



ACTS 22–28

THE CLIMAX OF PAUL'S LIFE'S MISSION

INTRODUCTION

Luke filled his record of Paul's last journey with healing, testifying, and missionary experiences. Missionaries have and will share Paul's experiences in every dispensation. We will note parallels of his life with Alma in the Book of Mormon. The Prophet Joseph Smith also quoted the apostle Paul often and found solace in their shared experiences. "Both began their service to the Lord through a life-changing vision. Both were true to the vision they received and acted with unrelenting faith and courage to fulfill their missions, bearing testimony to a skeptical world (see JS—H 1:24–25). And both sealed their testimonies with their blood as witnesses to the gospel they had so fervently preached throughout their lives."¹ We find foundational truths and admirable examples in Luke's retelling of Paul's last journey to Rome. We can learn how to be better missionaries and endure trials by studying Paul's life. Also, understanding Paul's life in the Book of Acts will make his Epistles easier to follow.

Paul's Timetable for Act 22–28

DATE	LOCATION	SCRIPTURE
AD 58 (late spring)	Jerusalem	Acts 21:17; 20:6
AD 58–60	Caesarea	Acts 24:27
AD 60–61 (Oct–winter)	Journey to Rome	Acts 27:9; 28:11
AD 61–63	Roman House Arrest	Acts 28:30

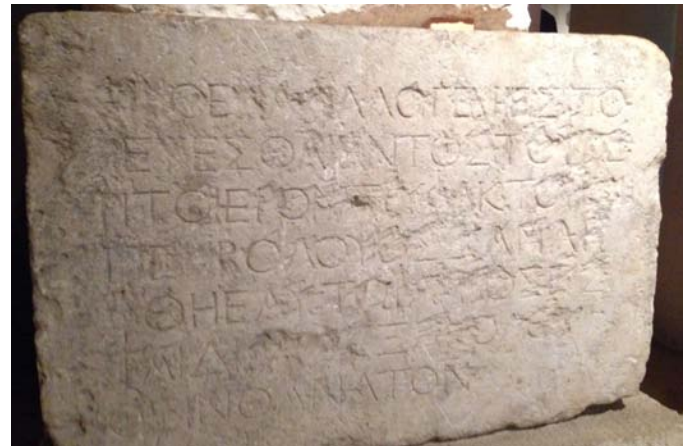
Paul Seized at the Temple

Acts 21:26–40

Acts 21:26 “So the next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them . . . When the seven days were almost over . . .” Paul had cooperated with the local elders to show his allegiance to the Law of Moses by going through his own—and paying for others’—purification rites (Acts 21:23–25). The “seven days” refers to either to the week-long Feast of Pentecost or more likely, the seventh day of the prescribed purification period for his vows.



Model of Herod's Temple in Jerusalem. Image by Juan R. Cuadra via Wikimedia Commons.



Jerusalem Temple Warning. Image by oncenawhile via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 21:27 “Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple . . .” For Paul to enter the temple, he would have had to walk across the Court of the Gentiles and up to a wall that acted as a barrier to separate the sacred space. Near the doorway, Jews had engraved a warning sign, in three languages, forbidding any Gentile or unclean person to enter the holy area—on punishment of immediate death.² Paul would have walked past this sign and into the Court of the Women across to the treasury. Along the perimeter stood thirteen trumpet-shaped chests that would have collected money for different offerings. The treasury was also a gathering place (Jesus taught there, John 8:20).

Acts 21:28 “This is the man who preaches . . . against our people and the Law . . . and has defiled this holy place” (NASB) Some Jews recognized Paul from Asia (who had probably debated against him in Ephesus). They jumped to the conclusion that Paul had brought Trophimus, one of his seven traveling companions and a Greek-Christian-convert, into the temple. The uproar began a riot.

Acts 21:30–32 “They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut” Luke’s retelling of angry Jews attacking Paul comes to a climax in Jerusalem at the temple. He includes the symbolic closing of the temple gates. The mob planned to kill Paul immediately, but the uproar was overheard by the Roman tribunal or “chief captain,” Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26). He was stationed in the Antonian Fortress on the northwest corner of the Court of the Gentiles.

Acts 21:33–36 “When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. The commander . . . arrested him and ordered him to be bound” (NIV) The captain tried to find out what happened, but could not get the facts straight, so he had the soldiers carry Paul up the stairs into “the castle” (KJV) or fortress with the angry crowd yelling behind. Luke is dramatic here.

ANTONIA FORTRESS

The **Tower of Antonia** was a Roman fortress built on the NW corner of Temple Square to keep the peace. Josephus described it as “a tower with other towers at each of the four corners; three of these turrets were fifty cubits high . . . the [fort] rose to seventy cubits and so commanded a view of the whole area of the temple.”³ In the 1st century, BC Herod the Great rebuilt it luxuriously.



*Right: The Antonia Fortress, near Herod’s Temple.
Photo by Ariely via Wikimedia Commons.*

Acts 21:37–40 “Paul said . . . ‘Am I allowed to say something to you?’ He replied, ‘You know how to speak Greek?’” (CSB) Near the top of the stairs, Paul asked the captain if he could have a word. Claudius Lysias was

shocked by Paul's perfect Greek (having assumed that he was an Egyptian terrorist). Paul identified himself as a citizen from the esteemed city of Tarsus. This was a game-changer. Claudius quieted the crowd and allowed Paul to speak. He spoke to them in their tongue (some translations say "Aramaic" others "Hebrew," the same in Acts 22:2).⁴

ACTS 22

ca. AD 59—Pentecost

Paul Speaks on the Fortress Steps to the crowd around the Temple

Acts 22:1–23

Acts 22:1–2 “Men, brethren, and fathers . . .” Paul began, just as Stephen had, before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2). Paul was probably in the same location as Stephen's stoning (Acts 7:58). Paul often addressed both men and women as he started sermons, suggesting that any women and children who had been at the temple that day, had not joined the mob in chasing Paul.

Acts 22:3 “I am a Jew, born in Tarsus . . . brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel . . . zealous . . .” This is one of the best biographical sections on Paul's early days. Luke recorded them as a second-hand source, but, as a travel companion with Paul, he was probably there listening.⁵ We also find evidence in Paul's life for these claims.

Paul introduced himself as a former student of the well-known Jerusalem school of Gamaliel, the grandson and protégé of Hillel (the father of Rabbinism).⁶ Both of these great teachers were honored as the highest authority among the Pharisees as strict observers of the Law of Moses and the ten thousand oral laws (Acts 5:34). Paul had the best education a devout, wealthy Pharisee could want. Paul's alliance to this great teacher probably calmed down the Pharisees in the audience (at least for a moment).

Jerusalem panorama from the Mount of Olives. Photo by Beko via Wikimedia Commons.



Luke recorded that Paul was born in Tarsus (which he repeated four times: Acts 22:3; 21:29; 30; 11:25; 9:11). We see evidence for this as Paul was at home in both the Hellenistic Diaspora and Israelite Jerusalem. He was a skilled orator and writer, which fit into the Tarsus educational scene.⁷ He also wrote beautiful Hebraic poetry as the Epistles, Philemon and Galatians, were each entirely written in a perfect chiasmus. This evidence confirms Luke's second-hand biographical witnesses here.

TARSUS

Tarsus, the largest city in the Cilician province, became a Roman province and the residence of the Roman proconsul in 66 BC. Tarsus was a city of world commerce. The Cydnus River and harbor provided Tarsus' sea trade. Land trade grew with Roman highways that ran both east-west and north-south through Tarsus.

It also boasted of the best schools of rhetoric in the Roman world. Paul's sermons and letters demonstrate that he was a mighty orator and writer, so we assume he studied (or possibly, just learned from listening) there.

Luke recorded that Paul was a tent maker or leather worker (Acts 18:3). Tarsus was also known for the production of goat hair and the processing of goat hair tents.



Map of the Mediterranean highlighting the location of Tarsus.



Acts 22:4–10 “I persecuted this Way . . .” (BSB) Again we see the early Christian church referred to as the “Way,” meaning that Jesus is The Way back to the presence of God.⁸ As Paul retold his conversion experience and first vision from two decades earlier, we find slight variations from the other two accounts recorded in Acts (compare on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:1–2; here on the steps of the Antonian Fortress, Acts 22:3–10; and before Felix in Acts 26:9–16). Minor changes speak to greater historicity than word-for-word duplication. For example, this retelling is now in first-person. Also, Acts 9:7 states the companions “saw no man,” and Acts 22:9 adds that they were conscious of the light, but disagree as to what they heard. Yet, all agree in the great reality of the place, meaning, and time of the visions. (We see similar differences in Joseph Smith’s four accounts of his first vision.)

ACTS 22:9

And they that were with me saw indeed the light and were afraid; they heard not the voice of him that spake to me

ACTS 26:13

...a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking...

ACTS 9:7

And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man;

ACTS 22:10

What shall I do Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

ACTS 26:16–18

But rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light

ACTS 9:6

[Paul] trembling and astonished said, Lord what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

Acts 22:10–13 “I could not see for the glory of that light . . . one Ananias . . . Brother Saul, receive thy sight”
In this retelling, we hear little of Ananias’ experience where he learned to not tell the Lord what to do, but to receive instruction from Him.

