



*the book of acts*  
**WEEK NINE**

ACTS OF THE APOSTLES | FINAL SESSION

# Paul's Prophetic Witness Reaches Rome

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Acts 23:12-28:31

PART 1 The Plot & the Providence    PART 2 The Trials Before Power    PART 3 Storm, Shipwreck & Malta    PART 4 Rome at Last

PART ONE

# The Plot & the Providence

Acts 23:12–35

The conspiracy of forty men · Paul's nephew · The tribune Claudius Lysias · Transfer to Caesarea

PART 1 · Acts 23:12–22

## The Conspiracy: Forty Men Bound by an Oath

Acts 23:12–13

When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. There were more than forty who made this conspiracy.

### Oath (anathema)

They placed themselves under a curse — a herem-like vow invoking divine penalty if not fulfilled. Keener notes this was a recognized but extreme Jewish legal instrument.

### God's Instrument

Paul's nephew (unnamed, like most of Paul's family) hears the plot and reports it. Providence hidden in ordinary means.

### Lysias Responds

The tribune sends Paul by night with 200 soldiers, 70 cavalry, 200 spearmen — a massive escort reflecting Roman seriousness about a citizen's rights (23:23).

## Claudius Lysias to Felix: A Self-Serving Letter

Acts 23:29

I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment.

“Luke gives us a rare look at Roman administrative correspondence. Lysias’s letter is a masterpiece of diplomatic self-justification—he omits the flogging order entirely.”

— Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles*

### First Innocence Declaration

Claudius Lysias declares Paul innocent (23:29).  
This is the first of THREE official declarations of innocence that frame Paul’s trials.

Application: When the world tries to silence God’s witness, God can use even secular officials and political systems to advance his purposes.

## PART TWO

# The Trials Before Power

Acts 24–26

Before Felix · Before Festus · Before Agrippa & Bernice — Three trials, three declarations of innocence

## Why Three Trials? David Cook's Structure

### Trial 1 Before Felix

Acts 24:1–21  
Paul defends himself against Ananias and Tertullus.  
Felix delays, hoping for a bribe (24:26).

### Trial 2 Before Festus

Acts 25:6–12  
Festus wants to move Paul to Jerusalem. Paul exercises his Roman citizenship:  
"I appeal to Caesar!"

### Trial 3 Before Agrippa

Acts 25:23–26:32  
The most elaborate hearing. Paul gives his full autobiography and gospel appeal.

#### THREE DECLARATIONS OF INNOCENCE

#### Claudius Lysias

Acts 23:29

"This man is doing nothing deserving death or imprisonment"

#### Festus

Acts 25:25

"This man is doing nothing deserving death or imprisonment"

#### King Agrippa

Acts 26:32

"This man is doing nothing deserving death or imprisonment"

## WHY THREE TRIALS?

- 1) To vindicate God's Word, i.e. despite charges before tribunals, God brings Paul to Rome in fulfillment of his Word (23:11; cf. 18:10)
- 2) To show Paul giving solemn witness, in fulfillment of Acts 9:15; partly to prove innocence but primarily to persuade hearers of the truth of the gospel.
- 3) To show that the resurrection of Christ empowers perseverance in testimony (cf. 1 Cor 15)
- 4) To explain the content of charges against Paul (in support of Paul's case in Rome?), how it is a dispute about the Jewish religion concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- 5) To show we've been here before (cf. Luke 23). God is in control of both events. In one he brings about human redemption through the death of his Son (cf. Acts 4:28). In the other, he ensures that the message of redemption is brought to Rome, despite the best efforts of opponents (cf. Acts 23:11)

## Paul Before Felix: Truth Without a Bribe

Acts 24:14–15

But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.

