

## The Book of Acts Study Guide

### Chapters 25-26

#### 25:1-12

When Festus became the new governor of Judea, he traveled to Jerusalem at the beginning of his term in office. There, the Jewish leadership showed that they were still preoccupied with the demise of Paul because they asked Festus to send him to Jerusalem. And the plot to assassinate him was still in place, given an opportunity such as transferring Paul in this manner.

vv. 4-5 – But Festus refused and told the Jewish leaders to bring their charges at Caesarea.

vv. 6-7 – As soon as Festus returned to Caesarea, the leaders brought their charges against Paul. It was a repeat of what transpired two years earlier when Felix was the governor. Once again, they could not prove their case.

v. 8 – And, once again, Paul showed that he had done nothing wrong according to the Torah, he had not harmed the temple, and had not broken Roman law. This episode illustrates the way that believers can be righteous according to God's Word and a good citizen where they live, and still face difficulty, even persecution.

v. 9 – This passage shows how people whose values are worldly, not godly, will compromise justice. Instead of issuing a just decision based on the evidence presented (or lack thereof), Festus took a political route by trying to give the Jewish leaders what they wanted. In this case, if they got their way, the Jewish leadership would be indebted to Festus and he when he needed a favor, he could call it in and they would have to oblige.

vv 10-12 – Paul recognized that justice was eluding him under Festus in spite of his innocence. So he exercised his right as a Roman citizen by appealing to Caesar. This was just one of many benefits of citizenship. It provided the right to vote and run for public office. As we saw in chapter 22, citizens could not be bound or scourged, or punished with the death penalty for lesser offenses. And they were granted the right to defend themselves in court, including having the supreme authority in the empire, Caesar, hear the case. When he exercised that right, personally he would get legal resolution to this dispute that had extended for a long time. He would also be spared the threat of assassination that had not gone away. The Messianic movement would also have a better chance of legal protection by Rome than if he stayed in Judea and civil unrest continued because of his presence. And his desire to be a witness of The Way in Rome would be realized.

v. 13 – And so Festus granted his request.

#### 25:13-22

But before Paul could be sent to Rome, Herod Agrippa II showed up in Caesarea. He was the last of the Herodian kings, although he was not a true king but what was called a tetrarch who ruled over a small region in the Roman empire and deferred to the authority of Rome. In his case, he ruled over the region of Galilee and Perea (eastern Jordan River Valley). He was the great-grandson of Herod the Great who expanded and adorned the temple in Jerusalem, but also massacred young boys when Yeshua was born. And he was the son of Agrippa 1 who had James, the brother of John killed in Acts 12. Accompanying Agrippa was his sister Bernice, who Josephus said lived with him in an incestuous relationship. So, like his ancestors, Agrippa was a powerful man with corrupted morals.

Festus described to Agrippa what had transpired regarding Paul. In v. 19 Festus referred to “a certain dead man, Jesus, who Paul asserted to be alive.” That description trivializes the immense significance of who Yeshua is.

Agrippa became intrigued by the story and asked to hear from Paul himself. So that set the stage for yet another trial.

### 25:23-27

Festus explained to Agrippa that the leaders of Judaism in Jerusalem wanted Paul put to death, but he had not determined that cause existed for such a punishment. However, since Paul had appealed to Caesar, Festus had no idea what charges should be brought against him in Rome. So the intent of Festus was for Agrippa to make that determination. In v. 27 he called the situation absurd. But he went ahead with all of these proceedings because he was primarily concerned about his reputation, not true justice for Paul.

### 26:1-23

- v. 1 – We are told that Paul made his defense. The Greek word translated as “defense” is *apologeomai*. It is the basis for the English word, apology. But it is used in a different way than how we generally apologize. It is a compound verb comprised of *apo* (“from”) plus *logos* (“word”). Literally it means “from a word,” which has the sense of explaining something truthfully by your words. It is used today in the biblical discipline called apologetics, in which you defend a theological position in a systematic manner. And that is what Paul does here, by carefully explaining the relevant details in a factual manner, and not embellishing them with emotional speech. So his method serves as an excellent example to us when we are called to make a defense of what we believe.
- v. 2 – Paul called Agrippa “an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews” because he was alerting Agrippa that he would present evidence that showed the error in the religious thinking of the Sanhedrin. It was like saying, “You know the real issues theologically and religiously, and so do I, so here it comes.”
- vv. 4-5 – Paul gave his credentials, in terms of living as a Jew in a normal manner, and being a Pharisee, which implies training in the Torah, as well as establishing an indicator of what he believed.
- vv. 6-8 – He then described his belief in the resurrection, which was the key theological distinction of the Pharisees. This is ironic because he was just being faithful to what he was supposed to believe as a Pharisee.