Acts 22:14–16 “. . . arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” Paul’s message is Christ-centered. He uses meaningful titles that open our appreciation and understanding of the God we worship: Jesus of Nazareth, Just One, the Lord, and The God of our fathers (Luke also recorded that Stephen used, “Just One,” and Peter, the other three names). Also, Paul taught the need for Jesus’ cleansing and repentance. He shows how with greater knowledge comes the responsibility of greater witnessing.

Acts 22:17–18 “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I . . . saw the Lord” (NIV) Paul wanted to share the message of his next vision and left out the space of three years between the visions (According to Acts 11:30 and Galatians 1:18, Paul did not go to Jerusalem for three years after his conversion). This is the only record in Acts of Paul’s second vision when he saw the Lord in the temple and received more instruction. This may have been the time when he was ordained an apostle (although we do not know if he were a member of the Quorum of the Twelve).

Acts 22:19–21 “the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles’” (NIV) This is the first time this is mentioned in Acts. The timing perfectly precedes Paul’s first mission to the Gentiles as an apostle (compare Acts 13:2). Paul’s life uniquely prepared him for his mission. I presume the same can be said for all of us. It is also worth noting that Paul continues to regret his part in persecuting the earlier saints, especially watching the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58).

Acts 22:22–23 “Now they were listening to him until this word . . . ‘he is not fit to live!’” (BLB) The offensive word was “Gentiles.” The very thought that God would send a Jew to the unclean was blasphemy in their minds. That triggered a ballistic reaction, and the crowd went wild again. In their rage, they flung off their cloaks, tossed handfuls of dirt into the air, and returned to their mob mentality eager to kill Paul.

Paul and the Roman Tribune

Acts 22:24–30

Acts 22:24 “the commander ordered . . . that Paul be flogged and interrogated” (BSB) The tribune, Claudius Lysias, actions seem inconsistent. He protected Paul from the riot and brought him into the Antonia Fortress, and yet, he then ordered him scourged. Roman whippings could be deadly, even though they had become a Roman sport (We saw Pilate do the same thing after he voiced that Jesus was innocent).⁹ It is also unclear if Paul’s claim to be a citizen in Acts 21:39 was understood by his guards to mean that he was only a citizen of Tarsus (not Rome), or that they had just forgotten his claim. Some details are obviously missing.

Acts 22:25 “But as they stretched him out to strap him down, Paul said . . . ‘Is it lawful for you to flog a Roman citizen without a trial?’” (BSB) The soldiers had used leather to tie Paul’s hands together and prepared to strip his back bare for the torture. Shortly before this episode, Paul claimed that five times he had undergone “thirty-nine lashes” from Jewish thongs (2 Corinthians 11:24, NASB). But Paul could interrupt the Roman torture because of his protection as a citizen.

Acts 22:26–28 “Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea” The centurion told the tribune (chief captain), who then asked Paul how he received his Roman citizenship. There were several ways one could receive citizenship, including:

1. By being born in Rome, or by being born of citizen parents
2. As a gift received from Caesar
3. By purchasing it at a remarkably high cost

Claudius Lysias had spent a lot of money to purchase his citizenship and assumed Paul was not wealthy enough. Paul was not dressed in the “citizen’s toga,” and there were very few Roman citizens in Jerusalem. However, Paul represented the rare one percent of citizens in the Diaspora who were “free-born.” This meant that Paul inherited his citizenship from his father or an earlier ancestor.¹⁰

Acts 22:29–30 “The chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him” Claudius Lysias was rightly worried since he had misused his power. Paul’s Roman citizenship granted him rights that stretched from his social and financial life to political and legal protection.¹¹

Acts 22:30 “wanting to learn the real reason Paul was accused by the Jews, released him and ordered . . . the whole Sanhedrin to assemble” (BSB) The next day Claudius Lysias released Paul from the Roman jurisdiction and took him to the Jewish governing body, the “council” or Sanhedrin.

Paul before the Sanhedrin

Acts 23:1–11

Acts 23:1–2 “My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day” (NIV) Paul was not new to this setting and did not appear shy or anxious about this trial. He had apprenticed with the Sanhedrin at the time of the stoning of Stephen and had interacted with them for a few years afterward (Acts 8:1–9:1). His experiences from his earlier life had prepared him (D&C 122:7).

“At this the high priest Ananias ordered . . . to strike him on the mouth” Paul was too bold for one in his audience, though. Ananias had Paul slapped for bragging. Under King Herod and Roman rule, the office of the one

Paul's Rights as a Roman Citizen

SOCIAL

- Right to use triple Roman name
- Right to wear the toga
- Right to marry a Roman citizen
- Right to pass citizenship to children

FINANCIAL

- Exemption from *tributum* (taxes to Rome)

POLITICAL

- Right to vote if in Rome
- Right to audience before Roman governors and officials in the provinces
- Right to be appointed to government office
- Right to stand for election to town council (*decuria*) of towns in Italy and the provinces

LEGAL

- Right to make contracts under Roman law, guaranteeing standing within Roman legal system
- Exemption from death or punishment without due process of trial and appeal process
- Right to trial before Roman magistrate
- Right of appeal for judgment to the emperor (*appellatio ad Caesarem*)
- Exemption from physical abuse in interrogation
- Exemption from authority of non-Roman local officials
- Protection from accusation by noncitizens
- Deaths of Roman citizens investigated by government

reigning high priest was changed from a lifelong appointment along bloodlines, to frequent appointments for political expediency.¹² We can see evidence of this in the record kept of the reigning high priest for centuries.¹³ This is a different “Ananias” than previously mentioned.

SANHEDRIN

The Sanhedrin, at the time of the New Testament, was the ruling body or Supreme Court of Jews. At its height, it included seventy-one chief priests, scribes, elders, and political aristocrats, who were knowledgeable of the law, plus the high priest. They decide important issues, including maintaining peace with Rome. It also represented both Sadducees and Pharisees. They met in Jerusalem in the chamber of hewn stone next to the temple sanctuary. Mosaic writings also refer to a body of 70 ruling elders working beside Moses and Aaron the high priest (Numbers 11:16–17; 24–25; Exodus 18:21–22). Over the centuries, under different rulers, their numbers, responsibilities, and powers changed.

Below: Saint Stephen tried before the Sanhedrin by Josef Arnold der Altere. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Opposite: Jesus Teaches Daily in the Temple by William Hole.



Acts 23:3 “God shall smite thee, thou . . . commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?” Paul cited a Jewish curse from Deuteronomy 28:22, “The LORD shall smite thee . . .” and from Leviticus 19:15, “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment.” Luke included this conversation, in part, to show that Paul knew the Law very well, and honored it.

Acts 23:5 “Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: ‘Do not speak evil about the ruler . . .’” (NIV) Paul did not recognize the high priest, possibly because he had changed since Paul had affiliated with the high priest and Sanhedrin members over twenty years earlier (Acts 9:1). I admire Paul’s immediate humility as soon as he realized he was wrong, that he did not become defensive. He even quoted a scripture that condemned his fault (Exodus 22:28), “Thou shalt not . . . curse the ruler of thy people).

Acts 23:6–8 “Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and others Pharisees, called out . . . ‘I am a Pharisee . . . because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial’” (BSB) Paul seized the opportunity to turn the situation into a missionary discussion. These two major groups within Jewish leadership date to the second century BC and animosity between them lasted until the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 when the Sadducee party ended. In Luke’s parallel fashion, he included a similar scene in his Gospel when Jesus addressed the same problem of the resurrection (Luke 20:27).

Sadducees (“Righteous Ones”) formed a tight circle of members consisting of the lay nobility, chief priests, priests, and aristocratic men who saw themselves as the guardians of the tradition and supporters of the temple and high priest. They held to the literal interpretation of the Torah and had their penal code, scribes, and dietary laws. They held the leadership positions at the time, even though they were not in the majority. As Luke recorded, they also did not believe in the afterlife or angels.



Pharisees (“Separate Ones”) accepted both the written and oral law—attributing both to Moses.

They interpreted the law differently than the Sadducees and had their traditions for food, Sabbath observance, ritual purity, tithes, anti-Hellenization, and views of free will and fate (Providence). Josephus mentioned there were 6,000 Pharisees. And as Luke records here, they believed in the resurrection and angels.

Acts 23:9 “If . . . an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God” The Pharisees’ conclusion sounds similar to what their leader Gamaliel had expressed earlier in Acts 5:34.

Acts 23:10 “When the dissension became violent, the tribune, afraid that Paul would be torn to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to . . . bring him into the barracks” (ESV) The Roman chief captain (or tribune) Claudius Lysias, carefully protected Paul, especially now knowing that he was a citizen—at the risk of his own head. The soldiers returned Paul to the Antonia fortress or “castle” (KJV).

Acts 23:11 “The night following the Lord stood by [Paul], and said, Be of good cheer,” the NIV uses “good courage” and the CEV, “Don’t worry!” That night Paul had his sixth recorded vision (see Acts 18:9 for list). This vision comforted Paul, as well as motivated and directed him to the right path for the next few months. It demonstrates how God protects his covenant people; how He opens doorways when it appears impossible. The Lord will fight his servants’ battles until their missions are complete.

The Plot to Kill Paul

Acts 23:12–22

Acts 23:12–13 “some Jews formed a conspiracy . . . with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul” (NIV) The conspiracy who “laid themselves under anathema (curse),” meaning they called for heaven’s punishment if they did not fulfil their oath.¹⁴ Luke includes that it was a group made up of “more than forty men.” Forty was used as both a number, as the concept of many, or to represent a purification period (Leviticus 12:3–4). These forty may not all be members of the Sanhedrin, but it sounds as though they heard Paul’s hearing.

