, he left the Jews with a hatred of Rome. So Festus wanted to establish peace in Judea.

**Verse 2—***And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul, and they were urging him*—not only did Festus inherit Felix’s political problems, he also inherited Felix’s prisoner Paul.

**Verse 3—***requesting a concession* [handover or surrender] *against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem*—for a trial. That seemed innocent, but then we learn—

- *(at the same time, setting an ambush to kill him on the way)*—The old ambush plot that was prevented by Lysias two years ago, was resurrected.

**Verse 4—***Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly*—The proper place for Paul, a Roman citizen, to be tried was at the seat of the Roman government rule in Judea—Caesarea, especially seeing Festus was just about to return there.

**Verse 5—***“Therefore,” he said, “let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him”*—But Festus, wanting to make peace with the Jews, suggested the influential Jewish men go with him to Caesarea.

**Verse 6—***After he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea, and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal* [bema judgment seat] *and ordered Paul to be brought*—in an official Roman trial.

**Verse 7—***After Paul arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him*—like attacking wolves (but with no teeth—because they could not prove their charges)

- *bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove*—The same charges as two years earlier—that Paul was causing riots, was against the Romans, and was against the Jewish Law and the temple (24:5-6). They made charges, but they had no witnesses to their charges, no evidence—therefore, no case. Luke again stresses that the Christians were innocent, law-abiding citizens (see also 18:12ff and 19:37).

**Verse 8—***while Paul said in his own defense, “I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar”*—Festus faced the same problem as Felix had. Paul was a Roman citizen, falsely accused and obviously innocent. But to release him would antagonize the Jewish leaders, the same leaders with whom Festus had to make peace.

**Verse 9—***But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?”*—Paul knew the Jews had wanted to ambush him and kill him before, what were his chances of getting there this time? And if they killed Jesus, they would certainly kill him.

**Verse 10—***But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried*—because he was a Roman citizen.

- *I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know*—just as Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, Festus knew Paul was innocent.

**Verse 11—***“If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die*—he was not trying to evade justice, instead he was demanding justice.

- *but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them*—As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to expect justice from a Roman court. Since there was no case against him, he could not be handed over to them.

- *I appeal to Caesar*—Once this appeal was made, it took the case out of the governor’s hands and transferred it to the emperor. The emperor at this time was Nero, but during this period of time, he was not marked by the cruelty and insanity of his later years, when he destroyed Jerusalem.

**Verse 12**—*Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go”*—Not only would Paul be happy that he avoided going to Jerusalem at the hands of the Jews, he was happy that God granted his request to go to Rome (23:11).

**APPLICATIONS**—No religion is neutral about Jesus Christ. All non-Christian religions are hostile Him (see Matthew 12:30). Persecution of Christians is often based on false accusations. Believers need to live their lives in such a godly way that they can say with Paul, “I have committed no offense.”

- Although Paul had been held for two years in Caesarea, the Jewish leaders’ hatred of Paul had not lessened. Peter wrote, *By what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved* (2 Peter 2:19). Especially the sins of hatred and bitterness do not go away. They have a long memory.
- Paul submitted himself to the ruling government (Romans 13:1-5). So should we.
- This passage shows the sovereignty of God in the affairs of man (see also Genesis 45:7-8; Daniel 4:17; Luke 22:53; John 7:30; 19:10-11; Acts 2:23).

## Chapter 25:13 – 26:32

### Paul’s Trial before King Agrippa

**Verse 13**—*Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa*—He ruled northern Palestine

- This is Herod Agrippa II
  - His father, Arippa I, was the Herod who killed James, arrested Peter, and was eaten by worms (Acts 12:1-23).
  - His great-uncle, Herod Antipas, was the ruler during the Gospels, who beheaded John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29), sought Jesus’ life (Luke 13:31-33), and later tried Him (Luke 23:7-12)
  - His great-grandfather was Herod the Great, who ruled at the time of Jesus’ birth (Matthew 2:1-19; Luke 1:5) and killed the children in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus.
  - Although he did not rule Judea, he had been granted control of the Temple treasury and the right to appoint the high priest. The Romans considered him an expert on Jewish affairs, as did Paul (Acts 26:3). Agrippa tried to prevent the Jewish revolt, but when it broke out in A.D. 66, he sided with the Romans, becoming a traitor to the Jews [MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 327].
- *and Bernice*—Not only was she his consort but also his sister. (Their sister Drusilla was the wife of the former governor Felix.) Their incestuous relationship was the subject of gossip in Rome (where Agrippa had grown up). Bernice would occasionally leave her brother and lover for another man (she had been the mistress of Emperor Vespasian and later of his son Titus), but she always returned. They are inseparable in this Acts narrative (25:13, 23; 26:30). Some have suggested that she is a symbol of Agrippa’s vice [MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 327].
- *arrived at Caesarea and paid their respects to Festus*—

**Verses 14-15**—*While they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king*—This gave Festus an opportunity to ask the king’s advice about what to do with Paul. Felix’s review:

- *saying, “There is a man who was left as a prisoner [for two years] by Felix [the former governor]; and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation against him*—The Jews did not want a fair trial for Paul, they simply wanted him condemned based on their request.

