



## [Acts 25:1-12](#)

Paul appeals to the emperor

**Date:** 70 CE to 130 CE

**Language:** Greek

**Category:** New Testament

**Title of work:** The Acts of the Apostles

**Reference:**

25:1-12

### **Commentary:**

Paul here appears before the Roman procurator of Judea, Porcius Festus (60-62 CE), who has succeeded Antonius Felix (the procurator whom Paul has previously appeared before and preached to – [Acts 24:10-26](#)). Wanting to grant a favour to the Jews, Felix has chosen to leave Paul in prison when Festus takes over from him (Acts 24:27). We are first told that Festus travels to Jerusalem three days after arriving in the province of Judea, likely because the region had a reputation for being somewhat troublesome. It is likely that the new governor wants to establish relationships with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, and the chief priests and Jewish elders themselves certainly take advantage of his visit, using it as an opportunity to make Festus aware of their accusations against Paul, and to ask him to summon Paul to Jerusalem, with the secret intention of ambushing him along the way and killing him (verses 2-3). Previously, in his defence speech before Felix, Paul has blamed a group of Asian Jews for his troubles, who incited the Jerusalem Jews into mobbing him when he worshipped at the Temple, falsely accusing him of stirring up rebellion and defiling the Temple (see [Acts 21:27-40](#); 24:10-26). In this passage, however, it is the Jerusalem authorities who take centre stage as Paul's opponents. Nonetheless, as Joseph Fitzmyer states, they likely repeated the charges made by the Asian Jews, and which were formally stated by Tertullus, the hired orator, before the procurator Felix in Acts 24:1-8 (*Acts of the Apostles*, p. 743). Festus does not directly grant his petitioners their wish, however, rather he informs them that he will be going himself to Caesarea, where Paul is being held, and suggests that some of the most prominent Jewish men of Jerusalem accompany him and if he is found to be guilty prosecute him there instead.

Festus taking his seat on the ???? (the "judgement seat") (verse 6) signals the start of Paul's formal trial in Caesarea, with the Lukan author choosing to summarise the prosecution's accusations, merely painting them in a threatening manner as surrounding Paul and throwing unprovable charges at him (verse 7). The Lukan author (the author of Acts is the same individual responsible for writing the Gospel of Luke) is more concerned with Paul's side of the argument, having already stated here and elsewhere (Acts 24:12-13, 18-19) that the charges brought against him are weak and unsubstantiated by the absence of the Asian Jews who accused him in the first place. Paul begins by stating his innocence (verse 8), before going on to claim that he has not broken Mosaic law (contrary to the accusation in Acts 21:28, and his own statement in 24:14) or committed offences against the Temple. Paul's statement that he has not sinned against Caesar (verse 8) is a new feature, and perhaps reflects the fact that he is now being tried before the Roman tribunal, and wishes to assert that he has not acted in a way that could be construed as against the emperor, who at this time would have been Nero (see Joseph Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 744). Luke's emphasis on Paul's political innocence here suggests that he wants to make clear that Paul's beliefs (i.e. Christianity) are not in conflict with either Judaism or the Roman Empire.

Festus now asks Paul if he would rather be taken and tried in Jerusalem, and we are told that this is the procurator's attempt to do the Jews a favour and presumably get on the right side of them as important figures in a key city of his jurisdiction (echoing Felix's sentiment in Acts 24:27). It was actually common practice in Roman law that plaintiffs had to go to the court chosen by the defendant (*actor rei forum sequitur*). One suggestion is that perhaps Festus felt that the Jewish Sanhedrin was a more appropriate location for Paul's trial, which would fit with the rhetoric of Paul's appearance before Felix, where it is made extremely clear by the Lukan author that the crux of the matter is theological difference between Paul and his accusers, not political wrongdoing. However, Festus states that the trial will still be "before [him]" (verse 9), which makes it impossible for the Sanhedrin to have been his suggestion here. Some manuscripts add the word "or" before ??' ???? , meaning that both settings are listed as options for Paul (on this issue, see Adrian Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, p. 67 and Harry Tajra,



*The Trial of St Paul*, p. 141-142). Indeed, this variation makes Paul's response make much more sense, as he replies that his case has already passed beyond a religious level and into the realm of Roman jurisdiction, and so by standing before Caesar's procurator, he is effectively at the mercy of Caesar himself (verse 10).

