

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 18 Acts 21-24

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: When you have completely surrendered to Christ, you don't care what the world will do to you

Chapters 21-24 Paul Arrested

Section 1: Acts 21 There is Nothing More Precious than Faithfulness to Christ

21 After we had torn ourselves away from them, we put out to sea and sailed straight to Kos. The next day we went to Rhodes and from there to Patara. ²We found a ship crossing over to Phoenicia, went on board and set sail. ³After sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it, we sailed on to Syria. We landed at Tyre¹, where our

¹ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 1282

ship was to unload its cargo. ⁴We sought out the disciples there and stayed with them seven days. Through the Spirit they urged Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.⁶After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home.

⁷We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. ⁸Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.

¹⁰After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus² came down from Judea. ¹¹Coming over to us, he took Paul's belt, tied his own hands and feet with it and said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'In this way the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.'"

² *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 26

¹²When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. ¹³Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." ¹⁴When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

¹⁵After this, we started on our way up to Jerusalem. ¹⁶Some of the disciples from Caesarea accompanied us and brought us to the home of Mnason, where we were to stay. He was a man from Cyprus and one of the early disciples.

¹⁷When we arrived at Jerusalem, the brothers and sisters received us warmly. ¹⁸The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

²⁰When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law." ²¹They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the

Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²²What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality."

²⁶The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

²⁷When the seven days were nearly over, some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple. They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him, ²⁸shouting, "Fellow Israelites, help us! This is the man who teaches everyone

everywhere against our people and our law and this place. And besides, he has brought Greeks into the temple and defiled this holy place.”²⁹ (They had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian in the city with Paul and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple.)

³⁰The whole city was aroused, and the people came running from all directions. Seizing Paul, they dragged him from the temple, and immediately the gates were shut. ³¹While they were trying to kill him, news reached the commander of the Roman troops that the whole city of Jerusalem was in an uproar. ³²He at once took some officers and soldiers and ran down to the crowd. When the rioters saw the commander and his soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

³³The commander came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. Then he asked who he was and what he had done. ³⁴Some in the crowd shouted one thing and some another, and since the commander could not get at the truth because of the uproar, he ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. ³⁵When Paul reached the steps, the violence of the mob was so great he had to be carried by the soldiers. ³⁶The

crowd that followed kept shouting, “Get rid of him!”

³⁷As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, “May I say something to you?”

“Do you speak Greek?” he replied. ³⁸“Aren’t you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?”

³⁹Paul answered, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus³ in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people.”

⁴⁰After receiving the commander’s permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic⁴:

These chapters can easily become a long involved history and geography lesson. But these verses were not written for our education, but our edification. We need to hear what God is telling is through them.

³ *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 1225

⁴ *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg.744

Luke begins by telling us that people were urging Paul not to go to Jerusalem, that he would be arrested there and put in chains. The Spirit had told them this. But Paul was fine with this. Paul had come to the place where he knew that God was moving His Kingdom forward and whatever happened to Paul would be God's will to advance His Kingdom.

What would have happened had Paul not been arrested or imprisoned? We would be missing much of the New Testament. The books of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written from this time in prison. Imagine the rich teaching we would be missing.

After hearing Paul's accounts of the Gentiles coming to faith, James praised God. He was worried, however, that the Jews would revolt against Paul. The rumor had been spreading that Paul taught people to neglect the Law of Moses. James told Paul to show good faith by supporting the vows of these four men. Paul agreed.

The whole thing blew up in their faces. Paul was falsely accused, beaten, and arrested (mostly for his own protection).

Section 2: Acts 22 Paul Tries to Speak Reason

22 ¹“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.”

²When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel⁵ and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

⁶“About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

⁸“‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

¹⁰“‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

⁵ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 474

“ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹ My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

¹²“A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³ He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

¹⁴“Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. ¹⁵ You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. ¹⁶ And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

¹⁷“When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance¹⁸ and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

¹⁹“‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and

beat those who believe in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

²¹“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

²² The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

²³ As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air,²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”

²⁶ When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”

²⁷The commander went to Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?"⁶

"Yes, I am," he answered.

²⁸Then the commander said, "I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship."

"But I was born a citizen," Paul replied.

²⁹Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

³⁰The commander wanted to find out exactly why Paul was being accused by the Jews. So the next day he released him and ordered the chief priests and all the members of the Sanhedrin to assemble. Then he brought Paul and had him stand before them.