Acts 23:14–15 “. . . you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of . . .” The band of murderers came to the chief priests (who were usually Sadducees) with their plan. (The Pharisees were probably not involved because they had just supported Paul in the Sanhedrin council.) They worked out a plan to kill Paul the next day.

Acts 23:16–21 “when the son of Paul’s sister heard about the ambush, he went into the barracks and told Paul” (BSB) Paul had an influential relative in Jerusalem, which was another miracle of God putting people in the right place at the right time. Paul’s nephew had some way of overhearing the conversation between the Jewish leaders. I think it is significant that he wanted to protect his uncle. Does this mean Paul’s extended family became Christian believers too, or that Paul’s conversion had not antagonized his family? In either case, the nephew was allowed to tell Paul, and Paul “summoned one of the centurions” (BLB) to allow his nephew to report his gossip to Claudius Lysias. We get a feel of the privileges of a Roman Citizen—or perhaps of Paul’s personality—that allowed a prisoner to give orders to a centurion.

Acts 23:22 “the commander dismissed the young man and instructed him, ‘Do not tell . . .’” (BSB) We learn that Paul’s nephew was a “young man,” which meant a different age bracket than modern usage. At the time of the New Testament, a “young man” could be used for one under thirty, or it could extend to forty years for one in the military. Some biblical scholars argue that in the Old Testament, it meant under sixty.¹⁵ Priests had to be thirty to serve in the temple, and the same age received “mature status” in the Dead Sea community. The Mishnah claimed thirty was the age of authority.¹⁶

PAUL SENT TO FELIX AT CAESAREA

Acts 23–26

Acts 23:23–24 “he called two of his centurions and ordered them, ‘Get ready a detachment . . .’” (NIV) Claudius Lysias called out an enormous group of guards! Paul received protection to travel approximately seventy miles from Jerusalem to Caesarea:¹⁷

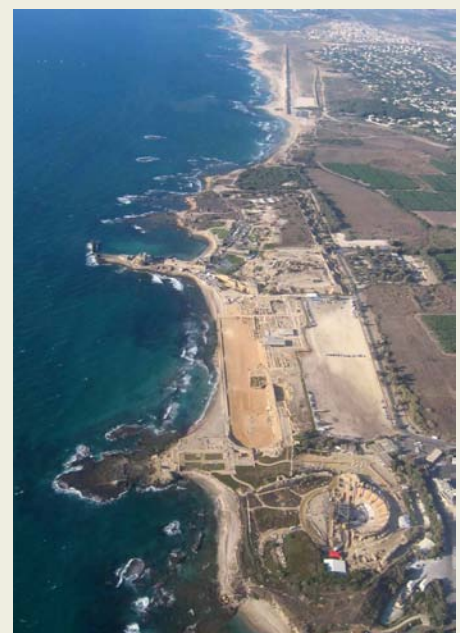
- 400 foot-soldiers (200 of whom were armed with spears)
- 70 horsemen

They were scheduled to leave under the cover of darkness, at nine at night, to aid their protective assignment. Horses were used almost exclusively for military purposes. Paul himself was allowed to ride horseback as the soldiers traveled from Jerusalem to Caesarea where the Roman governor Felix lived (This was the same position that Pilate and Festus had held¹⁸).

CAESAREA

Caesarea was initially known as Stratton’s Tower when the Romans conquered it in 63 BC. King Herod renamed it Caesarea Maritima. In 22 BC, he began building a deep-sea harbor. It was the largest artificial harbor in the world at that time (100,000 sq. meters). He also built storerooms, markets, baths, an aqueduct, and an elaborate palace jutting out into the sea. It became the capital of the Roman government in Palestine for over 600 years. The great Jewish war against Rome began there in 66 AD.

Right: Aerial photo of Caesarea Maritima via Wikimedia Commons.



Claudius Lysias' Letter to Felix

Acts 23:26–30

Acts 23:25–31 “Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix” The title, “excellent” is used for several Roman officials, including the benefactor of Luke and Acts, Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). Legal propriety of the time required Roman officials to send a letter of explanation accompanying their appeal. The message has five parts:¹⁹

1. Formal Opening (Acts 23:26)
2. Paul's arrest (Acts 23:27)
3. Summary of the earlier investigation (Acts 23:28)
4. Claudius Lysias' opinion on the case (Acts 23:29)
5. Rationale for the appeal to Governor Felix (Acts 23:30)

MARCUS ANTONIUS FELIX

Marcus Antonius Felix (also known as Claudius Felix), served as the Roman procurator of Judea between ca. AD 52–59. Historians Tacitus and Josephus described his brutal rule. He owed his position to his influential brother Paullus but lost it due to his incompetence and immorality (Joshua Yoder, *Representatives of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke–Acts* (Boston, MA: Walter DeGruyter, 2014).



Right: Coin of Marcus Antonius Felix via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 23:32 “the soldiers followed their orders and brought Paul by night to Antipatris” (BSB) Half way between Jerusalem and Caesarea, the detachment stopped for the night. Antipatris was rebuilt in 9 BC, by King Herod and renamed after his father (in the Old Testament it was named Aphek²⁰). It was on the main international highway, the Via Maris, and strategically guarded the mountain pass to the east and a river to the west.

Acts 23:33 “The next day [the soldiers] returned to the barracks and let the horsemen go on with him” (BSB) Now that the worst danger of the trip was passed, the four-hundred-foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem, and the seventy horsemen continued onto Caesarea.

Acts 23:34–35 “The governor read the letter . . . he said, ‘I will hear your case when your accusers arrive.’ He then ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's Praetorium. Felix was curious to learn that Paul's home town was Tarsus of Cilicia, and waited for the prosecutors. Paul's wait in the Praetorium turned out to be a long time. King Herod created a spectacular and utilitarian port in Caesarea.

ACTS 24

Paul Before Governor Felix
ca. AD 58–60

Tertullus Prosecutes Paul

Acts 24:1–9

Acts 24:1 “After five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus” (BSB) The high priest, Ananias, hired a lawyer or rhetorical professional to argue against Paul for a fee (like our modern attorneys). The name Tertullus is Latin and suggests that he was possibly a Roman citizen too. The speech followed Roman legal conventions, so we assume that he studied in Roman rhetoric (or Paul wrote it out in that fashion).²¹

Roman Judicial Speeches included three parts:

1. **Proem** or **exordium** grabbed the audience’s attention and offered goodwill to the listeners
2. **Refutation** gave proof and a proposition
3. **Epilogue** summarized with a climax to arouse the audience’s emotions to make a judgment.

PROEM OR EXORDIUM

Acts 24:2–4 “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you . . . most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude” (NIV) Tertullus flattered Felix crediting him with Palestine’s peace and prosperity, and then apologized for this inconvenience of a minor “tedious” case. The KJV “clemency,” is also translated, “be kind enough to hear us briefly” (NIV), or “indulge us” (NEB).

REFUTATION

Acts 24:5–6 “We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” Tertullus’ (false) facts portrayed Paul as a rabble-rouser from the “sect of the Nazarenes.” This was a title for Christians used by Jews and the Romans may have taken it from Pilate’s inscription on Jesus’ cross. Even though the witnesses agreed, Paul refuted them in his defense.

EPILOGUE

Acts 24:7–9 “By examining him yourself, you will be able to learn the truth” (BSB) The climax of Tertullus’ prosecution implied that Lysias had acted unwisely and wasted Felix’s time, but that Felix would soon ascertain Paul’s faults.

Paul's Defense and Testimony

Acts 24:10–21

Acts 24:10–13 “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense” (NASB) Paul’s rebuttal refuted Tertullus’ attacks and he devoted his time to the proof of his mission. His other sermons and epistles demonstrate that he also knew the rhetorical style, but did so without the flattery and flourishes that Tertullus had. Paul’s opening “*proem*” (or preamble) is simple and respectful: “twelve days ago, I went up to Jerusalem to worship. Yet my accusers did not find me debating . . .”

Shortly before this experience, Paul wrote the Corinthians expressing how he despised the type of rhetoric as Tertullus used—full of deceit, stylistic excess, manipulation, and elaborate performance (1 Corinthians 2:4; also, Colossians 2:3–4). In contrast the Restoration revealed that power and influence should be accompanied “only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; By kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41–42; also see Alma 31:5; Moses 6:31–32, 7:13).

Acts 24:14–16 “I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way . . .” (NIV) After he denied the charges against him, Paul testified that he believed in “The Way” (by which he meant Christianity, see Acts 9:2). Judaism was one of the ten legal foreign or imported religions in the Empire. Paul claimed to “serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets.” Judaism was known and legal, so by claiming he held to these beliefs, he could expect to be protected. He described his pure motives: “I exercise myself,” or “I do my best” (JB, NAS) and “take pains” (RSV) and “strive always” (NIV). The difference was, he saw the fulfillment of the Law in Jesus, and most Jews did not.

Acts 24:17 “Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation” In Paul’s Epistles he referenced his gathering of offerings for the poor in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:4–6; 9:2; Galatians 2:10). Luke also documents it repeatedly in Acts, as he also accounts for the years of Paul’s traveling away from Jerusalem (Acts 11:29; etc.).