**Verse 16**—“*I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man [i.e., a Roman citizen] before the accused meets his accusers face to face and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges*—Although Felix had found Paul not guilty, Festus wanted to preside over a trial himself and give his own verdict.

**Verse 17**—“*So after they had assembled here [in Caesarea], I did not delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought before me*—If possible, he wanted to calm down the Jewish leaders. His job was to keep peace there.

**Verse 18**—“*When the accusers stood up, they began bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting*—Of course, he thought the charges would be some serious violations of the Roman law, for which he could condemn Paul. But there were no such charges.

**Verse 19**—*but they simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive*—Festus was not very familiar with the Jewish law and did not understand the implications of what Paul said and why it caused the Jews to be so angry as to want to kill Paul.

**APPLICATION**—It is the fact of the resurrection of Jesus that sets Christianity apart from other religions. As Paul wrote, *if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins* (1 Corinthians 15:17).

**Verse 20**—“*Being at a loss how to investigate such matters*—He didn’t know how to investigate Jewish religious differences.

- *I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters*—Although what good would that do? The Jews had not presented any evidence to Festus at the trial in Caesarea (25:10) because there was no evidence. Going to Jerusalem would not create new evidence. Besides, Paul knew of their earlier ambush attempt, so he could be pretty sure they would try that again (which we know is exactly what they were planning—25:3).

**Verse 21**—“*But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor’s decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar*”—If Festus had done what justice demanded, he would have set Paul free. But because Festus was trying to please the Jews, Paul was still a prisoner and forced to appeal to Caesar. But in God’s providence (1) Paul was protected by the Romans from the Jews who wanted to kill him and (2) he was on his way to Rome—where he wanted to go.

**APPLICATION**—How different things look when you can see them from God’s perspective! Reminds me of Genesis 50:20 when Joseph told his brothers, *...you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result...*

Festus has a problem. He’s found that Paul is innocent of any Roman charges. But he has to send Paul to Caesar. But Caesar will want to know what the charges are. So Festus needs help, which is why he laid the case out to Agrippa, to come up with a valid charge against Paul that Festus can send with Paul in Festus’ report to the emperor.

**Verse 22**—*Then Agrippa said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself”*—Probably both flattered that Festus sought his expertise and also curious about speaking in person to the spokesman for this new Christianity spreading throughout his territory up by Galilee.

- *“Tomorrow,” he said, “you shall hear him.”*

**Verse 23**—*So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp*—“pomp” is only used here in the New Testament. It means a grand, showy spectacle. Agrippa would be in his royal clothes—purple robe, golden crown, rings, maybe a scepter. Bernice (though not the queen) would also be dressed as a queen.

- *and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders* [of the Roman soldiers stationed at Caesarea] *and the prominent men of the city*—The commanders were most likely dressed in their uniforms, and the leading men in their finest clothes for this royal assembly.
- *at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in*—What a contrast Paul must have been to all the pomp. He has been held prisoner for two years. And in general, *...his personal presence is unimpressive...* (2 Corinthians 10:10). But history has shown that Paul was one of the most powerful men who ever lived—and these men are *...like a mere breath; his days are like a passing shadow* (Psalm 144:4). Notably absent are the Jewish men bringing the charges.

**Verse 24**—*Festus said, “King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you see this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer*—In a few brief words, Festus laid out the situation about Paul.

**Verses 25-26**—*“But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death*—Festus honestly admitted his problem. He had heard the Jewish accusations, but he again declared Paul’s innocence of any crime against Rome or Roman law.

- *and since he himself appealed to the Emperor*—It was Paul’s idea to appeal to Caesar, not Festus’
- *I decided to send him*—But once Paul appealed, Festus had to send him.
- *“Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord*—Here’s Festus’ problem.
- *Therefore I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa* [as one more familiar with Jewish things], *so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write.*

**Verse 27**—*“For it seems absurd* [pointless, nonsensical] *to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him”*—And Caesar would not be happy with a provincial governor wasting his time with a prisoner with no charges.