When given the option, Paul wants the Sanhedrin to have no further role in deciding his fate – he is a Roman citizen (although Paul does not state this explicitly here; see Acts 22:22-29), and is therefore exactly where he should be. Paul nods to the governor's right to condemn him to death (verse 11), and claims that he does not seek to escape this if he is in fact guilty. If, however, as the Lukan author has made abundantly clear by this point in the extended narrative of Paul's trials, his accusers have nothing to back up their charges, Paul states that no one is justifiably able to hand him over to them (even the governor's choice to do this would be illegal). Paul's clear lack of confidence in the Jerusalem council is not surprising, and makes clear that in the eyes of the Lukan author, the Roman legal system is much more worthy of trust in this instance. Paul's invocation of Caesar's intervention marks the end of the proceedings, as he calls upon a higher power than the one he stands before. This means that Paul will now be required to stay in Roman custody (and so will not be given to the Sanhedrin). Paul employs here *provocatio* (the legal right to appeal to the *princeps*), which was confirmed by Augustus in the *Lex Iulia de vi publica seu privata* and protected Roman citizens from excessive autocratic decisions made by provincial governors, such as execution, torture etc. (see Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, p. 68-69 and Peter Garnsey, "The *Lex Iulia* and Appeal under the Empire"). The problem here is that in order for Paul to appeal, some sort of verdict would surely be required on the part of Festus, which we are not informed of here. It may be that Festus viewed Paul's case as out of the ordinary (Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, p. 62) or was worried about the ramifications of breaking Roman law if he was mistaken as to the proper course of action and denied Paul's request (see Craig Keener, *Acts*, p. 3465-3467). Whatever the situation, Festus confers with his council (*consilium*), whom would have been present even though Luke does not mention them until now, and agrees to grant Paul's appeal. It is a matter of debate among historians as to whether the governor's permission to appeal was actually required (see Harry Tajra, *The Trial of St Paul*, p. 149-151), but Luke narrates it this way in any case, and Paul's desire to remain in the Roman legal system, away from the disingenuous Jewish authorities, is granted. Moreover, this episode marks an important moment in Luke's story of Paul, as it sets the occasion for his journey to Rome, where he will continue to spread the Christian message.

Keywords in the original language:

- [?????????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [????????](#)
- [????](#)
- [????????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [??????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [????????????](#)

Thematic keywords in English:



- [appeal](#)
- [Caesarea Maritima](#)
- [chief priests](#)
- [council](#)
- [Jerusalem](#)
- [Jerusalem Temple](#)
- [Jewish Law](#)
- [Paul the Apostle](#)
- [Porcius Festus](#)
- [procurator](#)
- [province](#)
- [Roman emperor](#)
- [Roman law](#)
- [tribunal](#)

**Bibliographical references:**

[The Acts of the Apostles: A New Commentary with Introduction and Commentary](#)

Fitzmyer, Joseph A. book *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Commentary with Introduction and Commentary* London Doubleday 1998

[The Trial of St Paul: A Juridical Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles](#)

Tajra, Henry book *The Trial of St Paul: A Juridical Exegesis of the Second Half of the Acts of the Apostles* Tübingen Mohr Siebeck 1976

[Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament](#)

Sherwin-White, Adrian N. book *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* Oxford Clarendon Press 1963

[Representations of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke-Acts](#)

Joshua Yoder book *Representations of Roman Rule: Roman Provincial Governors in Luke-Acts* Berlin Walter de Gruyter 2014

[“The Lex Iulia and Appeal under the Empire”](#)

Garnsey, Peter article-in-a-journal 167-18956 “The *Lex Iulia* and Appeal under the Empire” *Journal of Roman Studies* 1966

[Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 24:1-28:31](#)

Keener, Craig S. book *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 24:1-28:31* Grand Rapids, MI Baker Academic 2015

**Other sources connected with this document:** Text

[Acts 21:27-40 and 22:22-29](#)

Paul is seized in the Jerusalem Temple, and appeals to his Roman citizenship



- [Read more about Acts 21:27-40 and 22:22-29](#)

Text

## [Acts 24:10-26](#)

Paul's defence before Felix the procurator

- [Read more about Acts 24:10-26](#)

**Realized by:**

[Kimberley Fowler](#)



**Source URL:** <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/acts-251-12>