Acts 24:18–21 “I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this . . . no crowd . . . nor . . . disturbance . . . I stood before the Sanhedrin . . . ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’” (NIV) All of these facts that Paul points to could be confirmed by Lysias or other eyewitnesses. Paul included—by using Tertullus’ argument against him—the Jews trivialized and wasted Felix’s time.

Felix Holds Paul in Custody

Acts 24:22-27

Acts 24:22 “Felix, who was well informed about the Way, adjourned . . .” (BSB) Felix was already well informed about “The Way,” or Christianity. I presume Jesus’ crucifixion and the spread of missionary work had made a strong impression in the Roman overlords in Palestine. As a governor he would have had access to the “Roman intelligence” that was always out gathering information. He may have had spies in Jesus’ crowds who reported to the Roman officials. These spies had reported that the disciples were not troublemakers, so the Romans let them alone. Whatever Felix knew, he was no longer worried and agreed to postpone until Lysias arrived.

Acts 24:23 “. . . allow him some freedom and permit his friends to minister to his needs” (BSB) Paul remained in Herod’s palace under a loose guard. Felix permitted him to receive family and friends, as well as food, drink, and clothing. Luke does not mention missionary work occurring at this time, but focuses his story line on moving Paul toward testifying before Caesar.

Acts 24:24 “A few days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess” (AB) Paul’s second opportunity to testify of Jesus as the promised Messiah to the Roman procurator came because Felix’s beautiful wife wanted to hear more. Her Jewish lineage may have piqued her curiosity in Christianity. She was probably the source of Felix having “a perfect knowledge” about “The Way” (Acts 24:22). This time Paul did not defend his case but chose to teach “faith in Christ/the Messiah.”

Drusilla was a younger daughter of Herod Agrippa I. Her beauty and familial political ties secured her marriage to King Azizus of Emesa in Syria. However, Felix fell in love with her and through considerable courting, won her away. She was the first of Felix’s three wives. She was Jewish by birth, but her actions demonstrated that her beliefs and practices did not follow the Mosaic Law.

Right: Drusilla by John William Godward. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



Acts 24:25 “He talked on about uprightness, self-control, and the coming judgment” (AB) Probably due to the more private audience, Paul moved from faith to morals. In light of the couple’s previously adulterous relationship, Paul’s discussion on the need for righteousness, temperance, and God’s coming judgment sounds like a call for repentance. Paul must have spoken with the Spirit’s penetration because “Felix trembled.” Just as John the Baptist had scared Herod Antipas when he had called him to repentance, and Jesus had upset the procurator Pilate, Paul also startled Felix enough for him to stop the discussion, “Go away for now.”²²

Acts 24:26 “. . . hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul” Here we see the heart of Felix. As Luke recorded, he was willing to break Roman law and seek a bribe. This detail also sheds light on Paul’s wealthy background—that a monetary sum might even have been feasible. We are left to wonder if Felix heard Paul speak again, or if he were too afraid of the powerful Jews to release Paul. We do know that no action was taken against Paul and the case proved to be a stalemate in for Felix.

Acts 24:27 “After two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus” (AB) This can be interpreted as the maximum detention for a citizen to be imprisoned before his mandatory release. But, like his predecessor Pilate, Felix wanted to show the Jews a favor. There must have been other issues in Felix’s governance that raised the conscious of Rome to his poor leadership. Nero had Felix removed about AD 59 or 60. This episode provides another historical date that we can attach to Paul’s life and New Testament history.²³

PORCIUS FESTUS

Porcius Festus took over the procurator or governor’s office in ~AD 60 and served until his death two years later. He came from a family of senators in Rome. He received his appointment by Nero Caesar. History remembers Festus as serving conscientiously, and the Book of Acts confirms that.

Right: Porcius Festus. Image via the Internet Archive.



ACTS 25

Paul before Festus and King Agrippa II
ca. AD 60

Paul Before Festus

Acts 25:1–12

Acts 25:1–3 “Three days after he arrived in the province . . .” (AB) Once in office, Porcius Festus wasted no time and acted quickly to tour his Judean jurisdiction. Luke records that he went “up” to Jerusalem.²⁴ While there, Paul’s accusers brought their charges against him. In this formal setting, during the first month of this new Roman leader in office, and his first week or ten days in Jerusalem, only the most pressing issues would have been addressed. For the case of Paul to be on this list, we see it either as a priority to the Sanhedrin, or else how strongly the chief priests wanted to kill Paul. Luke includes their plot to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem, “laying wait in the way to kill him” (Acts 25:3).

Acts 25:4–6 “Paul should be kept at Caesarea . . . go down with me, and accuse this man . . .” Even though Festus was new in his office, he did not capitulate to the Jewish wishes and kept Paul protected in Caesarea. Festus stayed in Jerusalem for no more than ten days and then encouraged the Jewish leaders to come to a trial in Caesarea against Paul if they wished.

“the next day sitting on the judgment seat [Festus] commanded Paul to be brought” The day after Festus returned to his new home in Caesarea, he brought Paul out for a pre-trial. This also speaks to the social significance of this case. Christianity was a big threat to the Jews at this time. By attacking Paul, who spread it around the Empire, they hoped to have a better chance of stopping it entirely.

Acts 25:7–8 “Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any . . .” Luke summarizes the broken record of false accusations and skips to Paul’s defense to the governor. By testifying from his mouth, Paul’s testimony could transfer extra meaning through the Spirit. Instead of being a court hearing, Paul used this opportunity as a missionary moment. Paul’s defense was to witnesses of his faith in the Lord’s blessing to fulfill his mission call to Rome. Festus, as a new ruler and wanting to befriend the Jews, suggested that Paul go to Jerusalem for a Sanhedrin hearing.

Acts 25:10–11 “Then Paul said, ‘I stand at Caesar’s judgement seat’” Paul’s request for an appeal to Caesar’s tribunal may sound like it was an easy way for Paul to save his life, but the Caesar at the time was one of the cruelest ever to reign. Paul would have known that he had banned Jews from Rome and hated Christians.

NERO

Nero reigned over the Roman Empire from AD 54–68. His reputation included public brutality and sexual licentious. He killed his mother and his wife to marry another beauty (whom he later murdered). He started a fire in Rome to build a larger palace, “the gold house” (AD 64). As a scapegoat for the fire, he ordered the brutal execution of Christians. He was passionate about chariot races and used the wealth of the empire to buy popularity. When Britain, Spain, and Gaul, revolted against him, Nero committed suicide. The early Christian fathers interpreted the “666” from the beast in Revelation as an acronym for Nero’s name.

Right: The French Actor Talma as Nero by Eugène Delacroix. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



When a Roman citizen appealed to Caesar, he received a Roman guard to transport him. His housing, travel, and needs until the trial would all have been paid for by Rome. All this was within Paul's citizenship rights.

Acts 25:12, “Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered ‘ . . . unto Caesar shalt thou go” The appeal may have been an embarrassment to Festus. One of his first cases, if not his first case as the tribunal, was appealed. But after confirming with his Roman “council,” “a board of assessors” to ensure the proceedings were legal, Festus accepted Paul's request. Paul's appeal ensured that he could remain in Roman custody, away from Jewish hands. More importantly, the Lord had also forewarned Paul that he would testify in Rome. His appeal to Rome fit into the inspiration from God to fulfill that assignment. Luke highlights the drama of the scene with the parallel structure of Festus' response.

Paul's Defense Before Festus, Bernice, and King Agrippa II

Acts 25:13-27

Acts 25:13 “A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea and paid a courtesy call on Festus” (AB) Still within the first month of Festus' arrival to Judea as the new Roman governor, political decorum dictated a welcome from the Jewish royalty, King Agrippa II and his sister, Bernice. This visit overlapped with the preparations for Paul to leave for Rome. Before he could set sail, the governor had to write up an account of his case, secure a ship, supplies, and other travelers. The timing of Agrippa II and Bernice's visit became providential as a stalwart missionary opportunity unfolded in Caesarea.

HEROD AGRIPPA II

Herod Agrippa II (AD 18-92) was raised in Judea and educated in Rome. He was seventeen when his father died (Agrippa I). In AD 50, at age 31, he received his uncle Herod II of Chalcis' territory and jurisdiction over the Jerusalem temple (and later received portions of Galilee, Perea, and Lebanon). He re-paved the streets of Jerusalem in white marble and renamed the capital, Caesarea Philippi, Neronia. He sided with Rome during the Jewish revolt in AD 66 and assisted Titus' conquer of Jerusalem. He moved to Rome and lived there until his death in AD 92.



Coin of Herod Agrippa II via Wikimedia Commons

BERNICE

Bernice, the sister to King Agrippa II was twice a widow. She first married her uncle Herod Chalcis, followed by a wealthy merchant. With plenty of wealth, she chose to live with her brother. History rumors that they had an incestuous relationship. She also had an affair with Titus Flavius Vespasianus when he came to Palestine, and even followed him to Rome as his mistress, but returned to live with her brother before he became Caesar.

Acts 25:14–18 “Festus declared Paul’s cause unto the king” During Bernice and Agrippa II’s visit, Festus brought up Paul’s imprisonment, as it appears to have been a hot topic of that period. Agrippa II’s father had tried to stop Christianity, too, when he had had James killed (the son of Zebedee and brother of John the Beloved). His uncle, Herod Antipas had beheaded John the Baptist, and his grandfather, King Herod, had killed the innocents in Bethlehem.

