

A Study of the Acts of the Apostles  
Week Thirty-One  
Acts 25:9-26:15

**Day One**

9 Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, said to Paul, "Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me there on these charges?" 10 Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well. 11 If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!" 12 After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!"

v. 9 – Imagine how Paul must have felt at this point. Having waited two years for justice, there is now a change from Felix to Festus as governor. Then they put Paul through another hearing and Festus, trying to ingratiate himself with the Jews, wanted to take Paul back to Jerusalem and certain death. But Paul must have kept his faith and perspective that God was using this situation for His purpose, which is exactly what was happening. **Do you have a situation that defies logic, that hasn't turned for you even after prayer, counseling or faithfulness? Then perhaps today is the day that you determine that God is in control and that you put it in His hands to do what He chooses.**

v. 10 – Paul told Festus just what he thought: He was innocent and Festus knew it. The Jews had no right to try Paul, for he had done them no wrong. And in some ways, this is the last hurrah for the Jews. Once Paul moved on, it was only a little more than a decade later that Jerusalem would be destroyed and the Sanhedrin would disappear from Jewish life forever!

v. 11 – As I've stated in earlier studies, I'm glad Paul was on my side. He was passionate, intelligent, and direct. Here he stated that he was willing to die if he had violated Roman law, but he refused to be judged by a Jewish law that he had been commissioned to transcend. Paul also knew his rights as a Roman citizen, probably advised by friends and believes who also knew Roman law. So here Paul appealed to Caesar, which meant that he would go to Rome to stand trial before the royal court there. God's word was fulfilled in Paul's life through this situation:

But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

**Do you have a "word" or promise for your life? If it hasn't been fulfilled, it will be. If it is, then thank God for using you to do His work.**

v. 12 – Paul had foiled Festus’ plan by appealing to Caesar and Festus had no choice but to honor the appeal. So the Jewish leaders were thwarted in their attempts to kill Paul and Paul’s purpose was fulfilled as he went off to Rome to bear witness to the Gentile kings. The same had been true in Jesus’ life:

At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come (John 7:30-31).

You and I have a “time” that is ordained by God. We don’t know when that time is, but no one can harm us before that time and no one can save us from that time. It is God’s will for our lives!

### Day Two

13 A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. 14 Since they were spending many days there, Festus discussed Paul's case with the king. He said: "There is a man here whom Felix left as a prisoner. 15 When I went to Jerusalem, the chief priests and elders of the Jews brought charges against him and asked that he be condemned. 16 "I told them that it is not the Roman custom to hand over any man before he has faced his accusers and has had an opportunity to defend himself against their charges. 17 When they came here with me, I did not delay the case, but convened the court the next day and ordered the man to be brought in. 18 When his accusers got up to speak, they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected. 19 Instead, they had some points of dispute with him about their own religion and about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive. 20 I was at a loss how to investigate such matters; so I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and stand trial there on these charges. 21 When Paul made his appeal to be held over for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him held until I could send him to Caesar."

v. 13 – Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, who was mentioned in Acts 12. Bernice was his sister and it was widely held that they maintained an incestuous relationship as they traveled and lived together. Agrippa was committed to Rome and the allegiance of the Jews to the same. Therefore this trip to Caesarea was to probably greet the new governor and establish good relations with him, since the Herod family owed their kingly positions to the cooperation and blessing of Rome.

Here was just another example of Paul fulfilling his purpose and not even trying to do so. The Lord told Paul that he would bear witness to Gentile kings and here was another ruler coming to have a “chance” meeting with the great apostle. That is one of the keys of purpose: **What do you do that you don’t have to work doing, for God seems to bring the situations to you?**

vs. 14-21 – The King and Bernice stayed a while, which enabled Festus to present Paul’s case to them. Since Agrippa and Bernice were part Jewish and Bernice a practicing Jewess at least in public, they probably had some awareness of The Way and maybe even of Paul himself. What follows is Festus’ summary to Agrippa, which is accurate

according to Luke's previous account of the matter. But I wonder how Luke got such detailed information of the conversation between Festus and Agrippa? Was this a matter of public record? Was there a believer in their household who reported this matter to Luke? Paul had an affect on Rome even when he wasn't preaching to their leaders, for they were talking about him when he wasn't there. But they were really talking about Jesus, as evidenced by verse 20. Festus summarized the dispute as being over some "dead man" named Jesus whom Paul claimed was alive.