Paul witnesses—he explains what happened to him. This is the most powerful way you can share your faith, explain what happened to you when you believed. People can argue against a lot of things, but they cannot argue against his experiences of his changed life.

The Romans have no idea what is going on here. They just know that Paul is being accused and attacked by the Jews. This reminds us of Jesus who was unjustly accused by these same Jews before the Romans. They have not changed.

Section 3: A House Divided Amongst Itself...

23 Paul looked straight at the Sanhedrin and said, "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." ²At this the high priest Ananias ordered those standing near Paul to strike him on the mouth. ³Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!"

⁴Those who were standing near Paul said, "How dare you insult God's high priest!"

⁵Paul replied, "Brothers, I did not realize that he was the high priest; for it is written: 'Do not speak evil about the ruler of your people.'^[a]"

⁶Then Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on

⁶ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 281

trial because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead.”⁷ When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.⁸ (The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things.)

⁹There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. “We find nothing wrong with this man,” they said. “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?”¹⁰ The dispute became so violent that the commander was afraid Paul would be torn to pieces by them. He ordered the troops to go down and take him away from them by force and bring him into the barracks.

¹¹The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.”

¹²The next morning some Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.¹³ More than forty men were involved in this

plot.¹⁴ They went to the chief priests and the elders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul.¹⁵ Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here.”

¹⁶But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

¹⁷Then Paul called one of the centurions and said, “Take this young man to the commander; he has something to tell him.”¹⁸ So he took him to the commander.

The centurion said, “Paul, the prisoner, sent for me and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you.”

¹⁹The commander took the young man by the hand, drew him aside and asked, “What is it you want to tell me?”

²⁰He said: “Some Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul before the Sanhedrin tomorrow on the pretext of wanting more accurate information

about him. ²¹ Don't give in to them, because more than forty of them are waiting in ambush for him. They have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

²² The commander dismissed the young man with this warning: "Don't tell anyone that you have reported this to me."

²³ Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, "Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen^[b] to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. ²⁴ Provide horses for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix."

²⁵ He wrote a letter as follows:

²⁶ Claudius Lysias,

To His Excellency, Governor Felix:

Greetings.

²⁷ This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen. ²⁸ I wanted to know why they were

accusing him, so I brought him to their Sanhedrin. ²⁹ I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge against him that deserved death or imprisonment. ³⁰ When I was informed of a plot to be carried out against the man, I sent him to you at once. I also ordered his accusers to present to you their case against him.

³¹ So the soldiers, carrying out their orders, took Paul with them during the night and brought him as far as Antipatris. ³² The next day they let the cavalry go on with him, while they returned to the barracks. ³³ When the cavalry arrived in Caesarea, they delivered the letter to the governor and handed Paul over to him. ³⁴ The governor read the letter and asked what province he was from. Learning that he was from Cilicia, ³⁵ he said, "I will hear your case when your accusers get here." Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace.

This is not going to be a fair trial. Paul was struck for saying he had a clear conscience. He lashed out at the High Priest, and later apologized for lashing out. He didn't correct what he had said. The Jews were whitewashed walls, all clean and white on the outside

hiding filth and death on the inside. Paul was proclaiming a way to be cleansed by God internally. This was far more important than white externals.

Paul noticed that his accusers were made up of Sadducees (who did not believe in the spiritual realm) and Pharisees (who believed in it all, including resurrection, angels, demons, etc.). Imagine being held before a group of university professors half of which who believed in materialism and evolution and the other half which who believed in the spiritual and supernatural side of life. It wouldn't be hard to get them fighting amongst themselves.

The Lord appeared to Paul again and stood near him. Jesus encouraged him and told him that he must testify about Jesus in Rome. How wonderful this must have been for Paul. Jesus visits him as would an old friend.

Paul got wind of the plot to ambush and assassinate him. He revealed the plot to the Romans and they provided protection for him.

Section 4: Acts 24 Red Tape

24 Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. ²When

Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix⁷: "We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. ³Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. ⁴But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

⁵"We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect ⁶and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him. ^[7] ⁸By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him."