Acts 25:19–22 “I would like to hear this man myself” After Festus explained his predicament—that the Jews’ “superstitions” or “peculiar religion” (NEB) had led to debates over whether Jesus were alive or dead—Festus “was at a loss on how to investigate such matters” (NIV). Having a Jewish opinion on the matter may have helped him know what to write to Caesar about the case. The KJV recorded “Augustus” for the word Emperor, but Augustus had died in AD 14 and Nero reigned at this time. It was tricky because every new Emperor took on Caesar Augustus’ name in addition to their own. Other English translations change Augustus to “Emperor.”²⁵

In the Roman world all future kings were to take upon them Augustus’ name. This became another point where Augustus and Jesus were in juxtaposition. But, in the case of the Lord, all who take on Jesus’ name become Kings and Queens. Luke also uses this scene to illustrate another parallel between Jesus’ trial and Paul’s trial, as both were taken from the Roman authority (Pilate and Festus) to the Jewish authority (Herod Antipas and Agrippa II).

DATE	NAME	SCRIPTURE
27 BC–AD 14	Augustus	Luke 2:1
AD 14–37	Tiberius	Luke 3:1
AD 37–41	Caligula	
AD 41–54	Claudius I	Acts 11:28; 11:2
AD 54–68	Nero	Philippians 4:2
AD 68–69	3 short terms	1 Peter 5:13
AD 69–79	Vespasian	Revelation 1:9?
AD 79–81	Titus	Ephesians 6:20?
AD 81–96	Domitian	2 Timothy 4:16? Revelation 1:9?

Acts 25:23 “Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high-ranking military officers and the prominent men of the city” (NIV) Luke described some of the elaborate display of pomp as the king entered the judgement hall. Fredric Farrar added even more background to the colors

and atmosphere that would have accompanied the occasion: Agrippa II “would doubtless appear in his scarlet paludament with his full attendance of lictors and bodyguard, who would stand at arms behind the gilded chairs which were placed for himself and his distinguished visitors. Bernice [would be] blazing with all her jewels, and he in his purple robes, and both with the golden circlets of royalty around their foreheads, and attended by a suite of followers in the most gorgeous appeal of Eastern pomp. It was a compliment to the new governor to visit him with as much splendor as possible.”²⁶ Three of those in attendance would have been the military leaders of the five groups of 1,000 soldiers stationed in Caesarea.²⁷

Acts 25:24–27 “I found [Paul] had done nothing deserving of death . . . I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him” (NIV) Both political leaders were deferential and act with much flattery to keep the peace. Festus, the new Roman governor, tried to ingratiate himself to Agrippa II, because history had revealed how the “Herods” had acted as Roman spies. Festus carefully laid out the situation because he was embarrassed about sending Paul to Nero without having committed any real crime.

As Christians, we see this gathering also as an opportunity for Paul to testify to King Agrippa II of Jesus as the Messiah, thereby fulfilling the prophecy spoken by Ananias, approximately twenty-five years earlier; “bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings” (Acts 9:15). Paul’s arrest opened remarkable positive opportunities, just as many challenges in our own lives do.

ACTS 26

Paul’s Defense

Acts 26:1–8

Acts 26:1–3 ““King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today to defend myself” (BSB) This is the fourth and last of Paul’s speeches recorded in Acts, and the third of his defenses (as the Roman law allowed citizens to defend themselves). The first was in Jerusalem, the second before the Roman procurator Felix, and this third defense was before Felix’s successor Festus, King Agrippa II, and Bernice. The latter two knew of, and gave verbal allegiance and support to, Judaism.

Paul was “happy” (KJV) because he was more interested in testifying than in proving his innocence. More than defending his own case, Paul felt fortunate to defend Christianity. (Compare Acts 24:5–6.) Even though he stood before them in chains or some type of bonds, he had the freedom of movement to “stretch out his hand” in the manner of a classical Greek orator.²⁸

Acts 26:4 “I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem . . . as a Pharisee” (NIV) The KJV requires careful reading to not confuse Paul’s home of Tarsus with his place of education in Jerusalem. The Pharisees’ fundamental tradition was to “be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law.”²⁹ They referred to building a “fence,” which became the 10,000 “oral laws.” Josephus added, “The Pharisees passed on to the people certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded into the Law of Moses.”³⁰ Paul claimed the Pharisees were the “strictest sect.” That is true if we compare them only to the Zealots and Sadducees, but the small groups of Essenes at the time lived an even more extreme version of the Mosaic Law.

Acts 26:6–8 “I stand and am judged for the . . . *promise* [of] our twelve tribes . . . that God should raise the dead?” Paul purported that his case was theological, not political. He cut through all the false charges of the Jews and expressed the real issue, which was the resurrection of Jesus—which then would lead to accepting Jesus as the Son of God and their promised Messiah. As Agrippa II and Bernice were raised with Jewish teachings, they should have known the stories of Elijah and Elisha raising the dead. The biblical background would have made the case of God raising Jesus more understandable. This was the promise that their ancestors had sought “earnestly” (RSV, NIV, NAV) or “with intense devotion” (JB). Paul referred to the “twelve tribes,” as he was from Benjamin.

Paul’s Conversion—3rd Account

Acts 26:9–23

Acts 26:9–11 “I too was convinced that I ought to do all I could to oppose the name of Jesus” (BSB) Thus begins the Book of Acts’ third account of Paul/Saul’s persecuting Christians (see parallels in Acts 22:4–5; 8:1–3; 9:1). Paul also referred to this in his Epistles. In Galatians 1:13, he explained that felt it was his duty to persecute the Christians with “zeal” (Also see Philippians 3:6; 1 Timothy 1:13). His investigation, interrogation, and sentencing of Christians fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy in John 16:1–2, “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (also see Matthew 23:34).

“**compelling them to blaspheme**” the KJV wording may mean that Paul made the Christians renounce their faith to save their lives. “Strange” meant “foreign,” which is in all other English modern translations.

Acts 26:12 “I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests” This verse is probably more correct in identifying Saul’s authority and directions as having initiated with the “chief priests,” not the one reigning high priest as Acts 9:1–2 claims. The three parallel accounts of Paul’s first vision are listed above in **Acts 22:4–10**. (I will only point out the differences below.)



Paul Before Felix by William Hogarth, ca. 1800. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Dent Saulp

Acts 26:14 “I heard a voice speaking . . . Saul, Saul . . . *it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*” This is the first account that mentions a prick or goad (NEB). It was used to control large animals (i.e. oxen). It was a sharp jab on a pointed stick that the animal pushed against. In this context, it suggests that Paul resisted previous spiritual promptings. Acts 26:15 Significantly, Paul saw the Lord in all three accounts.

Acts 26:16–17 “I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see” In this setting, Paul included more about his commission to preach. His difficult missionary charge included the Lord’s promise of future personal trials. Also, the promise of divine protection from “Gentiles” (also meaning, “nations”), and the call to preach to them. Either he understood that call differently because the thought of associating with Gentiles was repulsive, or Paul combined multiple visions in this retelling. Peter had not yet received the vision to take the Gospel to the Gentiles by the time of Saul/Paul’s first vision (Acts 10:15). The Lord placed the timing of Paul’s commission to the Gentiles, and Peter’s vision to open missionary work to them in perfect proximity.

Acts 26:18 “To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those sanctified by faith in Me” (BSB) Jesus’ message was the hope of forgiveness for Paul as much as for his converts. The Lord’s message promised sight, light, forgiveness, and inheritance. Take a minute and think about those spectacular gifts. The inheritance comes through sanctification, or the process of purification. Repentance and forgiveness prepare one for sanctification, which leads to more faith. It creates a beautiful circle.

Acts 26:19–20 “I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” Paul later wrote of repentance as the way to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:9–10). He described it as not only a change of behavior, but repentance brought a confession of and dependence on Christ as our Redeemer, which then opened the way to become a servant of God. Different translations confirm that repentance requires turning to God and then to good works.

- “Prove their repentance by their deeds” (NIV)
- “Proving their change of heart by their deeds” (JB)
- “Perform deeds worthy of their repentance” (RSV)

Acts 26:22 “I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen” (NIV). Paul referred to the titles of two of the three portions of Jewish scripture: The Law, Prophets, and Writings. What he referred to as Moses or the Law, included the Old Testament’s first five books, or the Pentateuch. The Writings included Psalms, histories, and the like. As the most accessible Prophet at the time, it is not surprising that Paul quoted from Isaiah (42:6; 49:6). Christians read the Old Testament for types and shadows of the promised Messiah, and the Book of Mormon is also replete with this outlook.

Festus’ and Agrippa II’s Perspective

Acts 26:24–32

Acts 26:24–26 “Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. ‘You are out of your mind, Paul!’ he shouted” (NIV) Festus’ remark about Paul having gone mad, implies that Paul was passionate or emotionally moved as he recounted his testimony. Festus was probably looking for data points. Roman administrators looked for legal issues of fact and were notoriously practical. Paul’s heartfelt approach would have been bizarre to Festus, but not necessarily to King Agrippa II and Bernice.

