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PAULUS

A play in two acts

By Motti Lerner

©

Translated by Hillel Halkin

Although this play is inspired by the life of Paulus, the events in it do not give a historic account. Some of its characters are imaginary, while others, introduced for dramatic purposes, are free adaptations of historical figures.

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The Structure

The play has two plots. The frame plot is set in 64 A.D. in different parts of a prison yard in Rome and is mostly concerned with Paulus' Via Dolorosa on the way to his death. The main plot takes place in various locations in Jerusalem and Caesarea and deals with the schism between Paulus and the Jewish establishment that occurred during his visit to Judea in 58-60. This main plot unfolds in Paulus' mind as he goes his last way.

The Characters

Paulus - A Jew born in Tarsus (48)

Hananiah - The High Priest in Jerusalem (48)

Jesus - A Jew crucified by the Romans after declaring himself the Messiah (62)

Nero - The emperor of Rome (21)

Trophimos - Paulus' servant (40)

Adima - Paulus' divorced wife (44)

Eleazar - Paulus' nephew (32)

Lysias - A Roman centurion in Jerusalem (35)

Felix - The Roman procurator in Caesarea (40)

Drusilla - Felix's wife, the daughter of King Agrippa I (35)

Also, prison guards, soldiers, officers, beggars, praying women, masked killers, and others. More than one role can be played by the same actor.

Act I

Scene 1

The yard of a prison in Rome, 64 A.D. Dawn. Paulus is asleep on the floor. An officer rouses him.

Officer: Rise, Paulus. Your time has come.

Paulus: Where to? To the courtroom? To freedom?

Officer: For a walk.

Paulus: I've done no wrong. Caesar knows it wasn't I who set fire to Rome.

Officer: The only person who knows what Caesar knows is Caesar. **(He prods him)** Get up!

Paulus: **(Getting up)** Take me to him. I need to speak to him.

Enter two soldiers carrying a cross.

Officer: **(To Paulus)** Shoulder it.

Paulus: You're going to crucify me?

1st soldier: You're going for your morning bath in the river.

2nd soldier: And for breakfast in the palace.

Officer: I said shoulder it.

The soldiers lay the cross on Paulus' shoulder.

Paulus: Who sentenced me? I want to plead my case before the judges. Why would I want to burn Rome? Take me to Caesar.

Officer: Move!

Paulus: **(Heavenward)** Master of the Universe, have You made up Your mind to kill me? For What?

The soldiers push Paulus, carrying the cross, off the stage.

Scene 2

A gate of Jerusalem, 58 A.D. Light falls on the Roman emperor Nero standing on the city wall. He sings, accompanying himself on a zither:

Nero: I came into this world, took a look, and gave a start.
 What makes the sun shine? The wind blow? A woman love?
 What makes the stars roam the sky?
 Where do we go when we die?

I grew and so did my fears. I prayed to my gods
 To mercifully grant me long life.
 Let the sun keep shining, the wind go on blowing,
 So that I could have time for loving and knowing.

Meanwhile, my people harnessed the wind for their ships,
 Plowed the earth to grow food.
 They made fires to keep warm indoors,
 Created poetry, science, laughter, and laws.

The gods remained with nothing to do
 But carouse and grow fat and stupidly stew
 In their juice. Now the time has finally come
 For them to clear out and let me be the one -- to rule all!

Nero turns to the audience.

Nero: I'm Nero, emperor of Rome. And one of the world's great artists. Some say the greatest. I'm waiting for the applause. **(He laughs)**

Paulus and Trophimos enter, their packs on their backs, and approach the city gate. Trophimos supports the weary Paulus. Three men and a woman come from the gate to greet them. One man is a beggar, a second is blind, and the third is a paralytic who drags himself on the ground with his hands. The woman carries a dead baby.

1st Man: Have pity on us, Paulus! We're being driven mad by despair.

2nd Man: You who have opened so many eyes, make me see again!

3rd Man: Make me walk and I'll worship you forever.

Woman: My child is dead, Paulus. He's dead.

Trophimos: Good people, my master has just arrived in Jerusalem. He's been on the hot, dusty road for three days, without shutting his eyes. He hasn't eaten or drunk. His servant is bushed, too.