⁹The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

¹⁰When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: "I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense.¹¹ You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. ¹²My accusers did not find

⁷ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 449

me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. ¹³And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. ¹⁴However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, ¹⁵and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. ¹⁶So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

¹⁷“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. ¹⁸I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. ¹⁹But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. ²⁰Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin—
²¹unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood

in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

²²Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” ²³He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

²⁴Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁵As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.”²⁶ At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

²⁷When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.

There was no legitimate case against Paul. He was accused of things that could not be proven because they had no basis in truth.

The striking thing here is that Paul was left to sit in prison for two years. But for the Christian, this is really not a problem. Two years to worship uninterrupted. Two years to pray. Two years to meditate on the realities of the story of God's amazing plan of salvation.

The natural man would complain. He would bang his head against the walls in frustration. He would miss his television and music; his walks and bike rides; his work. He would miss these for these are his life and without them he is nothing. But for Paul, God was his life. All the other things could be lost without even a whimper.

What have we learned?

Although Paul was warned about his coming imprisonment, he chose to go forward to Jerusalem. Jesus Himself assured him that he would be okay and that all this was meant to get him to Rome where he would testify to Christ.

Paul was arrested, incarcerated on trumped up charges. Even though they could not be proven, politics played a part and Paul was kept in prison for two years.

What the Text Says

Section 1 Acts 21

Paul was warned by several prophets that if he went to Jerusalem he would be imprisoned. Those who loved him could not stand the thought. He did everything to make sure he didn't offend the Jews. In spite of this, he was arrested, beat up, and almost killed.

Section 2 Acts 22

Paul made his case, but as soon as he mentioned the Gentiles the Jews went crazy. The magistrate wanted to appease the Jews and decided to beat Paul. Then he discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen. It would be illegal to beat him without being convicted first. He decided to let the Jews bring their charges.

Section 3 Acts 23

The Jews weren't looking for truth. They simply wanted to silence Paul at any cost. Paul knew that half these Jews (Saducees) did not believe in spiritual things (including a resurrection) and that half did (Pharisees). A fight ensued and attention was taken away from Paul. Paul was visited by Jesus again (how amazing would this be!) and encouraged that he would testify for Jesus in Rome.

Section 4 Acts 24

Paul was accused and defended himself before Felix. He could see that there was really no case here, however, he believed that he might be able to gain from Paul's imprisonment. He kept him 2 years.

Connecting to the Scripture

The goal for every Christian is to come to the place where Jesus is lord over every part of his life—his time, money, possessions, relationships—and of his life itself. If Jesus allowed us to be put to death or to sit for years in a jail cell for His Name, this would be fine with us.

This is something that never comes easy. It only comes to those who are living more for God than they are for themselves. It comes to those who live their lives on earth as if they were going to live for all eternity in heaven. It comes to those whose closest relationship is not with a human, but with their God.

There may come a time when we are completely physically incapacitated. We may have a terrible illness that puts us in a wheelchair. We may lose our hearing and eyesight. We may become paralyzed as the result of an accident. This will be the time our Christian life will be tested to the fullest.

Imagine yourself in this incapacitated state spending each waking hour worshipping God, praying, meditating on the truths of the Scripture. And imagine that this is enough. Imagine that being in the presence of God satisfies you in every possible way. Your face beams with joy from the Spirit. Your heart pounds with love for God and men. You are the most beautiful person anyone knows. Others in your state feel sorry for themselves and gripe and spit with anger. You are a blessing to all and continue to be a witness to God's sufficiency right up to your last breath. This is what Paul had. This is what we must all strive for.

Questions to Ask During the Study

Section 1 Read Acts 21

1. What do the prophets say is going to happen to Paul if he continues to Jerusalem? How does he respond?
2. How would you feel if you knew you would be arrested for your faith in Christ?

Section 2 Read Acts 22

1. Have you ever argued with someone who didn't want to know the truth, but just wanted to win the argument at all costs? What happened?
2. Can we expect those who oppose us to always want to find truth? What can we do when people are stubborn and irrational?
3. Why does Paul assert his Roman citizenship?

Section 3 Read Acts 23

1. How does Paul divide the Jewish accusers?
2. This is the third time we have recorded that Paul has a visit from Jesus. How would it affect you if Jesus came to you?
3. There is a plot to kill Paul. Should he be afraid?

Section 4 Read Acts 24

1. Paul spends two years in jail. What do you think makes this bearable to him?
2. How would you handle being put in jail for years for your faith?