### Paul's Strategy

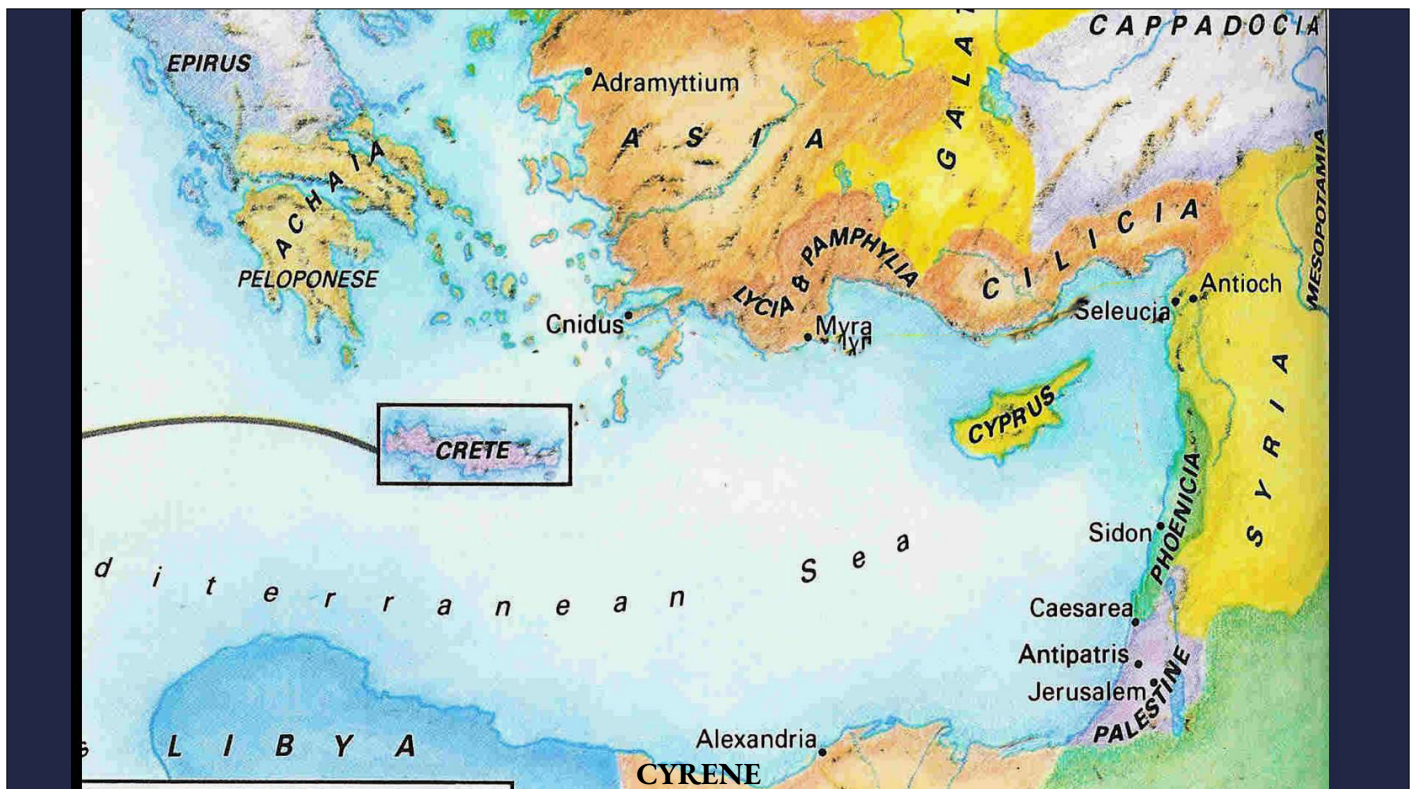
He doesn't just defend himself, he preaches. His "hope in God" (24:15) is the resurrection, the core of the gospel (Keener, Acts, vol. 3).

### Felix's Response

Felix is disturbed by talk of righteousness, self-control, and judgment (24:25) — the gospel confronts his lifestyle. He delays, hoping for a bribe.

### Two Years

Paul waits in Caesarea two years (24:27). God's timing, not Ananias's scheming, will determine when Paul reaches Rome.



## Paul Before Festus: “I Appeal to Caesar!”

### The Political Pressure

1. Festus visits Jerusalem. Leaders urge him to transfer Paul there — an ambush awaits.
2. Festus (currying Jewish favor) suggests Paul go to Jerusalem. Paul refuses.
3. Paul’s 3-point defense (25:8): nothing against the law, the temple, or Caesar.
4. Festus’s dilemma: charged with no crime he recognized (25:18), but can’t release him politically.

### The Appeal: *Caesarem appello!*

Acts 25:11

If then I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything for which I deserve to die, I do not seek to escape death. But if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can give me up to them. I appeal to Caesar.

Provocatio ad Caesarem was a legal right of Roman citizens. Witherington notes this maneuver made the Jerusalem plot moot — now Rome, not Jerusalem, controls Paul’s fate.

## Festus consults with Herod Agrippa II (25:13-22)

- Festus’ dilemma (25:14-21)
  - “they did not charge him with any of the crimes I expected” (v18)
  - “I was at a loss how to investigate” (v20)
  - “I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar” (v21)
  - Arranged an audience with Agrippa, part Jewish and an authority on Jewish religion

## Paul Before Agrippa: Apologia or Evangelistic Appeal?

“Paul’s speech before Agrippa is the longest and most rhetorically polished in Acts. It is simultaneously a legal defense, an autobiography, a missionary speech, and an evangelistic appeal.”

— Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. 4

### Autobiography

Paul reviews his Pharisaic credentials (26:4–8) — he is not abandoning Judaism but fulfilling it.

### Conversion

The Damascus road (26:12–18): Paul is commissioned as an OT prophet-figure to open eyes, turn from darkness to light.