Paulus: I'm a bearer of the gospel. I bring tidings of Jesus the Messiah. I don't work miracles that would take your mind off him. If you want to be saved, believe in him and beg for his mercy.

1st Man: Give us a sign and we'll believe.

Woman: Just one sign to strengthen us.

Paulus: Anyone asking for signs is of little faith. If you believe in the Messiah with all your hearts, he'll work the miracles you pray for.

Trophimos: My master will be in Jerusalem for two weeks. There will be faith-strengthening sessions every day before evening prayers.

Woman: My child is dead, Paulus. My child is dead.

Trophimos: We'll see you tomorrow at the Temple gate.

Paulus: **(To the Woman)** Be of good cheer. God's love for man knows no measure. That's why he sent us His Messiah, that's why He sacrificed him, that's why he raised him from the dead to give us hope that we too can vanquish death.

Trophimos: Perform your ablutions and pray. Any donations will be much appreciated.

Adima enters. Her robe is torn and her hair is unkempt.

Adima: Behold the vision of the prophetess Adima! Thus spoke the Lord: "Hurry, woman, to the gates of Jerusalem and warn Paulus that there are those who seek his life." **(To the beggar)** And when he is crucified upside-down, waiting for his Messiah to save him, you'll see that he hasn't even a single coin in his pockets for you.

Paulus: God be with you, Adima. Please, cover yourself against the sun. **(He covers her exposed parts)** You look well.

Adima takes Paulus' belt and ties his hands with it. Paulus does not resist.

Adima: Thus says the Lord: "So shall be done to you by the people of Jerusalem. In chains will you be delivered by Hananiah the High Priest to the Roman procurator, who will cast you into the pit." **(To the woman with the skin disease)** When he's there, he'll call for you to scratch the flea bites on his ass.

Paulus: Have no fear, good Adima. Your uncle Hananiah is my friend.

Adima: Beware and be on your guard, says the Lord. Fear of our Roman oppressors and of the Zealots who have risen against them have hardened Hananiah's heart. **(To the blind man)** Tell him what you see, blind man.

Paulus: My pants are falling down, Adima.

Adima: He sees a sword hanging over the streets of Jerusalem. A head rolling on the ground will bring no tidings to mankind, Paulus.

Paulus: I'm the Lord's servant. He'll protect me. **(He takes her arm)** Let me see you home. Is your mother still alive? Who takes care of you? Who gives you food and washes you?

Adima: Hold me, Paulus. I've been looking everywhere for you in the streets and marketplaces. Yea, I sought you but could not find you.

Paulus: Your mother must be dead.

Adima: You gave me your word that you would return to me.

Paulus: You heard what you wanted, Adima.

Adima: You gave it. In my bed. In my arms. **(She points to the woman with the dead baby)** You gave me as much joy as this woman's husband gave her on the night she conceived.

Paulus: The last time I saw you, waiting for me at the city gate, I turned around and walked away.

Adima: God is my witness, Paulus.

Paulus: Let me take you to Hananiah.

Adima: Hold me like a husband, not like a master!

Paulus: His maidservants will bandage your wounds and patch your robe, Adima.

Adima: **(Angrily)** Only my husband will take me where I don't want to go.

She slips from his grip and enters the city. He hurries after her. Trophimos Hurries after them.

Scene 3

The gate of the High Priest Hananiah's home. Nighttime. A lone torch lights the city wall. Paulus and Trophimos arrive holding their bags. Paulus knocks on the gate.

Paulus: Hananiah the High Priest! **(No one answers.)** Hananiah the High Priest!

A servant opens a peephole in the gate.

Servant: Good evening. Who might you be?

Paulus: My name is Paulus. I'm a friend of Hananiah's. I'd like a word with him.

Servant: I'll be right back.

The servant shuts the peephole.

Trophimos: When the gate opens, there'll be a sword for your belly. For mine, too.

Paulus: When the gate opens, Hananiah will embrace me and kiss me.

Trophimos: Of course. His servants are already setting a royal feast for you.

Trophimos wraps himself in his robe and sits morosely on a stone. Light falls on an elderly man. He is Jesus. Paulus kneels and kisses his hand.

Jesus: Blessed be your coming, Paulus.