Joseph Smith spoke about Festus (and others) assuming Paul was insane after hearing his testimony:

“[Paul] made his defense before King Agrippa, and related the account of the vision he had when he saw a light, and heard a voice; but still there were but few who believed him; some said he was dishonest, others said he was mad; and he was ridiculed and reviled. But all this did not destroy the reality of his

vision. He had seen a vision, he knew he had, and all the persecution under heaven could not make it otherwise; and though they should persecute him unto death, yet he knew, and would know to his latest breath, that he had both seen a light and heard a voice speaking unto him, and all the world could not make him think or believe otherwise.”³¹



Trial of the Apostle Paul by Nikolai Bodarevsky, 1875. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Acts 26:27–28 “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? . . . “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

King Agrippa may have known and even believed the prophets (but his beliefs did not always dictate his actions, sadly). But Luke only recorded his confession that he was “almost” converted. The word, “almost/*oligos*,” in KJV, actually meant: few, little, small, as in a segment of time (as the next verse first phrase confirms, “Short time or long,” NIV), instead of the more modern meaning of “nearly”. It is clearer in other translations:

- “In a short time, you think to make me a Christian!” (RSV)
- “A little more, and you are sure to make me a Christian.” (AB)
- “In a little thou dost persuade me to become a Christian!” (YLT)
- “Can you persuade me in such a short time to become a Christian?” (BSB)

Elder Neal A. Maxwell does not think Agrippa’s remark was flippant; “he was seriously touched” (There is no historical evidence that Agrippa ever converted to Christianity, at least in mortality)³²

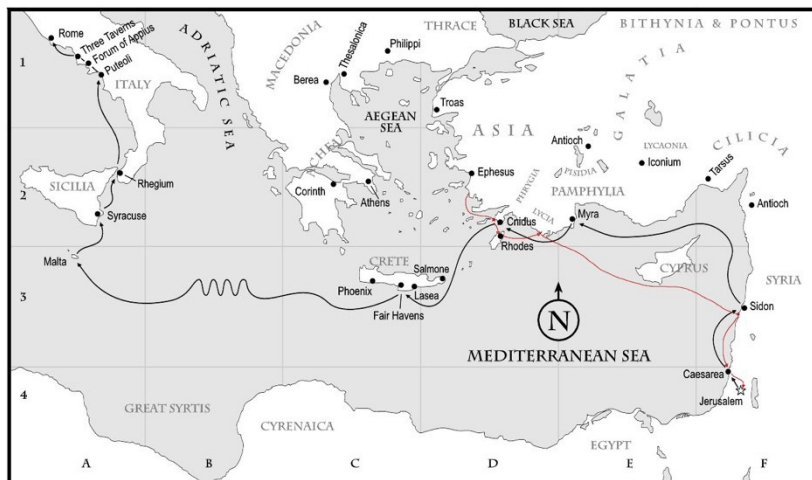
Acts 26:29 “I wish to God that not only you but all who hear me this day may become what I am, except for these chains” (BSB) Paul’s wish is the climatic ending of his testimony. He ended his witness, which moved a mountain. In God’s eyes, Paul was not on trial—his judges were (and we, the readers, are too).

Acts 26:30–32 “When . . . the king rose up . . . they talked . . . “This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed”” The trial ended when the King stood. After the hearing, the two leaders talked in the “hallways” and agreed that Paul had done nothing wrong. The verdict was “not guilty.” This scene added two more declarations of Paul’s innocence. Yet, the Lord wanted Paul to testify in Rome, so we look forward to hearing him witness before Caesar, but the book of Acts ends first.

ACTS 27

Paul's Voyage to Rome ca. AD 61

Acts 27:1–3 “Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship” (NIV) Herod had built a massive artificial harbor off their sandy coast of Caesarea. We are told that two of Paul’s Christian companions joined the 2,000-mile voyage. Luke (“we”), the doctor and scribe, as well as Aristarchus (Acts 19:29; Colossians 4:10).



Paul’s new Roman guard Julius, one of the Emperor’s special centurions, proved himself an honorable man and trusted Paul enough to let him visit friends (probably Christians) at their first stop in Sidon (100 miles north of Caesarea).

Acts 27:6–8 “the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy. . . we had sailed slowly many days . . .” In those days, ships preferred to sail near the coast lines in case of a storm if trouble arose. Only rarely did sailors intentionally sail into the deep sea. On the island of Crete, Paul’s group changed ships and joined a large grain ship from Alexandria, enroute to Italy with supplies for Roman bread.³³ They inched along the island of Crete, but are then were blown out to sea.

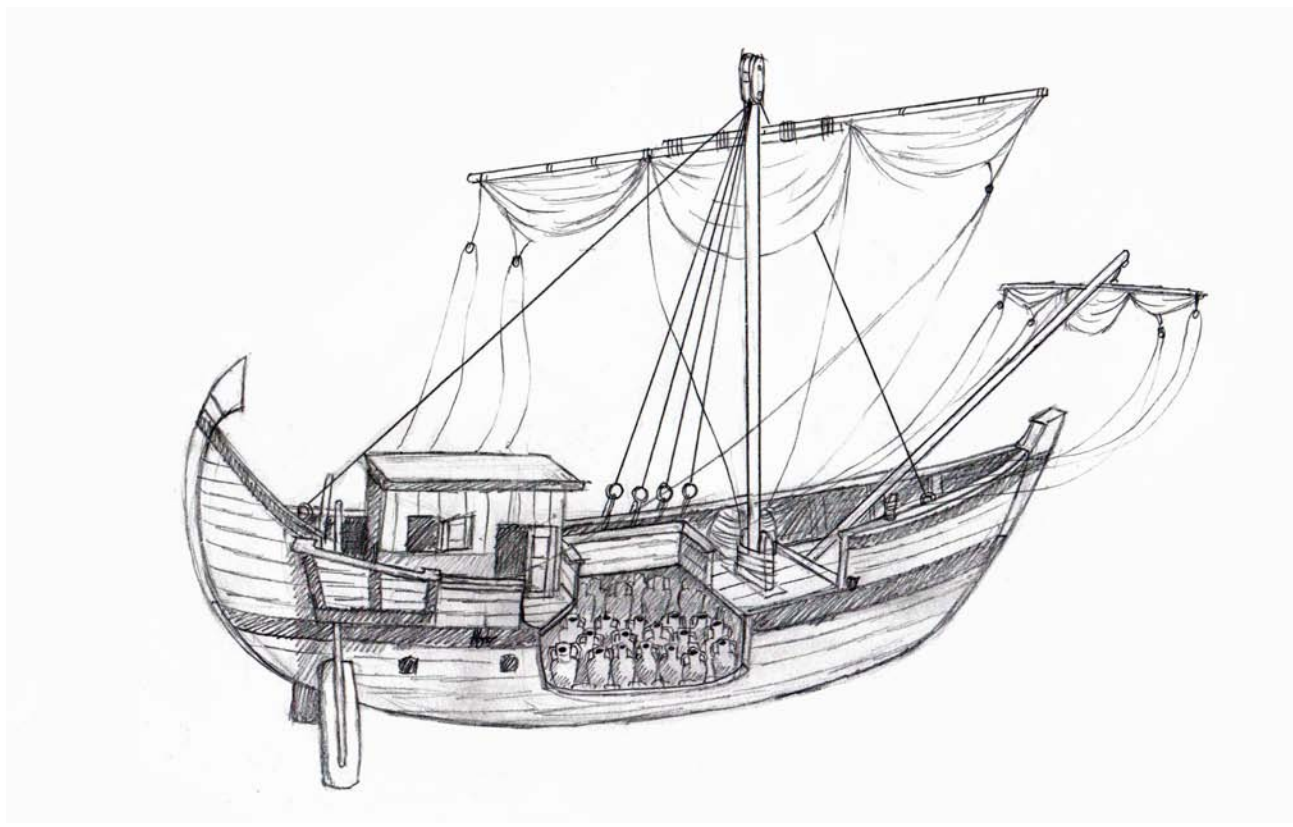
Acts 27:8–9 “Sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them . . .” Mediterranean Sea travel was avoided in the winter in the ancient world, because of dangerous storms. The fast referred to the Day of Atonement. That is the only Jewish celebration where everyone fasts. It falls in the autumn, often in conjunction with the Feast of the Tabernacles. Unfortunately, Paul’s warning to the captain went unheeded.

The Storm

Acts 27:13–21

Acts 27:13–14 “there arose against it a tempestuous wind . . . neither sun nor stars in many days appeared”
The ship crashed into an island “Clauda” and needed repairs, but because of the quicksand, the captain sailed

away. After three more days of fierce storms without the ability to navigate by the stars or sun, the crew lightened the boat and threw cargo and tackle overboard. The storm continued for many more days before the ship crashed.



An approximate diagram of a Roman trade ship carrying transport amphorae. Image by Matthew Jose Fisher via Wikimedia Commons.

Paul's Seventh Vision as Recorded in Acts

Acts 27:22–26

Acts 27:22–23 “Paul . . . said, **Sirs . . . I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship . . .**” Paul attempted to help the crew’s morale, as everyone was so physically and emotionally exhausted that they had lost hope. After enduring days of the storm and fasting from food, Paul had a vision and shared it with them to restore their hope. He began by providing evidence of his trustworthiness—he had given good advice to not sail so late in the season. Then, he shared what the angel of the Lord had told him. This probably saved Paul and several other’s lives, because all the prisoners were going to be killed (Acts 27:42). I am interested in what Paul meant by, “the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve.” Was the angel the Savior? The angel also reaffirmed, and Luke recorded, that Paul announced to everyone, that he would testify before Caesar.