## Chapter 26

**Verse 1**—*Agrippa* [now taking charge of the situation] *said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself”*—seeing there were no accusers present, he proceeded to the defense.

- *Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense*—

**Verses 2-3**—*“In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews*—Because of Agrippa’s Roman connection, he would not likely be sympathetic to the Sanhedrin but would be objective. But also, because of his Jewish background, he would be knowledgeable about the issues involved. So Paul was glad of his hearing before Agrippa.

- *therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently*— Because it seems that Paul’s objective was not his defense but to convert Agrippa (see verses 28-29), so he wants Agrippa to hear the whole story, beginning with his own life before his conversion to Christianity.

**Verses 4-5**—*“So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem*—educated in Jerusalem (22:3), and a chief prosecutor of the Christians (8:1-3; 9:1-2).

- *since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived as a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion*—Joseph described the Pharisees as “a certain sect of the Jews that appear more religious than others, and seem to interpret the laws more accurately” (*Wars* 1.5.2). When Paul wanted to describe his zeal for the Law, he said, *as to the Law, a Pharisee* (Philippines 3:5). He was as committed to the Law as any Jew (Galatians 1:13-14) and was an unlikely prospect for such a conversion.

**Verse 6**—“*And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers*—Paul affirmed his commitment to the teaching of the Old Testament.

**Verse 7**—*the promise to which our twelve tribes* [it’s interesting that he mentions all twelve tribes and not just Judah—see Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30; James 1:1; Revelation 21:12] *hope to attain*—The hope was the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom (see 1:6; 3:22-24; 13:23-33; Galatians 3:17-18; 4:4; Titus 2:13; 1 Peter 1:11-12).

- *as they earnestly serve God night and day*—Zeal for God is not enough. ...*they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge* (Romans 10:1-3).
- *And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews*—He’s being condemned for believing the very thing the Jewish people had always believed.

**Verse 8**—“*Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?*—By raising Jesus from the dead, God validated the Old Testament promise of the resurrection (Job 19:25-26) and demonstrated that Jesus was Israel’s long-awaited Messiah.

**Verses 9-10**—“*So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*—Most of the Jews (except the Sadducees—Matthew 22:23) did believe in the resurrection of the dead (see John 5:28-29; 11:24). But they did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead and was the Messiah. The Jews came up with the story that the disciples stole the body of Jesus and bribed the Roman guards to confirm their lie (Matthew 28:11-15).

- *And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them* (like the murder of Stephen—7:58). The word “vote” is the Greek word for a small smooth pebble, a reference to the ancient custom of casting a black pebble for conviction and a white pebble for acquittal. This may mean he was actually a member of the Sanhedrin.

**Verse 11**—“*And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme*—From a Jewish perspective, the Christians belief that Jesus was God was already a blasphemy, so what Paul means here is from his current Christian perspective, he was trying to get the Christians to deny that Jesus was God, which would be blasphemy from a Christian perspective.

- *and being furiously enraged at them* (see 9:1; Galatians 1:13-14), *I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities*—it was on a trip to this foreign city that Paul encountered Jesus.

**Verse 12**—“*While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus*—the capital of Syria, about 20 miles east of the Sea of Galilee and about 90 miles north of Jerusalem.

- *with the authority and commission of the chief priests*—to arrest any Christians

**Verse 13**—*at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun* [see Revelation 1:16; 21:2]), *shining all around me* [brighter than the Middle Eastern sun] *and those who were journeying with me*—

**Verse 14**—“*And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect* (Aramaic), *‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads’*—to fight God was as useless as an ox kicking against the goads (sharpened rods used to herd cattle). We use the word today—to goad someone into doing something. It’s such a strong motivation, that it is useless to kick against it.

**Verse 15**—Stunned, blinded, and terrified, *And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’*

- *And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting*—Rocked to the core of his being. The One Saul had hated and despised as a blasphemer and a false teacher threatening the sacredness of Judaism was indeed who He had claimed to be—Israel’s Messiah [MacArthur, *Acts*, p. 335].

**Verse 16**—*‘But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you*—see Acts 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 2 Corinthians 12:1-7; Galatians 1:11-12. Paul was an eye-witness to the resurrected Christ. Paul was not seeking Jesus—he had already decided Jesus was not the Messiah. He had not been convinced by talking with Christians—he arrested them and put them in prison, even killed them. Only the direct, miraculous, supernatural intervention of the risen, living Jesus Himself turned Paul from the persecutor of Christians to an apostle of Jesus Christ.