Paulus: My lord Jesus! Blessed be my lord and blessed be his name. **(He kisses his hand)**

Jesus: I thank the Holy One Blessed Be He for letting me see you again, my son. I thought you had come to Jerusalem to strengthen my believers, but you're at Hananiah's instead.

Paulus: I heard he's been appointed High Priest, Rabbi.

Jesus: And does that make his sins white as snow? He sat on the Sanhedrin that handed me over to be crucified.

Paulus: He was young then. He let himself follow the multitude¹.

Jesus: He persecutes our people to this day.

Paulus: That's why I've hurried here. I know his ways and manners. If it be your wish, I'll win him over to our faith.

Jesus: If he is won, I fear our faith will be lost.

¹ Exodus, 23:2

- Paulus: God forbid, Rabbi. If he joins us, so will many others.
- Jesus: We don't want the powerful, Paulus. We want the poor in spirit and the pure of heart who hunger and thirst for righteousness.² And to be worthy of redemption they must keep all six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah, as must all Gentiles who join us.
- Paulus: Of course, Rabbi.
- Jesus: That means circumcision. It means the Sabbath and the festivals, the dietary laws, the prayers, and the laws of purity. **(Paulus is silent)** It's been rumored, my son, that you are not as strict with these Gentiles as the law commands.
- Paulus: I am as strict as they can bear.
- Jesus: As the Law commands, Paulus.
- Paulus: If we are as strict as the Law commands, they'll never join us.
- Jesus: Do we want them to? Haven't I said: Go not into the way of the Gentiles, but go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel?³
- Paulus: I've seen them on my travels, Rabbi. In Antioch, in Corinth, in Philippi. They are weary of their gods and looking for a different God. When they hear from me about your crucifixion and resurrection, their eyes are opened and they pray for redemption.
- Jesus: Redemption will be granted to them because of the commandments they observe.
- Paulus: Our father Abraham made his covenant with God before there were any commandments. Our teachings tell us there are no commandments in the World to Come.⁴
- Jesus: The dead alone have none.
- Paulus: Yes, Rabbi.
- Jesus: Leave Hananiah alone and I'll forgive your errant ways. **(He puts a hand on Paulus' head)** You are the good tree that brings forth good fruit⁵, Paulus, but your hunger for redemption leads you astray. Why? The sins of your youth have been forgiven. There's nothing for you to atone for any more. Go at dawn to the Temple, purify yourself with

² Mathew, 5: 3-7

³ Mathew, 10: 5-6

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Nidah 61a

⁵ According to Matthew, 7:17

ablutions, fortify yourself with prayer, and return to your mission among our people across the sea.

Jesus vanishes. Trophimos turns to Paulus.

Trophimos: We'd better get out of here, Master. The High Priest must have sent for the police by now.

Paulus: Hananiah the High Priest! Hananiah the High Priest!

He bangs on the gate. The peephole opens.

Servant: You're still here? Can't you see he doesn't want to see you? He doesn't even want to tell you that he doesn't want to see you. **(He shuts the peephole)**

Trophimos: Why don't we look for somewhere to spend the night?

Paulus: I'm not moving from here until he sees me.

Trophimos: Here come the police.

Two figures emerge from the dark. Trophimos urges Paulus to flee, but Paulus recognizes Adima and his nephew Eleazar.

Adima: **(To Eleazar)** There he is.

Eleazar: I looked for you among the Christians, Uncle. I only found you because of Adima. Didn't you get the letter I sent you? Many people in Jerusalem are out to get you.

Paulus: Your uncle is the world's biggest fool, Eleazar. In his foolishness he never listens to you.

Eleazar: That's because your life is more precious to me than it is to you, Uncle. The High Priest and his men are already meeting in their office.

Trophimos: **(To the audience)** I warned him about Hananiah a hundred times.

Adima: God has sent me, Paulus. He said to me, "Hurry, hide him in your home before he opens his mouth and brings death upon himself."

Paulus: I need to speak to Hananiah, Adima.

Eleazar: He's no longer the man you once knew, Uncle. He's a lackey of the Romans. He says any talk of the Messiah is a call for insurrection. The Zealots want to kill you, too. They've sent me to find out where you're spending the night.