Acts 27:25 “be of good cheer: for I believe God . . .” No matter that the boat would crash “upon a certain island,” and that they would have to stay there all winter; regardless of the fact that they were all seasick, dehydrated, hungry, in pain, hopeless, and would remain out at sea fasting for days; even in spite of losing their investment of hundreds if not thousands of pounds of grain, their supplies, equipment, and also the ship, the Lord’s message was “be of good cheer.” It is more than a message. It is a commandment, just as much as if it had a “Thou shalt” in front of it. Thirteen times in the scriptures, the Lord commands: “Be of good cheer.” Surprisingly, most of them are given during absolutely devastatingly difficult times.³⁴ Why then? Why not just sit beside the sorrowing sufferer and show empathy? I think because God taught Paul, and the readers of Acts, how to develop the tool of joy to help them endure.

Because Paul believed God, he could always find cheer in an eternal perspective. We, too, can trust His promises. We can trust that He loves us. We can believe that He will provide for us eternally. If we can learn to see trials as God sees them, we can adopt an attitude of cheer or to “take courage” (ISV, CSB, BSB). The way we can change our discouragement, fear, or helplessness into cheer is through focusing on our belief in God. This foresight becomes a tool for mental, emotional, and spiritual empowerment to act. This can become a skillset to develop courage, perspective, and hope to overcome fear, trepidation, and anxiety. Having hope provides the courage to act. God gave Paul (and us) a life-changing tool—to believe and trust God—and to see life from an eternal perspective so that we can be of good cheer.

Fourteen Day Storm

Acts 27:26–37

Acts 27:26–28 “On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea . . . the sailors sensed they were approaching land [and] they took soundings” (NIV) Luke’s detailed record unfolds God’s miraculous rescue. The sailors found they were in 120 feet-deep water, then 90 feet, and sunk anchors hoping to avoid the rocks before morning. The angel’s prophecy was about to be fulfilled.

Acts 27:29–30 “Pretending to lower anchors from the bow, [the sailors] let the lifeboat down into the sea” (BSB). Paul saw the exhausted sailors heading out to land and warned the centurion, “Unless these men remain with the ship, you cannot be saved.” Paul has gained Julius’ trust it seems, and his soldiers stop the plot by cutting the ropes. Paul uttered another prophecy that will soon be fulfilled.

Acts 27:33–37 “This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing” Paul continually urged his fellow travelers to eat with him, and at day break they did. (The word for the KJV “meat” means food or nourishment.) All 276 passengers were safe. Paul turned this into an opportunity to praise the Lord and prayed in “thanks.” Luke added, “Then were they all of good cheer.” To make sure they wouldn’t go aground, the sailors lightened the ship by throwing out their wheat (ack!).

Acts 27:38 “they discovered a certain creek with a shore . . .” Next, they raised the sail and moved toward an unknown sandy beach. But the ship got stuck in a sandbar, and the waves crashed into the back end of the boat. As everyone abandoned the ship, Julius intervened to stop the soldiers from killing the prisoners (which was the protocol for fear they would escape at such a moment). Everyone swam or floated on broken boards to shore.

ACTS 28

Shipwrecked in Malta—Paul Winters there

Acts 28:1–10

Acts 28:1–2 “Once safely on shore . . . the islanders showed us unusual kindness . . . [and] kindled a fire . . . because of the present rain, and . . . cold” (NIV) The “sizable” island on which Paul and the 275 landed was named Melita (Latin for Malta).³⁵

MALTA

Malta, an island south of Italy and Sicily was colonized by Phoenicians in ~1000 BC, fell to Carthage control in 500BC, and then was conquered by Rome in 218 BC. It became an important stop on the Mediterranean shipping trade routes. The local pagans spoke Punic, not Greek.



Acts 28:3–6 “a viper . . . fastened on [Paul’s] hand . . . he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm”

The poisonous snake came out of the sticks that Paul gathered to help with the fire. This scene fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy “They shall take up serpents . . . and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18). Yet, no one there knew that. The superstitious locals first saw it as a sign of Paul’s wickedness, and then when the bite had no ill effects, they saw it as a sign that Paul was a god.

Acts 28:7–8, “Publius, the chief official . . . welcomed us to his home . . . for three days. His father was sick . . . Paul . . . prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him” The “chief man” Publius, was a Roman ruler, not a native. This may have been why of all the 276 shipwrecked people, Paul had the honor of staying in his estate until other housing could be prepared. Julius, the Roman official charge of Paul, was probably entertained at

Publius' home, too. One act of kindness was answered by another as Paul healed his host's father from dysentery through God's Priesthood power.

Acts 28:9–10 “Others also . . . were healed” The Lord again blessed Paul with the gift of healing to help several islanders (and hopefully fellow boat passengers).³⁶ Luke describes how Paul won the love of several islanders, but he does not mention that he preached the Gospel to them. I assume he did (possibly through an interpreter?). It sounds as though they had a grand going away party, complete with food and supplies for the voyage.

Paul's Arrival at Rome

Acts 28:11–16

Acts 28:11 “After three months we departed in a ship . . . we fetched a compass, and came to . . . Puteoli” Luke includes all the stops as they joined another Alexandrian grain ship and sailed north 60 miles to the island of Sicily, and then hopped up the Italian west coast to Puteoli, due west of Naples. It was a significant port where grain ships unloaded their cargo for Rome. Paul visited with a Christian family there for a week (Castor and Pollux were zodiacs signs of the patron god for sailors. The two names/signs were twin brothers).

Acts 28:15 “When the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us . . . Paul . . . thanked God, and took courage” News of Paul's arrival reached Rome before he did, and a group of saints traveled forty miles south of Rome, along the “Appian Way” to “Appii” where they gathered at a Forum. Their lodgings must have been remarkable enough for Luke to record its name: “The Three Taverns.” Luke did not record their conversations, but I imagine the local Christians probably undated the apostle on the latest Roman-Jewish-Christian relations.

Acts 28:16 “when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier” (ESV) Once in Rome, Julius the centurion from Caesarea, turned the prisoner, Paul, over to the captain of the guard (or “Empirical guard”) who kept Caesar's personal garrison. Paul was not kept in the usual prison but was allowed to live in private quarters with only one soldier as his guard (possibly connected with a “chain,” not knowing if verse 20 may be literal or figurative). “House arrest” allowed Paul to have visitors and to come and go to some degree. He may have been in the military barracks (“Praetorium”) of those imperial guards stationed in Rome to guard the Emperor.³⁷

When adding up all of Luke's “we” passages, it appears that he shared about a dozen years of missionary service with Paul (Acts 16:10–28:15). Other New Testament references also show Luke as Paul's companion (Colossians 4:11; Philemon 1:24; 2 Timothy 4:14). Luke may have stayed with him during those two years in Rome and written his Gospel or the Book of Acts of the Apostles, or he may have been too busy as a missionary (Acts 28:30).

Spring of AD 61–63: Paul Preached Under Roman Guard

Acts 28:17–31

Acts 28:17–20 “Paul called the chief of the Jews together . . . there was no cause of death in me . . . I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar” True to Paul’s fashion, after only three short days in Rome, he invited the local rabbis and synagogue leaders to get to know him. Paul wanted to make sure they understood his side of the story. Wisely, he emphasized the indisputable common ground they shared without touching on any of the controversial points. He also used this opportunity to fulfill his call to testify in Rome. He again started his preaching first to the Jews before he taught the Gentiles.

Acts 28:21–22 “we desire to hear of thee . . . as concerning this sect, we know that everywhere it is spoken against” Somewhere the Jewish communication link failed to pass on Paul’s eminent arrival in Rome. The Jews’ “golden question” opened a wide door for Paul to share his beliefs.

Acts 28:23–24 “. . . he expounded and testified the kingdom of God . . . from morning till evening” What an opportunity—a full house wanting to know more about the “sect” of Christianity! Paul’s first Jewish audience must not have been offended, because more came. This scene speaks of Paul’s knowledge of the Messianic scriptures, as no scrolls would have survived the shipwreck, nor were they provided with his “house arrest” (remember, they were as expensive as a second home; usually each community shared only a few scrolls). His masterful oration and debate skills kept his audiences rapt all day long. Combined with the Spirit of the Lord, many were converted.

Acts 28:25–29 “The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah . . . the heart of this people has become dull . . . salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen” (NASB) Paul sounded discouraged when more of the Jews did not believe. He recited Isaiah 6:9–10, as a warning to them. He publicly announced to the Jews that they had had their chance and he would now go preach to the Gentiles.

Acts 28:30–31 “He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!” (NIV) Similar to Caesarea, Paul had a two-year “captivity” in Rome, with “complete freedom” to preach (JB). Philippians 4:2 hints of Paul’s missionary work among the guards while on house arrest: “All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household” (NASB). Paul’s guard(s) would have heard him preach and also carried the Christian message through the ranks of Caesar’s staff and household.

By studying the texts of his Epistles, it sounds as if Paul wrote Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians in Rome during these two years. However, Luke’s abrupt end to Acts does not suggest that we have the finished work.³⁸ Paul had not testified to Caesar, nor were Peter and Paul dead. Yet, in light of Luke’s style of highlighting the Lord and apostles in the most positive light possible, perhaps this is where he chose to end the text. Paul had

followed the Lord's direction from the time of his first vision and the book ends with some successful missionary experiences.

If biblical scholars, archeologists, or Vatican librarians never find a second ending for Acts, we can still appreciate Luke's choice to end at this climatic answer to the Lord's command in Luke's prelude, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses . . . unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Luke's thesis fits nicely within this opening and closing.