**Verse 17**—*rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you*—for example, when Paul’s nephew heard of the Jews’ planned ambush and warned Paul and the Roman commander, saving Paul’s life (23:16-33).

**Verse 18**—*to open their eyes so*—Jesus said unbelievers were blind people being led by blind leaders (Matthew 15:14). Paul wrote, *The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving* (2 Corinthians 4:4). It is the Holy Spirit, using the Word of God to open the eyes of the spiritually blinded (John 16:8-11).

- ***that they may turn from darkness to light***—The purpose is the transformed life. (Colossians 1:12-13); *...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light* (1 Peter 2:9).
- ***and from the dominion of Satan to God***— *being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness* (Ephesians 4:18-19)
- ***that they may receive forgiveness of sins***—the result of our salvation (see Matthew 1:21; 26:28; Luke 1:77; 24:47; Acts 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 8:12; 9:28; 10:12; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 2:1-2; 3:5; 4:10; Revelation 1:5).
- ***and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified***—*an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you* (1 Peter 1:4; see also Acts 20:32; Ephesians 1:11, 14, 18; Colossians 1:12; 3:24; Hebrews 9:15).
- ***by faith in Me***’—apart from any works (John 3:14-17; 6:69; Acts 13:39; 15:9; 16:31; Romans 3:21-28; 4:5; 5:1; 9:30; 10:9-11; Galatians 2:16; 3:11, 24; Philippians 3:9). Paul wrote, *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

**APPLICATION**—Biblically, the opposite of faith is works. Faith is the vehicle by which we approach God. From Adam to the end of time, it’s always by faith.

**Verse 19**—*“So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision*—obedience is an acknowledgement of God’s authority in your life (Acts 5:29), an expression of your trust in God (Hebrews 11:8), and is the proof of your love for God. *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments* (John 14:15, 21).

**Verse 20**—*but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first [Acts 9:20-22], and also at Jerusalem [9:26-29] and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles*

- ***that they should repent and turn to God***—to change one’s mind (Luke 1:16-17; Acts 9:35; 11:21; 14:15; 15:19; 2 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Peter 2:25).
- ***performing deeds appropriate to repentance***—the result of a changed mind is changed behavior (Matthew 3:8; 7:16, 20; James 2:18).

**Verse 21**—*“For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death* (21:27ff). They especially didn’t like Paul’s stating spiritual equality between the Jews and the Gentiles (22:21-23).

**Verse 22**—“*So, having obtained help from God* [23:12ff; 25:2-5; 2 Corinthians 1:8-10; 2 Timothy 3:11; 4:17-18], *I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place*—What Paul was preaching was not heresy, it was in complete agreement with the Old Testament.

**Verse 23**—*that the Christ was to suffer* [Psalm 22; Isaiah 53], *and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead* [Psalm 16:10; Acts 13:30-37] *He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles*” [Isaiah 42:6; 49:6]

**Verse 24**—*While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad”*—No one in their right mind would think that someone rose from the dead and talked to them. Jesus was also accused of being insane (Mark 3:21; John 8:48, 52; 10:20). Because, as Paul wrote, *the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God* (1 Corinthians 1:18).

**Verse 25**—*But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth*—with a sound mind and in control of his senses.

**Verse 26**—*“For the king [Agrippa] knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner*—Agrippa’s silence is his agreement that he does know what Paul is talking about.

**Verse 27**—*“King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do”*—Agrippa is in a predicament. The implication is that if he does believe in the Prophets, then he would be admitting Jesus is the Messiah. That would make him look foolish in front of the other Romans and would make the Jews mad. But he could hardly say he did not revere the prophets of his people.

**Verse 28**—*Agrippa replied to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian”*—better translated, “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?” said in a mocking way, ignoring Paul’s question in verse 27.

**Verse 29**—*And Paul said, “I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains”*—No matter how long it would take, Paul’s heart’s desire was that they all believe in Jesus.

**APPLICATION**—You cannot create faith in others. Jesus also talked to the rich young ruler, who would not believe (Luke 18:18-25). Jesus didn’t make him believe either. Our job is to present the Gospel, be witnesses, but we can’t make a person believe. It’s God’s job to draw them to Himself if they are elect.

**Verses 30-31**—*The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, “This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment”*—again, Paul has been found innocent of any wrongdoing, and he was able to witness to the most powerful people in Judah. Now God’s promise is going to be fulfilled: *Take courage; for as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem, so you must witness at Rome also* (Acts 23:11).

**Verse 32**—*And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”*