- Paulus: They sent you? What do you have to do with them? You're a scholar, Eleazar. Go back to the study house.
- Adima: God in Heaven, Paulus! A sword is hanging over you and you're offering it your throat? Can't you hear God telling you, "Give up your mission and live? Stay with Adima and let her have pleasure from you.⁶ She'll bear you a son and you'll raise him to live by the Law and its commandments."
- Paulus: He knows the Law forbids you to me, Adima. **(To Eleazar)** Take her with you.
- Adima: You quote the Law in vain, Paulus. You keep its commandments when it suits you and ignore them when it suits you.
- Paulus: You've been forbidden to me from the day I divorced you.
- Adima: You ran away from me before you divorced me. You've made my womb shrivel. You've driven me mad.
- Paulus: **(Impatiently)** You haven't gone mad, Adima. You're playing a game with me and with yourself. **(To Eleazar)** Take her and go. **(To Adima)** Tomorrow I'll bring a woman to your home to look after you.
- Adima: If you don't come back to me, Paulus, you'll never be forgiven.
- Eleazar: I beg you, Uncle. If you don't clear out, you're a dead man.
- Trophimos: **(To Paul)** I can see you're having trouble making up your mind whether to be killed in this dark alley by the police or by the Zealots. Is this how you've always wanted to die? Wait a while, I tell you, and you'll have a more distinguished death yet. **(To Adima)** We'll go to your place, lay low there, and leave town before sunrise. **(To Paul)** Let's get going. I'll sit up all night with you and save you both from each other's lust.
- Paulus: We'll sleep in the marketplace.
- Trophimos: In the marketplace?! Side-by-side with flea merchants from the desert who've never seen the inside of a bathhouse? Next to their camel dung?
- Paulus: We'll purify ourselves in the Temple in the morning.

⁶ Based on Genesis, 18:22.

Scene 4

Light falls on a path in the prison yard in Rome. It is still dark out. Paulus enters, the cross on his shoulder. The officer and two soldiers walk behind him.

Officer: **(Whipping Paulus)** Step lively! Get a move on, Paulus.

Paulus: I'm a Jew. I want to wash my hands and pray to my God.

Officer: You still believe your prayers will save you?

Paulus: I believe in God, blessed be He, whether He saves me or not.

Officer: Now I see why they say in Rome that you're the king of the Jews. **(He laughs.)** Good morning, Your Royal Highness. Did You sleep well? Shall I put your crown on your head for you? Here it is.

The officer plucks a branch from a thorn bush, makes a crown of it, and places it on Paulus' head.

Paulus: **(Startled)** You put a crown of thorns on me?

Officer: **(To the soldiers)** Here's your king, men!

1st Soldier: Good morning, Your Majesty. We're at your beck and call.

2nd Soldier: Would His Highness like his royal scepter? His robe? His throne to sit on?

Paulus: **(Heavenward)** Master of the Universe, how great is your grace to me! You do me the honor of letting me go to my death as our lord the Messiah went to his.

Officer: **(Whipping him)** Get a move on!

Scene 5

The courtyard of the Temple. It is morning. Nero is sitting on the Temple wall. Paulus and Trophimos enter the courtyard, carrying a lamb to the altar. The sounds of an angry crowd can be heard in the background.

Nero: Why so pale, Paulus? You've gone to the ends of the earth to carry out your god's mission and now you're getting cold feet? Are you beginning to wonder about that mission? If you're carrying a lamb for a sin-offering in your god's temple, you must be afraid he wants to leave you in the lurch because of your sins. I've heard Jews say you've broken his law and betrayed your people. Even slept with men. **(He laughs.)** Of course you didn't sin. Your god's nasty priests just say that to torment you. What's so terrible about sleeping with men? I do it all the time. At least they don't get pregnant. Incest is no great sin, either. There was a

time when my mother and I were very close. I was quite fond of her before I chopped off her head. **(He laughs.)**

Paulus: I fear my mission, Your Majesty, but my fear might be just a test that my God is putting me to.

Nero: Your god? Your god is a bad joke made by his priests. They saw mankind's fear and invented a savior to rescue it, and now they run the world in his name. Come with me to Rome, Paulus. I'll show you there who God is.