### Ministry

He has done nothing but what the prophets and Moses said: Messiah would suffer, rise, and bring light (26:22–23).

### Gospel Appeal

“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?” (26:27) — Paul turns the trial into an invitation.

Agrippa’s Response (26:28): “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” — Saw the logic, declined to be drawn. Yet declared: “This man is doing nothing deserving death or imprisonment.” (26:31)

## Paul Mirrors Jesus: Luke’s Intentional Typology

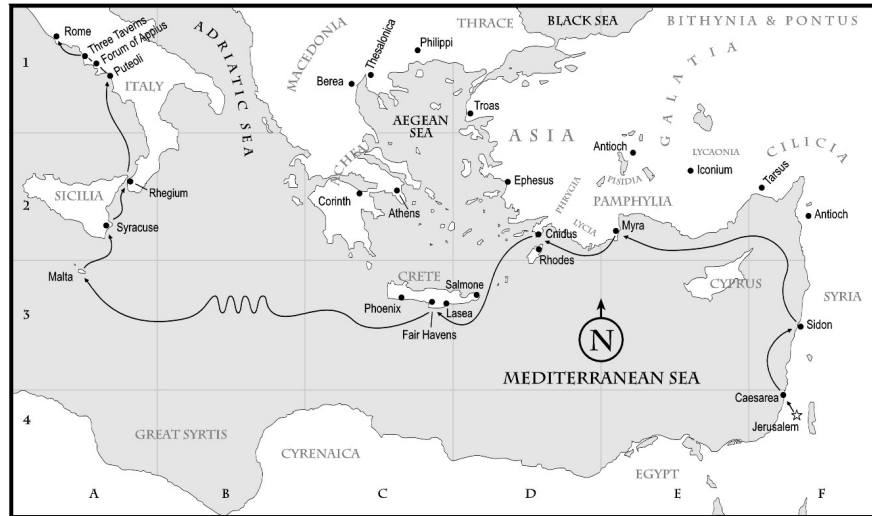
Luke deliberately structures Paul’s trials to echo Jesus’s passion. This is not coincidence — it is theology.

Pattern	Jesus (Luke 23)	Paul (Acts 25–26)
Seized by a mob	Jewish leaders seize Jesus	Jewish mob attacks Paul in Temple
Roman trial	Before Pilate (Luke 23:1–5)	Before Festus (Acts 25:6–12)
Herodian hearing	Before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6–17)	Before Agrippa II (Acts 25:23–26:32)
Innocence declared	Pilate: “I find no guilt” (Luke 23:4)	Agrippa: “done nothing deserving death” (26:31)

“God is in control of both events. In one he brings about human redemption through the death of his Son. In the other, he ensures that the message of redemption reaches Rome, despite every effort of opponents.”

— David Cook, *Acts (BST)*

# PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME



PART 3 · Acts 27

## Why Does Luke Give an Entire Chapter to a Shipwreck?

Acts 27 is the most detailed sea voyage narrative in ancient literature. It is not mere travel writing.

### 1. Faith Under Fire

Paul displays what the disciples lacked in the storm (Mark 4:38–40). He models radical trust in God's word even when all hope of survival is gone (27:22–24).

### 2. The Faithful Witness

An angel appears: "Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar" (27:24). God's mission cannot be sunk — literally.

### 3. Communal Blessing

27:24 — "God has granted you all those who sail with you."  
Keener: in God's economy, those near his servants may receive covering they did not seek.

### 4. Paul as New Moses

Longenecker notes echoes of Jonah (the storm, the sea, deliverance) — but Paul is no Jonah. He intercedes for others, not himself.

## Malta: Signs of the Kingdom Among the Nations

### What Happened

- Islanders show “unusual kindness” (28:2) — unexpected hospitality from “barbarians” (non-Greek speakers).
- A viper fastens on Paul’s hand. Islanders assume divine judgment (28:4).
- Paul shakes it off: no harm. Islanders swing to viewing him as a god (28:6).
- Paul heals Publius’s father and many others (28:7–9).
- The island honors them and provides supplies for departure (28:10).

### What It Means

#### Acts 1:8 Fulfilled

Jerusalem → Judea → Samaria → ends of the earth. Malta is a Gentile outpost on the way to Rome.

#### Kingdom Visible

Healing, protection, generosity — the kingdom breaks out even before Paul preaches a sermon.

#### The Snake’s Defeat

Luke 10:19 echo: “I have given you authority to tread on serpents.” The mission cannot be poisoned.

## PART FOUR

# Rome at Last

Acts 28:11–31

Arrival · Jews in Rome · Isaiah 6 · Two years of bold proclamation · The open ending

## Arrival: “To the Ends of the Earth” Reached

Acts 28:14b–15

And so we came to Rome. And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

“He had come at last to Rome, the apostle to the Gentiles, to be the figurehead in the fulfillment of the last section of Christ’s commission — ‘to the ends of the earth’ (1:8).”