Don't ever be discouraged when you witness to someone and they reject what you say. You don't know what God will do with that conversation long after you're gone and how the Spirit will use it to bring that person to Jesus. Or you may be playing a role in presenting the truth to that person or persons and they may very well reject the truth—but at least they heard it and had a chance to accept or reject. And of course, they may repent later and look back at your session as a turning point.

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle — I am telling the truth, I am not lying — and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2:2-7).

**But there is no way for anyone to come to the knowledge of the truth about Jesus unless we tell them about Him. Are you being faithful to bear witness about him to your family, friends and associates?**

Notice again that Paul was clear in the passage from Timothy: Jesus is the *only* way to the Father. There is no other way by which men can be saved. Don't ever be intimidated in this tolerant era to share this critical truth—Jesus is the only answer to the sins of the world!

### Day Three

22 Then Agrippa said to Festus, "I would like to hear this man myself." He replied, "Tomorrow you will hear him." 23 The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 Festus said: "King Agrippa, and all who are present with us, you see this man! The whole Jewish community has petitioned me about him in Jerusalem and here in Caesarea, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. 25 I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome.

v. 22 – Agrippa chose to hear Paul himself. There is no way that Agrippa could or would have ever heard Paul, but God brought his choicest servant to speak to the Roman court. I am still impressed that Paul was at home with a crowd or with just a few; he was an obedient servant who took advantage of whatever opportunity the Lord gave him. **Are**

**you faithful with a small opportunity as you would be with a larger, more prestigious one? I hope you are, for remember what Jesus said Himself:**

"Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own?" (Luke 16:10-12).

**How do you measure up in these three categories: with little, with worldly wealth, and with someone else's property? Are you faithful in those three areas? If you are, then God can entrust true riches to you. What are true riches? In my opinion, they are the opportunities to do His will, just like Paul had in addressing these Gentile kings. Paul had been faithful and now God was entrusting special ministry situations to him.**

v. 23 – We have quite a contrast here. The real royalty, Paul the servant of King Jesus, was brought in wearing chains. The delegated royalty who were serving at God's will and appointment, came in with great pomp and regal dress. This is an indication of the world system's values: they dishonored the King's servant but honored the royal imposters. But notice what God did here. Not only were the king and queen present, but all the royal officials were about to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. They saw it as a hearing, but Paul probably saw it as a church service and a continuation of his purpose, which was carried out throughout the Roman Empire. Be careful that you honor what God honors; don't be sucked into honoring what the world honors, which may not be worthy of the respect it is accorded.

v. 24 – We see here that Paul's opposition was formidable; Festus characterized it as the whole Jewish community in both Jerusalem and Caesarea. This must have been difficult for Paul to bear, for he loved his people and saw himself as a prophetic continuation of the covenant that God made with the Jews. They of course did not see it or him that way. How do you handle opposition? Remember two biblical exhortations where this is concerned:

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all — how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will

be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:31-39).

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (1 Peter 3:15-18).

v. 25 – Festus was correct: Paul had done nothing that deserved death. Yet eventually Rome would execute him for his faith. But even when he died, he died as Caesar tried to prolong his reign and deny the truth of Paul's message: That Jesus was the Messiah, the true King of heaven and earth. Rome correctly understood that there could not be two kings—Caesar and Jesus. They incorrectly assumed that by killing Jesus' followers, they could deny Jesus the throne. They could not, for God rules and reigns over all. At best, earthly kings can rule for 50 or 60 years. But Jesus lives forever.

#### **Day Four**

26 But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write. 27 For I think it is unreasonable to send on a prisoner without specifying the charges against him." 26:1 Then Agrippa said to Paul, "You have permission to speak for yourself." So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: 2 "King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, 3 and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

vs. 26&27 – Festus wanted to know how to frame the letter that would accompany Paul to Rome, since Paul had done nothing wrong. In some ways, his letter was to be Rome's introduction to the apostle to the Gentiles. Rome was probably already familiar with The Way, but it wasn't yet a threat to imperial rule as it would become in the future. And Rome still afforded imperial protection to Jesus' disciples, although that would change in the years to come. Plus I'm sure Festus wanted to be able to quote others in his report so that he could protect himself as he carried out his duties for Rome.

v. 1 – Agrippa gave Paul permission to speak in his own defense. Luke must have been present, for how could he have known that Paul motioned with his hand? Let us remember what Jesus said about the scenario that Paul found himself in at that point in time:

Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit (Mark 13:11),

So what Paul was about to say was the Holy Spirit speaking. It is interesting to me that many significant leaders, both in and out of the church, spent time in prison. The current system seldom welcomes the heralds of new truths and change agents and, consequently, jails the prophets of the new system or order. Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela are just a few examples. **Am I willing to spend time in jail for what I believe? Are you? What would I do with that time? What would I be able to do?**