Paul: **(Laughing)** And that God will still choose me for my mission? Will he give me strength when my faith falters? Will he whisper to me when I walk the streets at night, revolted by my own sins, "You are my beloved son and have not betrayed me?"

Nero: It's not he who gives you strength, Paulus. It's you. He won't tell you "You are my beloved son". It's you who will make peace with yourself. You, with your own powers -- you, with your own wisdom. If you go on revolting yourself, you'll end up like the lamb that you're carrying.

Paulus: And what makes you so sure, Your Majesty, that you won't end up like this lamb, too?

Paul laughs. Nero vanishes.

Trophimos: **(To Paulus)** I'm pleading for my life, Master, and you're simpering like a baby dreaming on its mother's breast.

Paulus: There's no need to plead, Trophimos. Your mother is Jewish and so are you. You're entitled to enter the Temple.

Trophimos: The mob sees that I'm beardless and thinks I'm a Greek.

Paulus: No one is going to kill you. The worst that can happen is that I'll be brought up on charges before the High Priest.

Trophimos: May your God save me from your schemes, Master. Is it because Hananiah wouldn't receive you that you've brought me here to force him to put you on trial?

Paulus: We're in the Temple to ask the Holy One Blessed Be He to open Hananiah's heart. If you're afraid for your life, go ahead and save it.

Trophimos: The minute I walk through that gate, someone in the mob will crack my skull with a stone. With your kind permission, I'll stay put.

Trophimos drops his end of the lamb and sits in a corner. The mob howls louder. Light falls on Jesus.

Jesus: I see in your heart that you've come to the Temple, not to fortify yourself with prayer, but to hasten the redemption of all these people. **(Paulus is silent.)** Can't you see that they're not yet ready? Even as I hung on the cross, my bones pierced and my flesh flayed and bleeding, they cheered. They couldn't spare a tear of pity for my suffering.

Paulus: I saw it, Rabbi.

Jesus: When I was taken down from the cross and buried, I told myself I had suffered in vain. But when God kissed my brow and His hands caressed my wounds and healed my flesh and broken bones, I thought: My resurrection will stir their compassion.

Paulus: The day is nigh, Rabbi.

Jesus: It's still far. Since then, the years have gone by. With every passing day I've had to realize that one man's suffering, no matter how holy he is, and one man's resurrection, no matter how miraculous it seems, cannot bring redemption to the world.

Paulus: The world needs it more than ever.

Jesus: It will not come overnight with fanfares and trumpets, but with a thousand silent whispers, with the rustling of the grass. Not by power, but by grace. Not by zealotry, but by tolerance

Paulus: And what will be the fate of these people, Rabbi? They won't be redeemed?

Jesus: I was young and now I'm old, Paulus, and never have I seen the zealot who did the world any good. Let the march to redemption be a slow one, at a snail's pace. Let us first prepare one human heart at a time.

Paulus: And keep all these people waiting? How long, Rabbi? Ever since watching you on the cross, I couldn't see their torment and keep silent. If the redemption doesn't come soon, they'll turn savage in their despair and eat one another alive.

Jesus vanishes. The mob grows louder. Lysias, a Roman centurion, enters in the company of two soldiers.

Lysias: **(To the soldiers)** Into the pit with him!

Paulus: What have I done?

Lysias: You've caused a riot. Now my men have to put it down.

Paulus: The crowd thinks my servant is a Greek, sir. Allow me to calm it and I will.

Lysias: **(To the soldiers)** The pit!

Paulus: Give me a chance, sir. **(To the mob)** Brothers, listen to me. I keep the Torah and all its commandments. I would never bring a Greek into the Temple. Take me to the High Priest and I'll tell him that. He knows I'm zealous for the Law. When I was young I was a Temple policeman. I hounded every heretic. I had many Christians stoned to death. I was one of the police who arrested Jesus at Gethsemane and I stood watching him with you when he was crucified at Golgotha.

The mob cheers.

Paulus: One day I set out for Damascus to arrest a Christian who was preaching the Lord Jesus. Along the road, in a lonely place, Jesus appeared to me and I saw that he had truly risen from the dead. I asked him how it came to be and he answered that he had persisted in his faith in redemption.

