

A low-angle photograph of a classical building facade, likely a courthouse or government building. The image shows a series of statues on a balcony or frieze, and a large column in the foreground. The sky is overcast.

STUDY 9 || *ACTS 24-26*

GOSPEL IN COURT

Plenty of Christians are politically involved - from those who picket outside abortion clinics; to those who hold prayer vigils in response to immigration policy; or others who actively write to their local members about religious freedoms in their local communities; or Christians who are politicians.

How politically motivated should Christians be? What do you think Christians should fight for in our society?

The message that the one who died for sin is King was turning the world upside down and the Jewish religious leaders were threatened by it. In Acts 23:12-35 the Jews are intent on having Paul executed. But with their assassination plot foiled, they embark on a new approach to shut Paul up, appealing to the Roman judicial system. Paul is dragged before the courts and is put on trial before three separate judges. How will Paul fare against another round of opposition? How will the gospel stand up to international and political scrutiny? And what is he willing to forgo for the sake of the gospel being proclaimed?

TRIAL ONE

Read Acts 24:1-27

1. In the first trial, Paul is brought before the local governor, Felix. What are the charges brought against Paul by the Jews? (v5-9)

2. How does Paul defend himself (11-16) and what does he believe to be the real issue at stake here (20-21)?

Do you think Paul is primarily defending his own actions, or has he got other concerns?

3. Felix is perplexed by the case and adjourns the trial. A couple of days later he calls for Paul again to explain himself. Why do you think Felix sends for Paul? What was he hoping for?

What does Felix get instead?

What do we learn from Paul about facing potential injustices in our own lives and what is of primary importance under such circumstances?

TRIAL TWO

The Jewish leaders are up to their old tricks again. They appeal to the new governor, Festus to return Paul to Jerusalem for 'a local trial'... by which they really mean 'return Paul to Jerusalem where we can quietly assassinate him' (v3). But instead Festus decides to hear the case himself. Read **Acts 25:6-12** to find out what happens.

4. How does Paul defend himself against the charges?

Even though Paul is innocent, why do you think he appeals to Caesar under these circumstances?

5. Festus is also perplexed by the case and doesn't know what to do. And so he seeks the advice of the Jewish King Agrippa, who happens to be in town. Read **Acts 25:13-22**. Why is Festus so perplexed by this case (v18-20)?

TRIAL THREE

6. Things are escalating quickly! Paul's been on trial first before the Jewish leaders (ch23), then two Roman governors (ch25&26), and now before a King. Read Acts 26:1-23. How would you describe:

Paul's manner?

His defence?

His purpose?

7. Half-way through Paul's defence Festus interrupts. What does he find so unreasonable and offensive in what Paul's saying (v22-26)?

8. How does Agrippa respond to the gospel (v28-29)?

What is Agrippa's verdict (31-32)?

What do you think is significant about the repeated declaration of Paul's innocence in these chapters (25:25, 26:31-32)?

9. Paul is repeatedly put on trial despite the three-fold declaration of his innocence (see 25:8). Yet his primary concern at trial is not his own safety or acquittal. What is Paul's primary purpose and mission in these passages (see 24:21; 26:7-8, 23; and also 28:28)?

GOSPEL ON TRIAL

Paul only wants to spread the news about Jesus. And he uses every opportunity to do just that - even sharing the gospel with his own judges. It's a bold approach to life! Even in the face of opposition, assassination attempts and political scrutiny, Paul keeps fighting for the right to keep sharing the gospel, even if that meant forgoing his own individual freedom and rights.

10. What would it look like for you to defend your right to keep sharing the gospel in the following areas, even if that meant giving up some of your own personal freedoms:
 - Work
 - School
 - Politics