Jesus didn't say if you were arrested, he said "whenever." That indicates that he assumed it would happen to those who were bearing witness to the truth. **Is my belief in Jesus a matter of preference or conviction? It is a matter of convenience or necessity? I guess it all comes down to this question: What price am I willing to pay to follow Jesus and carry out His will and purpose for me? What price are you willing to pay? I don't think we can ever know the answer until we are confronted with the situation; then God's grace helps us to do what we need to do.**

Right now, I am spending half my time in Africa. That isn't prison, but it is a situation where my freedom and options are limited for the sake of the gospel. I must be away from home and its comforts to do my purpose work in Africa. There is some sacrifice involved, but God is with me when I do my work there. He has revealed Himself to me and that has made my work easier to carry out. Don't fret over whether you will be able to do what God wants you to do. You're not in this alone; He is with you and will help you, as He has helped me.

vs. 2&3 – Once again Paul avoided empty flattery as he began his defense. He acknowledged the truth—that Agrippa was informed concerning Judaism and The Way—and was glad to be able to present the truth to Agrippa firsthand. God had opened this door for Paul and he was about to make the most of it.

Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is (Ephesians 5:15-17).

*Lord, help us to make the most of every opportunity for You. Grant us grace to speak Your words and touch the people you want us to reach. Let us be faithful in our day as Paul was in his, and help us to have an impact for You on this world and our generation. Show us today the doors that are open to us and help us to walk through them. Amen.*

### **Day Five**

4 "The Jews all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. 5 They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that according to the strictest sect of our religion, I lived as a Pharisee. 6 And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers that I am on trial today. 7 This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. O king, it is because of this hope that

the Jews are accusing me. 8 Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

vs. 4&5 – Paul mentioned his former life as Jewish Pharisee. He wrote about it on two separate occasions:

What anyone else dares to boast about — I am speaking as a fool — I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham's descendants? So am I (2 Corinthians 11:21-23).

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless (Philippians 3:6).

Paul declared that he was faultless where following the rituals of the Law were concerned. That is quite a statement! It is quite a testimony to God's grace that Paul was then standing before the Gentile leaders bearing witness to what God had worked in his life. And it is quite interesting that those who knew of his legalistic perfection were now trying to kill him instead of investigating what God had shown him. They should have given consideration that something radical had happened in his life or else he could not have abandoned his life as a Pharisee.

**How flexible are you in following the Lord? Are you open to God changing you, your ideas and your opinions? But be warned: If you allow that to happen, those who once held those previous opinions with you will probably not like you anymore? They may even oppose you.**

At one point in my life, I preached and led an authoritarian style of leadership. Today I have changed my thoughts completely and teach servant leadership, where leaders must serve followers and not the other way around. Those who still teach authoritarianism no longer like me; some condemn me as one in error. But I have had a deep change of heart on this issue and I can relate to some of what Paul went through on his journey from legalistic Jew to grace-filled apostle.

vs. 6&7 – Paul distilled all his work and the hope of Israel to one issue: The resurrection of the dead. Paul saw this truth as a continuation of his work as a Pharisee—since they believed in resurrection—and the bridge between what he had believed and what he then taught. (A bridge in the sense that Pharisees believed in resurrection, Jesus was raised, so therefore Jesus was the firstfruit of resurrection, with more to come as believers in Him would eventually be raised as well.)

We are preparing not just for this life, but for the life to come when we will all be raised just as Jesus was after his crucifixion. When Jesus came back, he had memories of his life, recognized his friends and associates, ate food, came into rooms through locked doors and continued his teaching ministry. In my mind, the resurrection isn't just a time

when we sing heavenly songs in one eternal service, but a chance to continue our purpose without the limitations of hunger, fatigue or distance. We will have glorified flesh that will empower us to serve God. Don't ask me to explain any more than that, because I can't. But the next age will be an exciting time for all those who have put their trust in Jesus now. What are you preparing to do for the rest of eternity? With that in mind, I hope you will prepare well!

v. 8 – Paul raised an interesting question to these Gentile leaders: Why would the concept of resurrection be so far-fetched? If God can create man in the first place, He could give a dead man new life. It is interesting that to this point, Paul never mentioned Jesus. He was trying to establish that God could raise the dead, and that Jesus therefore was raised, making all His claims to be the Son of God valid. He was framing his accusations and defense in the context of this one doctrine. It is interesting to me that Paul's accusers never mentioned resurrection; he did. And he seized on this theme and was still presenting it two years after he first used it.

