

The Book of Acts / The History of the Apostles

Lesson 68 – Acts 21-28 – In Defense Part 3

INTRODUCTION / REVIEW

Acts 21-28 serves as a conclusion and summary of the account of Acts. It all comes back to where it started and provides a glimpse into the unrecorded future. In these last chapters Paul will give six defensive testimonies ranging from one statement to a full accounting of his life.

Acts 22:1-21 – Paul's defense to the mob

Acts 22:30-23:10 – Paul's defense before the chief priests and the Sanhedrin

Acts 24:10-21 – Paul's defense before Felix

Acts 25:8-11 – Paul's defense to Festus

Acts 26:1-29 – Paul's defense to Agrippa

Acts 28:16-28 – Paul's defense before the Jews in Rome

Why does Luke spend so much time and importance to these trials and defenses?

To show that the mission of Paul is unhindered despite imprisonments.

Paul does not get despondent and uses every opportunity to give the Gospel.

To demonstrate Paul's desire that the Jews in Israel hear the truth about Jesus Christ from him as an Apostle.

To defend the mission of the message of Jesus to the Gentiles and include them in the administration of God.

ACTS 22-23 – PAUL'S DEFENSES IN JERUSALEM

Acts 22:1-2 – Paul speaks in Hebrew dialect for rapport.

Acts 22:3-5a – Paul recounts Jewish upbringing and having a zeal for the Law. This is his introduction establishing himself as being both prominently a Jew being raised in Jerusalem under the most prestigious Pharisaical schools in Jerusalem and related to the zeal that the Jews have for God and the Law.

Acts 22:5b – This is a part of the history that we know well. Paul was both commissioned by the Sanhedrin and desired to seek and punish believers in Jesus.

Acts 22:6-11 – There is nothing new in this account we see all of this in Acts 9.

Acts 22:12-16 – Ananias's role in restoring Paul's sight and preparing him for ministry. The statement in verse 16, we must remember is not his salvation (being right before God, obtaining eternal life) but a preparation for Paul to be part of God's administration. All three of these statements are seen in the book of Acts as having someone getting ready to function on behalf of the message of Jesus Christ.

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Acts 22:17-21 – After Paul was chased away from Damascus. That Paul was witnessing and ministering in Jerusalem that Paul was instructed to leave Jerusalem. Paul refutes Jesus by saying that he thought they would accept His testimony because he was once on their side and is now working for his former adversary. Jesus refuses and instructs Paul to go to be sent to the Gentile nations to witness to the Diaspora Jews and the Gentile people.

Acts 22:22-29 – This infuriates the Mob and want Paul killed. The centurion wants to quell the Mob and decides to have Paul examined by scourging. But Paul stops this process by invoking his Roman Citizenship. Now we may not know what Roman Citizenship was or entails so let's look at some details. Remember the early recipient of this account would not need this detail

Historical records show us Roman citizens were granted many rights and legal protections against corporal punishment, including flogging, which were enshrined in the Porcian Laws dating back to the early second century BC. These laws explicitly prohibited the torture, whipping, or flogging of Roman citizens, distinguishing them from non-citizens or slaves who could face such penalties routinely.

This right extended to immunity from summary beatings by officials without due process, such as a trial before a magistrate or court; citizens could only be subjected to corporal punishment in exceptional cases like treason, and even then, it required formal proceedings.

Violating these rights carried severe consequences for Roman officials, potentially including fines, demotion, flogging of the offender themselves, or even execution in extreme cases of abuse against a citizen.

Paul's invocation of his citizenship in this and similar incidents (Acts 16:37-39) leveraged this privilege, which was held by only about 5-10% of the empire's population and often invoked with the phrase "Civis Romanus sum" to avert harm. These protections underscored the privileged status of citizenship, which also shielded against crucifixion (commutable to exile) and ensured trials in Rome for serious crimes.

Some wonder if Paul was in fact a Roman Citizen. In Acts 23:26-27 Claudius writes a letter which he states "having learned that he was a Roman" This indicates that not only was Paul's statement taken in but a discovery was done and it was demonstrated to Claudius that Paul was a citizen.

Acts 22:30 – Claudius still had some moves. In an attempt to understand the situation and probably just to mess with Paul and the Sanhedrin conveyed a meeting and put Paul into the fire, surrounded by all who hate him.

Acts 23:1-5 – This is Paul before the Sanhedrin which goes as well as would be expected. Paul makes one statement, and Ananias had him hit in the mouth.

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Ananias was a Sadducee appointed by Roman procurator Ventidius Cumanus and later deposed by King Agrippa II around AD 59. Josephus describes him as notoriously cruel, rapacious, and vengeful, a tyrant who defrauded lower priests of their tithes, nearly starving them, and sent slaves to seize tithes by force in Damascus. He was killed around AD 66 during the First Jewish-Roman War, by Jewish rebels for his pro-Roman leanings.

So, even done in haste, the statement that he would be stricken by God comes true in his humiliation and eventual death.