The crowd howls.

Paulus: If my passion for redemption is a sin, I'll confess it to the High Priest. I believe God loves all men and desires their salvation. And you, the poor in spirit -- you, the humble ones, who hunger and thirst for righteousness -- you, the peace makers⁷ -- you will be the first to be saved, for it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven⁸.

The crowd continues to boo.

Lysias: **(To the soldiers)** Shackle him!

The soldiers bind Paulus. Lysias addresses the crowd.

Lysias: This man will be given forty lashes. Jews, go back to your homes and your work. **(To his soldiers)** Flog him!

Paulus: Officer, sir. I'm a Roman citizen.

Lysias: You can buy Roman citizenship, but you can't buy your way out of a flogging.

Paulus: My father was a Roman citizen before me.

Paulus show Lysias his papers. Lysias wavers. The crowd's howls grow louder.

Lysias: **(To the soldiers)** Flog him!

Paulus: Tomorrow I'll file a complaint against you in Rome.

⁷ According to Matthew, 5: 3-6

⁸ Matthew, 19: 24

Lysias: What for?

Paulus: Your own laws decree that a Jew who violates the Torah must be tried before the High Priest.

Lysias: Let it be as you say. And if the crowd doesn't like it, I'll chop off your head. **(To the mob)** Go home, Jews! This man will be tried by the High Priest and punished according to your Law. **(To the soldiers)** Take him to the pit.

Trophimos: Tell them to take me too, sir. I may be just a servant, but he needs me more than I need him. I have to feed him and wash him. If I don't clean the pus from his wounds and bandage them, he'll die.

Lysias: Go with him. If he dies, so will you.

The soldiers exit with Paulus. The cries of the crowd die down.

Scene 6

The office of the High Priest. Two servants carry in Hananiah on a litter. Through another door, Paulus, his feet shackled, is led in by a Roman soldier. Light falls on Jesus.

Jesus: I told you to stay away from Hananiah, Paulus.

Paulus: The Romans brought me here, Rabbi.

Jesus: They brought you because you talked them into it.

Paulus: I did it for your sake.

Jesus: You did it for my sake but you won't listen to me?

Paulus: I do listen, Rabbi. But you're seated at the Lord's right hand and I'm living with men on earth.

Hananiah shakes Paulus' hand. They embrace. The servants exit.

Hananiah: You've grown gray, Paulus.

Paulus: And the High Priesthood has made you taller.

Hananiah: It will soon cut me down to the size of a coffin. **(He laughs.)** I see those chains are cutting into your skin. **(Orders a soldier to remove the shackles)**

Paulus: Had I known so many Jerusalemites would line the streets to see me in them, I would have put them on myself.

- Hananiah: More of them would line the streets to see you stoned.
- Paulus: They still think I'm a traitor?
- Hananiah: Until the day you left for Damascus, no one in Jerusalem had more Christians stoned to death than you did. You went from house to house, dragging men and women off to jail.
- Paulus: I'll never stop atoning for that, Hananiah, all my life. **(He falls silent)** When I returned from Damascus I wrote you and asked to see you.
- Hananiah: I had it in for you because of Adima. I took her in and she ran away to her mother. When her mother died I took her in again and she ran away again.
- Paulus: I pray for her and beg for her forgiveness every day.
- Hananiah: Her sorrow saddens me. Yours does even more.
- Paulus: When you were appointed High Priest, I sent you another letter.
- Hananiah: Had I agreed to see you, the word in Jerusalem would have been that I approved of your preaching.
- Paulus: That's why I wanted to be brought before you.
- Hananiah: I won't mince words, Paulus. We're groaning under the Roman boot. Many in Jerusalem dream of a savior who will redeem them. If you've come to promote that Messiah of yours, you're fomenting rebellion.
- Paulus: I've come to offer you a pact, Hananiah.
- Jesus: Watch what you say, Paulus. Your pact could shake the world to its foundations.
- Paulus: Perhaps it needs to be shaken, Rabbi.
- Jesus: And who are you to shake it?
- Hananiah: A pact?
- Paulus: We'll spread the name of God together. I've traveled from country to country and I've seen how weary men are of their idols. They're looking for God. Many are seeking a way to the God of Israel.
- Hananiah: If they're seeking the God of Israel, let them live by the laws of Israel.
- Jesus: Even this **(Points at Hananiah)** scoundrel who sent me to my death observes the Law more faithfully than you do, Paulus.