In some sense, Paul wasn't going to settle for what his accusers wanted to accuse him of doing. He was going to determine what the issue was and then argue for his innocence from that point. Paul was quite a man.

### **Day Six**

9 "I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the saints in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. 11 Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. In my obsession against them, I even went to foreign cities to persecute them.

v. 9 – Paul opposed The Way as a matter of conviction. He wasn't trying to protect his position or power for he had none. He was, however, trying to protect God and the covenant, as he saw it being "perverted" by these believing heretics. He was convinced that he ought to do all that was in his power to oppose the name of Jesus. The Sanhedrin, on the other hand, was opposing Paul to protect their interests and positions. Perhaps that is why God had mercy on Paul.

But that doesn't make sense, for there was nothing redeeming about Paul or any of us for us to think that we earned our salvation. We are all saved by grace, including Paul, so that the focus is always on God and His work and not our own works or merits.

v. 10 – Paul told the truth that he did what he did under the authority and with the approval of the chief priests. They knew his zeal for Judaism and were only too happy to see it spill over into persecuting the followers of Jesus. Now these same priests were trying to have Paul killed because he no longer carried out their dirty work and had become "one of them."



**If God saved Saul, then God can save anyone. No one is beyond the reach of His grace. Do you know someone that seems like they could never be saved? Well, they can! Why not spend some time today and in the days to come to pray for this “un-saveable” person? What a story they will have and be when they come to know the saving grace of Jesus.**

v. 11 – Paul admitted here that he was obsessed with Jesus and His followers. He was determined to wipe them out since he saw them as Jewish heretics, a view which prevails with many Jews even today. When you visit Israel, they will attest to the fact that Jesus existed and some will say that He was a prophet. But no Jew can say that Jesus was the Messiah and remain a Jew. At that point, they become a Christian and that is anathema for any Jew and his or her family.

Jesus is the stumbling block for many. They will admit that He was a leader, teacher, prophet, holy man and rabbi. But they cannot confess that He is Lord. So Jesus is the great “divider.” The question that Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I am? But who do *you* say that I am?” are relevant questions for all mankind. The answer will determine where each person will spend eternity.

### **Day Seven**

12 "On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. 13 About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' 15 "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.

v. 12 – It is my theory that Saul had been an “evangelist” to the Gentiles as a Pharisee. He was already comfortable with going to the Gentiles—or at least as comfortable as a Jew could be.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are" (Matthew 23:15).

The Jews were only too happy to send Saul to Damascus, since they were unwilling to go and become unclean due to the contact with Gentiles. And Saul was only too happy to go in his obsession to wipe out the followers of The Way.

v. 13 – It must have been a bright light indeed that was able to outshine the noonday sun. That is the kind of light God is able to use to reveal your purpose in life. Of course, the companions saw the light and knew something supernatural was happening. But as far as we know, they never gave any testimony that would assist Saul's testimony. It's just as well, however, for the Jews would not have received it!

**What light has God shed on your life, your reason for living? If you don't know, perhaps it's because the light is so bright that you are blinded. I mean that perhaps you are so familiar with yourself and what you do is so second-natured, that you can't see it—it isn't very special to you. Ask God today to shine this kind of light on who you are and what you do and then be open to see yourself in a "whole new light."**

v. 14 – God speaks every language; He is a great communicator. Saul had no problem hearing His voice or understanding what He was saying. And notice that they all fell to the ground. There are many who are intrigued and even offended by people falling to the ground. I am surprised that more people don't fall to the ground when they have an encounter with God. Even a group of Roman soldiers fell to the ground as recorded in John's gospel:

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:5-6).

v. 15 – Jesus told Saul that he was in actuality persecuting Jesus and not His followers. I wonder how the followers felt about that?! It sure felt to them like they were being persecuted. I am only joking, of course, for Saul's hatred at that point was really for Jesus; he was expressing it toward the followers.

Paul later wrote:

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:3-4).

You are now in Christ. For something to get to you, it must get through Him. So when someone is persecuting you, God has allowed it to happen, for it must through Him first. And since Jesus is the point of "first contact," the persecutor is actually persecuting Jesus. Paul also wrote:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20).

**How can someone persecute you, when "you" are dead and it's Christ living in your place? Don't take persecution or hard times personally. It's not about you; it's all about Him! So rejoice in your persecutions and accept them as part of being in Christ. Be strengthened in that knowledge and serve the Lord, just like Paul did.**