

¹¹ That night the Lord stood near him and said, “Keep up your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome.”

Acts 23: 11

25 Three days after Festus had arrived in the province, he went up from Caesarea to Jerusalem ² where the chief priests and the leaders of the Jews gave him a report against Paul. They appealed to him ³ and requested, as a favor to them against Paul, to have him transferred to Jerusalem. They were, in fact, planning an ambush to kill him along the way. ⁴ Festus replied that Paul was being kept at Caesarea, and that he himself intended to go there shortly. ⁵ “So,” he said, “let those of you who have the authority come down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them accuse him.”

⁶ After he had stayed among them not more than eight or ten days, he went down to Caesarea; the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. ⁷ When he arrived, the Jews who had gone down from Jerusalem surrounded him, bringing many serious charges against him, which they could not prove. ⁸ Paul said in his defense, “I have in no way committed an offense against the law of the Jews, or against the temple, or against the emperor.” ⁹ But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, asked Paul, “Do you wish to go up to Jerusalem and be tried there before me on these charges?” ¹⁰ Paul said, “I am appealing to the emperor’s tribunal; this is where I should be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you very well know.

¹¹ Now if I am in the wrong and have committed something for which I deserve to die, I am not trying to escape death; but if there is nothing to their charges against me, no one can turn me over to them. I appeal to the emperor.” ¹² Then Festus, after he had conferred with his council, replied, “You have appealed to the emperor; to the emperor you will go.”

¹³ After several days had passed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea to welcome Festus. ¹⁴ Since they were staying there several days, Festus laid Paul’s case before the king, saying, “There is a man here who was left in prison by Felix. ¹⁵ When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me about him and asked for a sentence against him. ¹⁶ I told them that it was not the custom of the Romans to hand over anyone before the accused had met the accusers face to face and had been given an opportunity to make a defense against the charge. ¹⁷ So when they met here, I lost no time, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal and ordered the man to be brought. ¹⁸ When the accusers stood up, they did not charge him with any of the crimes that I was expecting. ¹⁹ Instead they had certain points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, but whom Paul asserted to be alive.

²⁰ Since I was at a loss how to investigate these questions, I asked whether he wished to go to Jerusalem and be tried there on these charges.²¹ But when Paul had appealed to be kept in custody for the decision of his Imperial Majesty, I ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor.” ²² Agrippa said to Festus, “I would like to hear the man myself.” “Tomorrow,” he said, “you will hear him.”

²³ So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then Festus gave the order and Paul was brought in. ²⁴ And Festus said, “King Agrippa and all here present with us, you see this man about whom the whole Jewish community petitioned me, both in Jerusalem and here, shouting that he ought not to live any longer. But I found that he had done nothing deserving death; and when he appealed to his Imperial Majesty, I decided to send him. ²⁶ But I have nothing definite to write to our sovereign about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that, after we have examined him, I may have something to write— ²⁷ for it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner without indicating the charges against him.”

26 Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and began to defend himself:

² “I consider myself fortunate that it is before you, King Agrippa, I am to make my defense today against all the accusations of the Jews, ³ because you are especially familiar with all the customs and controversies of the Jews; therefore I beg of you to listen to me patiently.

⁴ “All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, a life spent from the beginning among my own people and in Jerusalem. ⁵ They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I have belonged to the strictest sect of our religion and lived as a Pharisee. ⁶ And now I stand here on trial on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors, ⁷ a promise that our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship day and night. It is for this hope, your Excellency, that I am accused by Jews! ⁸ Why is it thought incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?

⁹ “Indeed, I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth. ¹⁰ And that is what I did in Jerusalem; with authority received from the chief priests,

“It is too light a thing that you should be my
servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the
earth.”

Isaiah 49:6

I not only locked up many of the saints in prison, but I also cast my vote against them when they were being condemned to death. ¹¹ By punishing them often in all the synagogues I tried to force them to blaspheme; and since I was so furiously enraged at them, I pursued them even to foreign cities.

¹² “With this in mind, I was traveling to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, ¹³ when at midday along the road, your Excellency, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and my companions. ¹⁴ When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵ I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ The Lord answered, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you. ¹⁷ I will rescue you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

¹⁹ “After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, ²⁰ but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance. ²¹ For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me. ²² To this day I have had help from God, and so I stand here, testifying to both small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would take place: ²³ that the Messiah must suffer, and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”

²⁴ While he was making this defense, Festus exclaimed, “You are out of your mind, Paul! Too much learning is driving you insane!” ²⁵ But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth. ²⁶ Indeed the king knows about these things, and to him I speak freely; for I am certain that none of these things has escaped his notice, for this was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you believe.” ²⁸ Agrippa said to Paul, “Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?”

²⁹ Paul replied, “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that not only you but also all who are listening to me today might become such as I am—except for these chains.”

³⁰ Then the king got up, and with him the governor and Bernice and those who had been seated with them; ³¹ and as they were leaving, they said to one another, “This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment.” ³² Agrippa said to Festus, “This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to the emperor.”