Major speeches in Acts

Here is our summary of the major speeches in Acts, as referred to in the ForeCast livestream on 7th June 2020.

Each entry gives you a quick synopsis of the occasion, the length (in words and time when read aloud), the structure, a possible purpose for the speech (there could be others) and the results.

See p4 for the full text of each speech, from the NIV. We think it will take you 40-45 minutes to read them all aloud. Why not read two a day, for a week?

**Acts 2:14-39: Peter addresses the onlookers after Pentecost.**

577 words (4’30”)

* Structure: Three sections, each with a lengthy OT Scriptural reference; then a conclusion.
* Possible purpose … establish Scriptural basis for Jesus’s work and the coming of the Holy Spirit. The calling of the Jews to repentance and baptism.
* Result: 3000 converts in a day.

**Acts 3:12-26: Peter speaks to onlookers after lame man is healed**

343 words (3’)

* Structure: Addresses the issue (healing), diverts to talking about Jesus, makes appeal
* Possible purpose: Sets the death, resurrection and return of Jesus in a Jewish historical context, with an action point for the hearers today
* Result: 2000 more people converted (Ac 4:4), Peter and John arrested

**Acts 4:8-12: Peter and John defend the faith in front of the religious rulers**

107 words (1’)

* Structure: Acknowledges the charge against them, and moves straight in to a statement about salvation in Jesus
* Possible purpose: Outlines the shape of the religious struggle which Christianity quickly introduced
* Result: Peter and John released unrestrained; praise party

**Acts 5:29-33: Peter defends the faith in the Sanhedrin**

71 words (0’30”)

* Structure: Defence of their actions turned instantly into a testimony about Jesus
* Possible purpose: Shows the believers were not cowed, emphasises Israel’s need for repentance, sets up the ground for Gamaliel’s important speech
* Result: apostles flogged, but Gospel spreads ‘house to house’

**Acts 7:2-53: Stephen teaches and rebukes the Sanhedrin and High Priest**

1232 words (10’)

* Structure: Detailed historical account of Abraham, the patriachs, Moses and prophets, with touchpoints of prophecy about Jesus
* Possible purpose: The Jewish Christians were orthodox and committed to their faith, but see Jesus in all of it
* Result: Stephen stoned, persecution begins, Church goes from Jerusalem and into Judea and Samaria

**Acts 10:34-43: Peter addresses Gentiles at Cornelius’s house**

225 words (2’)

* Structure: Peter tells them what Jesus did for Israel, and explains his revelation that the Gentiles are also included
* Possible purpose: Pivotal moment when the Christian faith ceases to be a Jewish concern
* Result: Holy Spirit comes on Gentiles as he came on the Jews in Acts 2

**Acts 13:16-41: Paul lays out the Gospel for Jews and god-fearing Gentiles in Pisidian Antioch**

541 words (4’30”)

* Structure: History lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures, linked directly to Jesus as “promised Saviour”, and offer extended to the new hearers
* Possible purpose: Explains Paul’s transition to working among the Gentiles; his missionary work began with Jews and ‘god-fearers’ as an offer of forgiveness and a warning not to join the scoffers
* Result: Jews reject Paul out of jealousy, and Paul turns to the Gentiles. The Gospel spreads, and the Jews become enemies of Paul

**Acts 14:15-17: Barnabas and Paul reject a crowd’s attempts to make them ‘gods’**

92 words (1’)

* Structure: Desperate appeal to a crowd going out of control
* Possible purpose: Outlines God’s goodness to all people of the world and rejects attempts to honour his servants
* Result: Jews win the crowd over and Paul gets stone and left for dead

**Acts 17:22-31: Paul defends his Gospel in the Athenian Areopagus**

270 words (2’30”)

* Structure: A local observation, a universal application, an explanation of the common human longing for the divine, and a reference to “the man” appointed to judge (interestingly, Jesus is not named)
* Possible purpose: A demonstration that the Gospel can hold its own against Greek philosophers just as much as the Jewish religious hierarchy
* Result: Controversy, but converts among the important Athenians

**Acts 20:18-35: Paul says goodbye to the Ephesian church leaders**

410 words (3’30”)

* Structure: A reminder of his servant-leader role, and an appeal to them to maintain the model
* Possibly purpose: Lays out Paul’s method of living and working with a new church, and demonstrates his care for them (and desire to protect them from ‘wolves’)
* Result: Lots of tears!

**Acts 22:3-21: Paul defends himself to the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem**

431 words (4’)

* Structure: Paul’s testimony, explaining his direct revelation from God. He is apparently unable to finish due to the angry crowd.
* Possible purpose: Demonstrates Paul’s willingness to continue to try to win over the Jews in Jerusalem, and their resistance to one who has ‘gone over’ to the Gentiles
* Result: Paul’s long journey to Rome begins

**Acts 24:10-21: Paul on trial before Felix the Governor**

282 words (2’30”)

* Structure: Paul’s legal defence transcript, and an explanation of his reason for coming to Jerusalem
* Possible purpose: If Paul was still in prison when Acts was written, as we believe, putting his defence here may have been helpful to him
* Result: A two-year delay in the prison of a corrupt ruler

**Acts 26:2-23: Paul defends himself to King Agrippa and Festus the Governor**

582 words (5’)

* Structure: Paul establishes his Jewish credentials, tells his story, explains his ministry (and gets interrupted)
* Possible purpose: The power of Paul’s defence, even before significant rulers
* Result: Paul continues his (ordained) journey to Rome

**Acts 28:25-28: Paul addresses the Jewish leaders on his arrival in Rome**

98 words (1’)

* Structure: The passage from v17 shows that Paul’s sermons were definitely longer than this! (See v23, for example.)
* Possible purpose: This passage is the culmination of his sermon, and the final message of the Book of Acts – the Gospel was offered first to the Jews, but is now going out into the Gentile world
* Result: Some were convinced, most probably not, and Paul became a house-bound preacher to “all who came” for two years (up to the time of writing?)