It is no different for Messianic believers today who hold to the things the patriarchs and the faithful men and women of Israel believed. These beliefs are biblical in nature, and thus recorded by Jewish authors under the inspiration of the God of Israel, not based on the teachings of men. Yet Messianic Jews are accused by Judaism today as holding beliefs that are incompatible with the Jewish heritage. But just as Paul had truth on his side, Messianic beliefs are more consistent with biblical faith than modern Judaism. These beliefs include:

- A real Messiah who is a person, and also God incarnate.
- Atonement for sin based on the shedding of blood.
- A day of judgment that leads to everlasting life or everlasting punishment.
- Salvation by grace through faith, not by works.
- Being faithful to Torah, without being burdened by legalism.

- vv. 9-11 – Paul then told the story of his life before his spiritual transformation, which was marked by having religious approval to practice hate, which is a dangerous combination.
- vv 12-13 – Then he told the story of his encounter with Yeshua and his spiritual transformation. His reason for telling it in detail goes beyond a mere personal testimony. It gives evidence to his position on the key issue at hand – the resurrection. For if it is well known that Yeshua died on the cross, and yet He spoke to Paul afterward, that means Yeshua is alive, and that requires resurrection from the dead. Moreover, since Messianic prophecy foretold the resurrection of the Messiah in Psalm 16:10 and Isaiah 53:10, that means Yeshua must be the Messiah and everything He taught must be true. So Paul’s eyewitness testimony is significant for a number of reasons.
- v. 14 – His defense goes on to provide an additional detail of Paul’s Damascus road conversion experience that was not brought out in chapter 9. When Yeshua confronted Saul, He said, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” Goads are sticks that are sharp at one end. They are used to motivate stubborn livestock like oxen to move. Shorter versions were also placed on wagons or carts behind the animal. So when a beast resisted moving forward by kicking backward, the sharp object would deliver a painful reaction, and the animal would learn to stop resisting.
- Applied to Saul, this means he had been resisting God’s leading prior to his personal encounter with Yeshua. As someone who was active in Jerusalem, it is reasonable to conclude that Saul was familiar with Yeshua’s teachings before the crucifixion. He may even have heard Yeshua speak directly, although we have no direct evidence of that. But it is likely that he knew the message that Yeshua had given, and Saul resisted it. In fact, Saul’s hateful passion to defeat the followers of Yeshua only makes sense if he understood the message and resisted it. So when Yeshua confronted him on the road to Damascus, it all came to a head when Saul finally stopped kicking back at the message of Yeshua that was calling him to move forward spiritually.
- v. 18 – Paul also provides additional details regarding the calling that Yeshua gave to him. He wasn’t just called to take the name of Yeshua to the Gentiles and kings (9:15), here he adds the purposes of opening their eyes from the darkness of Satan to the light of God, to receive forgiveness of sins, and to be sanctified by faith. Those things would be especially important to state at that moment because he was being a direct witness to both Festus (a Gentile) and Agrippa (a king), and was hoping that they might repent and be saved.
- vv. 19-21 – Paul then explained how he had taken the message given to him by Yeshua to both Jews and Gentiles. He said that the reason the Jewish leaders were trying to have him put to death is because he had called them to repentance.
- vv. 22-23 – Paul’s concluding statement is profound – his message has only been what is found in the Prophets and Torah in the Hebrew Scriptures. That, too, serves as an example to all of us. When we know what the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) states, we can use it to state what God has already declared. That way, the Word of God is the authority, and if someone rejects our testimony, it is ultimately their rejecting of God’s authority.

### 26:24-32

Festus and Agrippa had different responses to Paul’s statements. As a Roman, Festus did not believe in life after death, so everything Paul had to say made no sense and he concluded that Paul was thinking in an insane manner. That reaction is common today, as atheist or humanist people

typically consider the message of the Bible to be unbelievable, and thus have disparaging feelings towards those who do believe it.

At first glance, Agrippa appears to be positively interested in Paul's message. But notice that he used the word Christian (Gr. *Christianos*), which at that time was a pejorative term. He also said that Paul's argument was a short one. So it is most likely that Agrippa was being cynical or sarcastic – "In a *short time* you will persuade me to become a *Christian*?"

v. 29 sums up Paul's entire purpose in life, becoming "such as I am" means being forgiven of sins and having a calling that benefits others.

vv. 30-32 – These people with authority determined that Paul was innocent of having committed an offense worthy of capital punishment or being imprisoned. But he had to be sent to Caesar anyway because Paul had invoked that right. To them, it must have seemed foolish and unnecessary. But now, from the perspective of history, this situation was part of the bigger picture of God's plan. In order for belief in Yeshua to reach greater numbers, the message of the Good News had to reach the most influential city in that part of the world—Rome. And that called for the most skilled person to bring it about—Paul. And so Paul would go there not to defend himself, but to testify on behalf of Yeshua.