

EXPERIENCE THE LAND AND THE BOOK

A Captive's Call to Freedom

Acts 24–26



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Along the beautiful Mediterranean lies the coastal city of Caesarea. Caesarea was the official seat of government, a busy port, and a naval base for the powerful Romans in the province of Israel. On the grounds of the seaside palace called Herod's Praetorium, the apostle Paul was unjustly imprisoned AD 58–60. Through a curious chain of events, Jerusalem's authorities brought Paul here to appear before the Roman magistrate on three trumped-up charges. Paul modeled for us how a thinking, believing follower of Christ can defend himself or herself against criticism.



A CLOSER LOOK

Caesarea

Stand on the edge of Israel with your toes in the Mediterranean and imagine the history buried underfoot. Caesarea, one of the great archaeological sites in Israel, boasts a long and glorious past.

Herod the Great built Caesarea around 22 BC and named it in honor of Caesar. A city of fine marble and grand monuments, it was the hub of Roman presence in Israel during Jesus' time. Israel had no natural harbor, so Herod built one here—a world-class forty-acre seaport named Sebastos (Greek for “Augustus”) that boosted Israel into international trade. Caesarea sat strategically close to the Via Maris, the trade route between Egypt and regions like Persia, Babylonia, Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula. A towering lighthouse at the harbor entrance could be seen for miles. This new source of enormous trade revenue was later used to fund Herod the Great's other personal projects, like his palaces at Masada and Jericho and the rebuilding of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Near the Caesarean harbor, Herod also built himself a luxurious palace (the foundation of which can still be seen today) that extended into the Mediterranean on its own peninsula. Not far away stood a grand theater that seated four thousand people—offering strategic entertainment that offended the Jew but promoted the Greek culture. In the nearby hippodrome (horse track) that sat near the theater complex, Herod

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Quotable

*The simple facts
of the gospel
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personal decision.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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brought “the games” into Jewish culture. These games were dedicated to pagan gods in an attempt to hellenize his kingdom. Chariot races were the rage, as were gladiatorial contests that included men and animals.

With all of these draws, Caesarea grew to become the largest city in Judea, with an estimated population of 125,000 at the time of Christ.

Until the 1950s and 1960s, all of Caesarea's secrets lay under sand. Archaeologists continue to work today unearthing new discoveries related to this first-century hotspot of Greek culture in a Jewish world.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Biblical Survey of Caesarea

Caesarea had a long and storied history in the New Testament. This city was the place of ministry for Philip, one of the original deacons (Acts 8:40). It was the place Peter preached to the Roman centurion Cornelius (10:24). And it was the place where Herod Agrippa I accepted worship from his subjects (12:19–24).

2. Paul's Imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 24–26)

Paul spent two years as a prisoner of Rome in the Caesarean jail, appearing before the governors Felix and Festus and before King Herod Agrippa II.

From Paul's court appearances, we learn seven important truths about responding to unjust criticism:

- **Paul refused to get caught up in the emotion of the charges.** “Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense” (Acts 24:10).
- **Paul stayed with the facts.** In a deliberate, logical manner, Paul reviewed the events to which his accusers referred (24:11–13).



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- **Paul told the truth with a clear conscience.** Paul chose his words carefully to build trust with his hearers.
- **Paul identified the original source of the criticism.** Paul knew who had accused him, but the only ones present were people with secondhand information (Acts 24:17–21).
- **Paul would not surrender and quit.** Paul didn't walk off the scene exasperated by the injustice or fold in fear before Felix. He was not afraid to discuss righteousness and judgement.
- **Paul did not become impatient or bitter.** Two years in prison waiting for a judgement is a long time. Yet we read nothing in Acts 24 that leads us to believe that Paul suffered from any level of depression or regret by his undeserved prison term—even when Felix exited the scene and left Paul sitting in his cell. Amazing!
- **Paul stood firmly on God's promises.** Paul clung to what the Lord had said and took action based on his belief. Frustrated Festus didn't take long to come back with a ruling: "To Caesar you shall go" (Acts 25:12).



LET'S LIVE IT

Paul's imprisonment reveals three truths about the gospel: First, the simple facts of the gospel are true and reasonable. Second, the clear presentation of the gospel calls for a decision. Third, the personal response to the gospel must be left to God.

What was your life like before you surrendered it to Christ? What happened that prompted you to turn to Jesus for salvation? What has your life been like since? What changes do you see in yourself and your situation?



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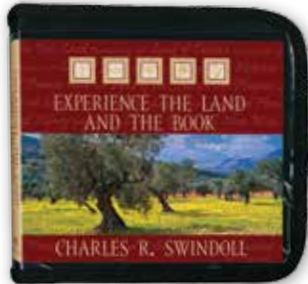
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Tools for Digging Deeper



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