- Paulus: I'm not abandoning the laws of Israel. I only want to add to them. The Torah could not prepare the world for redemption. That's why God sent us the Messiah, to spread knowledge of Him among His creatures and redeem them.
- Hananiah: Spreading knowledge of God means spreading His Law, not some tall tale about a Messiah who rose from the dead. A generation from now, your Jewish followers who fail to keep all the commandments will no longer be Jews and won't be redeemed.
- Paulus: Whoever believes in the Master of the Universe is a Jew. Our pact will make Jews of the whole world. All will be redeemed.
- Jesus: Does the Master of the Universe want the whole world to be Jews? Didn't He at Mount Sinai sanctify **us** with his commandments? Didn't He desire **us**, and choose **us** from all the nations to be a holy people and a kingdom of priests?⁹
- Paulus: On the road to Damascus, you told me to bear your name before the Gentiles and kings.¹⁰ You said, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God?"¹¹ You didn't say "Only the Jews shall see God".
- Jesus: I said, "Not all who say, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of their Father in Heaven."¹² And it's His will that we keep all His commandments. They sanctify us.
- Paulus: Isn't the deed that is done willingly greater than the deed that is commanded, Rabbi?
- Jesus: The deed that is done willingly is the will of man, not of God.
- Hananiah: The whole world Jews? Greeks, Egyptians, Romans?
- Paulus: We're all the children of God.
- Hananiah: Can the whole world live by God's Law?
- Paulus: It can believe in Him and be redeemed.
- Jesus: Redemption will come, Paulus, even if it takes its time. You only wish to hasten it because you can't believe in it unless you see it with your own eyes.
- Paulus: I believe in it, Rabbi.

¹⁰ Based on Acts, 9:15

¹¹ Matthew, 5:8.

¹² Matthew, 7:21

Jesus: You don't, and neither do you believe in the Creator of the world who promised it. I'll have to sit in mourning for you as if you were dead, and you'll never see my face again.

He exits.

Hananiah: This pact you are offering, Paulus, is rooted in a lie. You yourself were sent by me to arrest Jesus on the Mount of Olives. You saw him crucified. You saw him buried. How could you have met him on the road to Damascus? How could he have shared his teachings with you? I'd put you on trial for this heresy if you weren't dear to me and I didn't fear the Sanhedrin sentencing you to death. Go back to Tarsus and live out your life there. Stop your evangelizing. Stop your preaching. Stop defaming the Torah.

Silence.

Paulus: When Jesus was on the cross, I stood watching him from the crowd. I saw his suffering that could not be explained and his pain that could not be measured – a lonely man, hanging between heaven and earth, his soul about to leave him while the crowd stood and cheered. I saw the frailty of flesh-and-blood, its helplessness, its bottomless despair. When I heard Jesus cry out and get no answer, I was stricken by a great fear. If there is no answer to a cry that fills the world, maybe God doesn't exist? Maybe He never did? Maybe He did but doesn't any more? My heart stopped beating and my blood froze. If there is no God, what hope do we have? What salvation? Don't you see, Hananiah? If Jesus didn't rise from the dead, there is no God above and human beings are condemned to eternal, unredeemable suffering.

Hananiah: Good heavens, Paulus! From the day we were old enough to think, we wrestled with doubts. We overcame them through Torah and the commandments. We didn't need crucified men to be resurrected. Until now I haven't bothered to refute such nonsense because I thought it posed no danger. But if you, a learned man, can be led astray by it, so can many others. I'll have you put on trial this very day. You'll preach no more, neither in Jerusalem nor anywhere else.