Header Image: Paul and King Agrippaa by Vasily Surikov. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Below: Ancient Rome; Agrippina Landing with the Ashes of Germanicus by J. M. W. Turner, 1839. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

1. David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, “Paul: Untiring Witness of Christ” *Ensign*, August 1999.
2. The sign was written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin and read: “No foreigner is to enter the barriers surrounding the sanctuary. He who is caught will have himself to blame for his death which will follow.”
3. Josephus, *Jewish War*, v, 238.
4. The NIV, BSB, and CSB say “Aramaic” while the KJV, NASB, and BLB read, “Hebrew.” The vernacular of Palestine was Aramaic (the language the Jews brought back from their Babylonian captivity, 600–538 BC). Most people no longer understood or read Hebrew, this is why the Jews had their scriptures translated into Greek, known as the Septuagint (LXX). Even when the New Testament cites an ancient prophet or psalm it usually uses the LXX. Paul was taught under Rabbi Gamaliel, so we assume that he read Hebrew.
5. Jurgen Becker, *Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 34. Paul’s personal writings do not include that he was tutored under Gamaliel, nor that he was born in Tarsus. However we do have other second hand sources who claim the same thing. The early Church Father, Jerome suggested that Paul’s parentage “emigrated from Galilean Gishala.”
6. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul* (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1983), 21–22. Piecing the patchwork of Paul’s biography together leaves one to question how he could have been taught in Jerusalem without knowing more about Jesus’ ministry. However, if his education from Gamaliel was about AD 20, that was well before Jesus became popular in Jerusalem. This timing fits into the Mishnah outlined of a young man’s path in life mentioned above that advanced rabbinical interpretation began in a young man’s teens: “...thirteen to religious duties, fifteen to Talmud.” Furthermore, Paul’s Epistles are filled with arguments that reflect rabbinical biblical interpretation.
7. The ancient historian Strabo recorded, that Tarsus excelled in rhetoric: “that facility prevalent among the Tarsians whereby [one] could instantly speak offhand and unceasingly on any given subject.” Cited from Strabo, 14.5.15- *Perseus Under Philologic*, available at: <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/perseus-cgi/citequery3.pl?dbname=GreekFeb2011&query=Str.%2014.5.15&getid=2> (accessed 7-13-19)
8. See earlier commentary in Acts 9:2, for how “the Way,” points to temple texts.
9. See earlier commentary on scourging in John 19:1.
10. Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul* (NYC, Washington DC: Peter Lang, 2005), 7–8. Two theories are often purported. The most esteemed was that “... According to traditions preserved in Jerome and Photius, Paul’s parents were carried off as prisoners of war from the Judean town of Gischala to Tarsus . . . What would have happened to Paul’s family” was possibly working as slaves, going through manumission, and over time, Saul’s ancestors were given citizenship before they moved to Tarsus. The second theory purports that Paul’s father may have been one of those from Tarsus who helped Octavia and Anthony during the civil war. As a thank you after Octavia won, he probably awarded those key men with citizenship. We do not know for sure, as no record remains of who was rewarded citizenship.
11. John W. Welch and John Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 15-4.

12. As a review, the organization of the Mosaic priesthood in the New Testament was divided into the following offices:
 - A. The one reigning high priest
 - B. Chief Priests: The captains of the temple
 1. Cultus: the leaders of the 24 weekly sections or “courses” or “companies” and of their daily course
 2. Custody of the Temple: Temple overseers
 3. Temple finances: Three treasurers
 - C. The Priests: 24 weekly courses, ~7,200 priests who served at the altar, to light the incense, etc.
 - D. The Levites: 24 weekly courses, ~9,600 who served as musicians, guards, custodians, butchers, etc.
13. Frederick F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 3. From the time of King David, the high priest, descended from the Aaronic family of Zadock (960 BC until 171 BC). In 171 BC, a priest named Menelaus, who did not belong to the Zadokite line, bribed the king who made him high priest. From then on, the high ranking, chief priests, vied from the position of high priest, which changed on the ruler’s whim. The list of reigning high priests varies slightly with different sources, but approximate dates for the New Testament are: 3 BC Joshua son of Sie; AD 6 Joazar son of Boethus; AD 6–15 Ananus son of Seth (who participated in Jesus’ trials, also spelled Annas); AD 15–16 Ishmael Fabus/Phiabi; AD 16–17 Eleazar; AD 18–37 Joseph Caiaphas (son in law to Annas, participated in Jesus’ trials); AD 37 Jonathan son of Annas; AD 37–41 Theophilus son of Annas; AD 41–43 Simon Kantheras; AD 43 Matthias son of Annas; AD 44 Elionaisus, son of Kantheras; AD. 44–46 Josephus son of Camydus; AD 46–58 Ananias son of Nedebeus; Jonathan AD 58; etc.
14. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: Acts of the Apostles* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 1997), 722.
15. Cornelia B. Horn, John W. Martens, *Let the Little Children Come to Me: Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington DC, Catholic University, 2009), 100–101. F. E. Gaebelin, ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians through Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1981), 374.
16. *Mishnah, Avoth* 5:21; for the full list of age denominations see commentary footnote on Acts 18:3.
17. For more on Caesarea see Acts 10:1.
18. In Caesarea, engraved in a corner stone of an old Roman building, was found the name Pontious Pilate.
19. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 726.
20. Joshua 12:18; 1 Samuel 4:1; 29:1.
21. Sperry Symposium, *The Apostle Paul—His life and Testimony* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994), 69–72.
22. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 740.
23. Ibid. “The time of the beginning and end of his administration cannot be accurately established” and some historians use AD 59 as his start date. After his death, Luceius Albinus, was the procurator from AD 62–64.
24. For more on why one always ascends to Jerusalem see Luke 2:4; Acts 18:22.
25. As discussed in Luke 2:11, Caesar Augustus used the title “son of god” for himself on ancient coins, he claimed to be the prince of peace and he used his birthday for the starting of the calendar).
26. Frederic Farrer, *Life of Christ* (NYC, NY: Dutton Co., 1887), 699.
27. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 752.

1. What are two major themes that Luke carries throughout the book of Acts?
 2. Where did Paul spend the bulk of his time during each of his 3 missions to the gentiles? (name cities please)
 3. What were the four items decided at the Jerusalem Council that gentile converts needed to live from the Law?
 4. Name three other men called “apostles” in Acts not of the original twelve? Which one replaced Judas Iscariot?
 5. What authority did the Romans give the Jewish Leaders—who held it? (More details and genealogy the better)
 6. What are the dates of Herod’s Temple? Why is that significant?
 7. What evidence do we have for the authorship of Acts? Where can you find it?
 8. Identify five doctrines or practices found in the early church that Joseph Smith restored (preferably from Acts)
 9. Name four divisions within Judaism and explain what each stood for.
 10. Identify five or more things about the Roman Empire that fostered the growth of Christianity
28. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 755.
 29. *Mishnah, Avoth*, 1:1 The Jews fenced in the Law of Moses with ten thousand commandments that became known as the “oral laws” or the Oral Torah. They systematized these laws as a “buffer zone” to protect their Torah.
 30. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 13.297.
 31. Andrew Ehat and Lindon Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith : The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 14.
 32. Neal A. Maxwell, “Taking up the Cross,” *BYU Speeches: Devotional* (Jan 4, 1976), 255; also Adam Clarke, *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia, PA: Thomas, Cowperthwaite, 1838), 440; “Every circumstance in the case proves them to have been the genuine effusion of a heart persuaded of the truth; and only prevented from fully acknowledging it by secular considerations” (Acts 26:28).
 33. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 234. Caesar had promised “bread and circuses” for all Romans. The food stuffs came from their colonies.
 34. Matthew 9:2, 14:27; Mark 6:50; John 16:33; Acts 23:11; 27:22, 25; Alma 17:31; 3 Nephi 1:13; D&C 61:36; 68:6; 78:18; 112:4. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Learning the Language of the Lord: A Guidebook to Personal Revelation* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2018), 184, 186.
 35. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 782.
 36. Just as he did in Acts 14:8-10; 19:12.
 37. Fitzmyer, *Acts*, 788.
 38. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 211–316. In 1 Timothy and Titus we read of another Pauline visit to Asia Minor, Greece, Crete, and possibly Spain (1 Timothy 1:20). In AD 96 Clement of Rome recorded that Paul reached the “boundaries” or “limits of the west;” suggesting Spain more than Rome. The Muratorian Fragment also says Paul visited Spain. The 4th century historian Eusebius recorded of this time in Paul’s life, “Having, therefore, made his defense at the time, it is recorded that the apostle again journeyed on the ministry of preaching, and, having set foot for a second time in the same city was perfected in his martyrdom.” George Ogg, *The Chronology of the Life of Paul* (Eugene, OR: Methodist Publishing, 1968, reprint, 2016), 186. I agree with many scholars who propose that Paul was set free after his two years, and then preached the gospel for a few more years before a second Roman imprisonment. Paul’s second Roman impris-

onment sounded different that this first as we read of the dark terms in 2 Timothy. This fits in with the timing of more serious Christians persecutions too (after Rome's great fire in July AD 64, which Tacitus claimed, Nero blamed on the Christians). Tacitus, Annals, 15.4, <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/tacitus/tacitus-on-the-christians/>