— F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (NICNT)

The Journey: Caesarea → Sidon → Myra → Fair Havens (Crete) → Storm → Malta (3 months) → Syracuse → Rhegium → Puteoli → Forum of Appius → ROME

Acts 1:8 fulfillment: Jerusalem (chs. 1–7) → Judea & Samaria (chs. 8–9) → Ends of the Earth (chs. 10–28). Rome is the symbolic center of the known world — the gospel has now reached it.

## Paul’s Ministry in Rome: Three Postures

1

### Tirelessly Sharing About Jesus Acts 28:17–23

Paul calls the Jewish leaders — not to defend himself first, but to explain the hope of Israel (28:20). They come in large numbers. He expounds from morning to evening from Moses and the Prophets, “trying to convince them about Jesus.”

2

### Decisively Turning to the Receptive Acts 28:24–28

Mixed response: some believed, others rejected. Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9–10 — the same passage Jesus quoted (Matt 13:14–15). Hardened hearts are not surprised — they fulfill prophecy. Paul turns to the Gentiles.

3

### Boldly Continuing the Work Acts 28:30–31

Two years of house arrest = open doors. “Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (28:31). Prison cannot silence the Word.

## The Isaiah 6 Quotation & the Open Ending of Acts

Acts 28:26–27 (Isaiah 6:9–10)

“Go to this people, and say, You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive. For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”

### Used by Jesus (Matt 13)

Jesus quoted Isa 6 to explain why he spoke in parables. Paul uses the same text for the same reason. Israel’s rejection is prophetically anticipated, not a divine surprise.

### Not Replacement Theology

28:28 is a pivot, not a permanent verdict. Paul has just said some Jews believed (28:24). Cf. Romans 11: Jewish rejection opens doors for Gentiles.

### The Open Ending

Acts ends mid-sentence in Paul’s story. No verdict on the trial. No report of his death. Luke’s point: the story is not finished. The church continues the narrative.

## Why Does Luke End Acts Without a Verdict?

“The book of Acts has no proper ending because the story it tells has no proper ending. The mission of the church to the ends of the earth is still in progress.”

— David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (PNTC)

### Theory 1: Written Before 64 AD

Luke wrote before Paul’s death, so he literally didn’t know the ending. Explains why Luke–Acts doesn’t mention the fall of Jerusalem (70 AD), Nero’s persecution, or Paul’s execution.

### Theory 2: Apologetic Purpose

Luke was writing a legal brief for Paul’s defense. The verdict-free ending served that purpose: the case is still open, Christianity is innocent.

### Theory 3: Intentional Theology

The “unfinished” ending is Luke’s literary and theological climax: the gospel now reaches Rome “without hindrance” (28:31). The mission continues — with us.

## Three Threads Through the Entire Book of Acts



### The Holy Spirit

True Christianity is Spirit-powered, not self-powered (1:8; 2:1–13). The Spirit applies, unifies, gifts, and empowers witness. Prayer is the key (1:14; 4:23–31).



### The Church

God's people are marked by four essentials: Word, community, worship, witness (2:42–47). The church faces internal and external battles—answered by Spirit-led unity.



### The Gospel

The resurrection is non-negotiable (1:22; 2:22–38). The church exists to spread this gospel locally and globally. We don't just believe it—we live it (28:30–31).

## PAUL IS ACQUITTED

- After his acquittal, we think he may have undergone a 4th missionary journey to Spain and Gaul
- We don't learn of the outcome of his 1st imprisonment in Acts but from the Pastoral Epistles themselves
- Likely wrote 1 Timothy, Titus, and possibly Hebrews during this time



## PAUL'S SECOND ARREST (66AD)

- Paul is arrested in Troas
- “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments (2 Tim 4:13)— he was likely taken prisoner in Troas
- We are told this imprisonment is much more difficult
- Paul writes 2 Timothy



### APPLICATION

## Discussion: We Are Acts 29

The story of Acts is unfinished. Luke's open ending is an invitation. What does Chapter 29 look like for you? For Two Rivers Church?

Q1 Paul witnessed “without hindrance” from house arrest. What “prison” in your own life could become a platform for the gospel?

Q2 The trials repeatedly showed Paul treating every hearing as an opportunity to preach. Who in your life is in the role of Agrippa — hearing the logic but not yet committed?

Q3 Paul's ministry in Rome is described with two words: boldness and without hindrance. Which of these do you need more of right now?

Q4 The open ending of Acts suggests the mission continues. What is one specific way you will continue the story this week?

ACTS 28:31

“Proclaiming the kingdom of God  
and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ  
with all boldness and without hindrance.”

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The story is not finished.  
We are Acts 29.