

## ACTS 22-24

This section contains Paul's testimony before different people and the political manoeuvring of his enemies (the Jewish leadership, especially the Sadducees), Paul himself, and the Roman authorities at various strata of the chain of command.

To the Jews Paul speaks as a devout Jew. To the Romans he speaks as a Roman citizen. To the Jewish council he speaks as a Pharisee against the Sadducees (who are at the top of the Jewish hierarchy and constitute the Jewish priesthood). Paul is well versed in Greek. Tarsus (his birthplace) was one of three leading educational centres in the world. The common language of Asia minor (outside of the official Greek) was the Semitic Aramean (or "Hebrew" in Acts). The dialect would vary from place to place but the language was essentially the same.

In this section there are three speeches of Paul, all of which are different, tailored to his audience.

### 1) Speech to the Jewish people - 22: 1-22.

Paul emphasizes his devoutness and zeal as a Jew, and one totally committed to eradicating false religion (as he believed "the Way" to be before his encounter with Jesus). It took nothing less than a direct revelation from Christ to change his heart and mind, changing them 180 degrees. From a persecutor he became an evangelist and apologist of the Way. He speaks about this revelation and how it did not change his devoutness to Jewish religion, but only to recognizing that Jesus was the messianic fulfilment of Jewish religious hopes. The revelation from Christ also came to him in the temple (the seat of Jewish religion), and what he heard was a call to take the gospel to the gentiles.

### 2) Speech to the Council (Sanhedrin) – 23: 1-9.

The council was made up mainly of the priestly class of Sadducees (the minority with the greatest power) and the Pharisees (the majority with the least power). Paul appeals to his blameless conduct as a religious Jew. He calls the high priest a "white-washed wall" (outwardly pure but inwardly corrupt). The prediction about the high priest being struck down would have been significant for Luke (the author of Acts). Ananias was high priest from AD 48-58. He was struck down and killed by Jewish patriots in AD 66 as a Roman lackey. Acts was written after this time and, therefore, Paul's words would be seen as prophetic.

Paul's strategy of appealing to the resurrection of the dead was brilliant. For Pharisees believed not only in resurrection, but also in angels, spirits and visions of the divine. Paul's Damascus Road experience would not be dismissed as easily by them as it would by Sadducees who were

much less imaginative and more cynical about such beliefs.

### 3) Paul's speech before Felix, the Roman Governor - 24: 10-21, 24-26.

Paul presents himself as a blameless Jew who had come to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the temple and bring alms (money) to his people (You will recall that this was part of Paul's campaign on his journeys as a gesture of goodwill from the gentile dominated-churches outside Jerusalem to the Jewish-dominated church of Jerusalem). He argues that the real disturbers of the peace were those Jews from Asia who had come down to Jerusalem to accuse him and create a riot. The only controversial thing he claimed was the resurrection of the dead, which a good many Jews believe anyway.

Felix was a brutal governor who was recalled to Rome after complaints about him from the Jewish leadership. His keeping Paul in prison may have been an attempt to appease the Jews. Paul's discussion of justice, self-control and the coming judgement may have scared Felix and his wife Drusilla. Although Drusilla was Jewish, she was reputed to have had many sexual exploits while her husband's lack of self-control expressed itself more in physical brutality and a corruption of justice (by being money hungry and therefore open to bribes).

Paul strategically emphasizes aspects of the Jewish faith (ethics) that would be revered by his audience, and strategically he doesn't bring up Jesus as the Messiah of the Jewish people who also speaks to Paul in visions and dreams (this would be more controversial and cynics like Felix would be less persuaded).

Paul is kept in prison for 2 years, during which time many come to visit. It was probably a good time to write letters.

Depending on his audience and his intention, Paul tells the story of his faith and his personal story of redemption quite differently. How would you tell your story? How has this study of Acts helped you understand the larger biblical story culminating in Jesus' death and resurrection, and then his Spirit (Holy Spirit) moving in and through your life and rising up in and through your inner stirrings and outer service?