Acts 23:6-11 – Paul needs to get out of there, so he turns this hearing into a theological uproar, even having the Pharisees defend him for a moment. The commander not wanting for Paul to get killed in the near riot, got him out of that situation but put Paul in the barracks (Antonia Fortress). That night Paul was visited by Jesus and told that he would go to Rome.

Acts 23:12-15 – There is a large number of the Jews (40 men) who have sworn to kill Paul and not only did they make this pact they involved the chief priest and elders who were (evidently) going along with the plan.

Acts 23:16-22 – Paul's sister son (Paul's nephew) overheard the plan. This young man was probably following in Paul's footsteps in going to school in Jerusalem and was probably a scribe or servant of one of the elders.

Paul's nephew was probably young (8-12) being that he was escorted by the guard to the commander. The commander led him to a place of privacy so that he could hear what he had to say. This is not how you would treat an adult witness.

Once the plot is discovered, the commander has to protect Paul, being that he was a Roman citizen. So, he plans to move Paul by night to Caesarea.

Acts 23:23-35 – The Commander, Claudius Lycius sends Paul with 70 horsemen and two hundred spearmen to Felix in Caesarea to protect Paul from the Jews and wash his hands of Paul having the governor take control.

ACTS 23-25 – FELIX AND FESTUS

Antonius Felix served as the Roman procurator (governor) of the province of Judea from approximately AD 52 to 60. He freed slave of Roman empress Antonia and brother to the influential courtier Pallas under Emperor Claudius. His appointment was secured through his brother's connections, but his tenure is widely regarded in historical sources as one of the most corrupt in Roman provincial administration. Ancient historians like Flavius Josephus and Tacitus, depict Felix as ruthless, bribe-hungry, and exploitative, fostering crime and unrest in Judea through extortion, judicial misconduct, and violence. His actions exacerbated tensions that contributed to the buildup toward the First Jewish-Roman War (66–73 AD). Upon his recall to Rome in 60 AD, Jewish leaders accused him of cruelty and corruption, though he escaped severe punishment due to Pallas's influence with Emperor Nero.

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Porcius Festus succeeded Felix as procurator around 59–60 AD and held the position until his death in 62 AD. Festus takes over while Paul is still imprisoned and continues the legal proceedings. Historical accounts describe Festus as more competent and fair-minded than Felix, though his short term was overshadowed by growing Jewish unrest.

Roles and Responsibilities - Judea was directly administered by the emperor after AD 6, when it transitioned from client kingdom status under Herod's heirs. Procurators like Felix and Festus were officials appointed by the emperor, serving as his financial agents and de facto governors. Their key responsibilities included: Administration and Governance: Overseeing day-to-day provincial affairs, including infrastructure, local alliances, and coordination with the Jerusalem Sanhedrin on religious matters.

Tax Collection and Revenue: Managing imperial taxes, customs duties, and tribute, which were a frequent source of friction with the Jewish population.

Judicial Authority: Acting as chief judge for serious crimes, with the power to issue capital sentences (though in practice, they often deferred to the emperor for high-profile cases involving Roman citizens like Paul).

Maintaining Order: Suppressing rebellions, banditry, and ethnic tensions (e.g., between Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles), backed by a small auxiliary legion stationed in Caesarea.

Military Oversight: Commanding limited Roman forces in the province, though larger legions were based in Syria under a legate.

Caesarea Maritima, on the Mediterranean coast north of modern Tel Aviv, served as the official seat of Roman governors in Judea. Herod the Great rebuilt it as a grand port city around 22–10 BC. Unlike Jerusalem, which was the Jewish religious and cultural center, Caesarea was a Hellenistic-Roman stronghold with a deep-water harbor, aqueducts, theaters, and a diverse population of Jews, Greeks, and Romans—making it ideal for imperial administration.

Governors preferred it to avoid entanglement in Jerusalem's volatile temple politics and to facilitate quick maritime links to Rome and Syria for reinforcements or reports. Paul was specifically transferred there from Jerusalem for safety and to conduct trials in a neutral, fortified setting.

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Procurator	Term (approx.)	Notes
Valerius Gratus	15–26 AD	Preceded Pilate; known for appointing high priests and temple reforms.
Pontius Pilate	26–36 AD	Oversaw Jesus' trial; recalled to Rome after complaints of brutality.
Marcellus	36–37 AD	Brief interim role; little documented.
Marullus	37–41 AD	Served until Herod Agrippa I became king.
Interregnum: Herod Agrippa I as client king	41–44 AD	Province briefly under Jewish rule.
Cuspius Fadus	44–46 AD	First procurator after Agrippa; dealt with early unrest.
Tiberius Julius Alexander	46–48 AD	An apostate Jew; suppressed revolts.
Ventidius Cumanus	48–52 AD	Predecessor to Felix; mishandled Samaritan-Jewish conflicts.
Antonius Felix	52–60 AD	Tried Paul; notorious for corruption.
Porcius Festus	60–62 AD	Successor to Felix; handled Paul's appeal to Caesar.