Acts 2:14-39

‘Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

‘“In the last days, God says,  
    I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
    your young men will see visions,  
    your old men will dream dreams.  
Even on my servants, both men and women,  
    I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
    and they will prophesy.  
I will show wonders in the heavens above  
    and signs on the earth below,  
    blood and fire and billows of smoke.  
The sun will be turned to darkness  
    and the moon to blood  
    before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.  
And everyone who calls  
    on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

‘Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. David said about him:

‘“I saw the Lord always before me.  
    Because he is at my right hand,  
    I will not be shaken.  
Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
    my body also will rest in hope,  
because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,  
    you will not let your holy one see decay.  
You have made known to me the paths of life;  
    you will fill me with joy in your presence.”

‘Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that he was not abandoned to the realm of the dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said,

‘“The Lord said to my Lord:  
    ‘Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
    a footstool for your feet.’”

‘Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.’

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’

Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’

Acts 3:12-26

‘Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

‘Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. For Moses said, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.”

‘Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, “Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.” When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.’

Acts 4:8-12

 ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is

‘“the stone you builders rejected,  
    which has become the cornerstone.”

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’

Acts 5:29-32

‘We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead – whom you killed by hanging him on a cross.  God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins.  We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’

Acts 7:2-53

‘Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. “Leave your country and your people,” God said, “and go to the land I will show you.”

‘So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. God spoke to him in this way: “For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and ill-treated. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,” God said, “and afterwards they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.” Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

‘Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

‘Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

‘As the time drew near for God to fulfil his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. Then “a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt”. He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

‘At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

‘When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. He saw one of them being ill-treated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defence and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought that his own people would realise that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, “Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?”

‘But the man who was ill-treating the other pushed Moses aside and said, “Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?” When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

‘After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

‘Then the Lord said to him, “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.”

‘This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, “Who made you ruler and judge?” He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

‘This is the Moses who told the Israelites, “God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.” He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

‘But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They told Aaron, “Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt – we don’t know what has happened to him!” That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and revelled in what their own hands had made. But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

‘“Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings  
    for forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?  
You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek  
    and the star of your god Rephan,  
    the idols you made to worship.  
Therefore I will send you into exile” beyond Babylon.

‘Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, who enjoyed God’s favour and asked that he might provide a dwelling-place for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

‘However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

‘“Heaven is my throne,  
    and the earth is my footstool.  
What kind of house will you build for me?  
says the Lord.  
    Or where will my resting place be?  
Has not my hand made all these things?”

‘You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: you always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him – you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.’

Acts 10:34-43

 ‘I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

‘We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.’

Acts 13:16-41

‘Fellow Israelites and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! The God of the people of Israel chose our ancestors; he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt; with mighty power he led them out of that country; for about forty years he endured their conduct in the wilderness; and he overthrew seven nations in Canaan, giving their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years.

‘After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet. Then the people asked for a king, and he gave them Saul son of Kish, of the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for forty years. After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: “I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.”

‘From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Saviour Jesus, as he promised. Before the coming of Jesus, John preached repentance and baptism to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his work, he said: “Who do you suppose I am? I am not the one you are looking for. But there is one coming after me whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

‘Fellow children of Abraham and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognise Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the cross and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had travelled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

‘We tell you the good news: what God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:

‘“You are my son;  
    today I have become your father.”

God raised him from the dead so that he will never be subject to decay. As God has said,

‘“I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.”

So it is also stated elsewhere:

‘“You will not let your holy one see decay.”

‘Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his ancestors and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

‘Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you:

‘“Look, you scoffers,  
    wonder and perish,  
for I am going to do something in your days  
    that you would never believe,  
    even if someone told you.”’

Acts 14:15-17

‘Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: he has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.’

Acts 17:22-31

‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. “For in him we live and move and have our being.” As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.”

‘Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.’

Acts 20:18-35

 ‘You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

‘And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the good news of God’s grace.

‘Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of any of you. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

‘Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. I have not coveted anyone’s silver or gold or clothing. You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”’

Acts 22:3-21

‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, as 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.

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

‘“Who are you, Lord?” I asked.

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

‘“What shall I do, Lord?” I asked.

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

‘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. He stood beside me and said, “Brother Saul, receive your sight!” And at that very moment I was able to see him.

‘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. You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised and wash your sins away, calling on his name.”

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

‘“Lord,” I replied, “these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. 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.”

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

Acts 24:10-31

‘I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defence. You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. However, 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, and 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. So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

‘After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. I 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. But 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. Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin – unless 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.”’

Acts 26:2-23

‘King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defence against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

‘The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

‘I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

‘On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.”

‘Then I asked, “Who are you, Lord?”

‘“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” the Lord replied. “Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

‘So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. That is why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen – that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.’

Acts 28:25-28

‘The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

‘“Go to this people and say,  
‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding;  
    you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.’  
For this people’s heart has become calloused;  
    they hardly hear with their ears,  
    and they have closed their eyes.  
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,  
    hear with their ears,  
    understand with their hearts  
and turn, and I would heal them.”

‘Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!’