Scene 7

The assembly hall of the Sanhedrin. Trophimos enters and addresses the audience

Trophimos: A trial by the Sanhedrin? What for? Has anyone committed treason? Has anyone embezzled, killed, murdered? Open your eyes and see. **(Pointing to Hananiah)** He's a thieving charlatan who pretends he's God's personal spokesman! **(Pointing to Paulus)** And he's a thieving charlatan who pretends he's God's personal spokesman! **(Pointing to Hananiah)** He promises that if you keep God's Law and its commandments, you'll enter Paradise. **(Pointing to Paulus)** And he promises you that if you have faith in God's grace and His Messiah, you'll get there, too. Do you know what the two of them are like? Like two hungry wolves lurking by a dead tree in the desert, bleating to the thirsty sheep that there's a spring of fresh water there. **(Angrily)** Fresh water? A pool of bubbling blood!

Hananiah: Shall we begin?

Trophimos summons the witnesses as if he were the court bailiff.

Trophimos: The first witness will take the stand.

1st Witness: **(To Paulus)** I'm a Jew from Antioch. When you visited our city, you said that the Messiah didn't care about circumcision but only about faith that works by love¹³.

Paulus: I said that so that the uncircumcised might have faith, too.

Hananiah: If circumcision doesn't matter, why circumcise our sons?

Trophimos: The second witness will take the stand.

2nd Witness: I'm a Jewish woman from Philippi. With my own eyes I saw this man invite Jews and Christians to an unclean meal and say to them, "Let not him that eats despise him that eats not, and let not him that eats not judge him that eats, for God has received him."¹⁴

Paulus: Isn't the eater of unclean food a human being too?

Hananiah: If we don't condemn the eater of unclean food, why shouldn't our own children eat it, too?

Trophimos: Let the third witness take the stand.

¹³ Galatians 5:6

¹⁴ Romans 14: 2-3.

- 3rd Witness: I'm a Jew from Corinth. When Paulus was in our town, he said the Messiah has redeemed us from the curse of the Law through the curse of hanging on the cross.¹⁵
- Paulus: The curse of the Law is the curse promised by the Law to those who fail to observe it.
- Hananiah: Whoever heard you took you to mean that the Law itself is accursed.
- Trophimos: Let the fourth witness take the stand.
- Hananiah: **(To the Sanhedrin)** I don't need any more witnesses. These are enough to convict him. The Christians among us are observant Jews. Their sin is their belief in a false Messiah. Paulus multiplies this sin tenfold by preaching the abrogation of the commandments.
- Paulus: I never preached any such thing.
- Hananiah: The witnesses all testified that you did.
- Paulus: I was speaking to Gentiles.
- Hananiah: Paulus mixes Gentiles with Jews and tells them all the same thing: Since the appearance of that Messiah of his, all the commandments are null and void.
- Paulus: I'm a Jew. I've always kept every last one of the commandments. The minute I set foot in Jerusalem I hurried to the Temple to make a sin-offering to the Lord.
- Hananiah: Paulus himself may not slight the commandments, but he tells others to slight them. I ask the Sanhedrin to render its verdict.
- Paulus: My fellow Pharisees! I'm a Pharisee born to Pharisees like you. I worship God, blessed be He, just as you do. I believe in the resurrection just like you. I also happen to believe that one man has already risen from the dead.
- Hananiah: I ask the Sanhedrin to render its verdict!

Hananiah signals the guards and they silence Paulus. Trophimos counts the vote of the elders.

- Trophimos: That one votes yes, and that one no, and he yes, and he no, and he no, and he no. That one says: "Let Paulus be cast into the pit for making light of the commandments." I can see the prison gates shutting on me, too. That one votes no and that one yes. And he yes and he yes. The sooner I get out of this horrible city, the better. He no, and he no and he

¹⁵ Galatians 3:13-14

no. That one says: "Paulus is lying. He's a Christian, not a Pharisee," and that one, "Paulus is fomenting rebellion against Rome." Master of the Universe! Before the sun goes down, our bodies will be nailed to the cross. Oh, my guts, my guts, God help me!¹⁶ **(Reconsidering)** I'm so scared I forgot that I'm not sure the universe has a God. That one yes, and that one yes. And he no, and he no, and he also no. We'll rot in some stinking pit for the rest of our lives. I'll have to feed him the little food I'm given. I'll have to mend his socks and underpants. When he shivers with cold, I'll have to cover him. Is that why he bought me at the slave market in Ephesus? Is that why he freed me? Here's someone who says, "Paulus is our brother, a good Pharisee," and another who says, "The Christians are Jews, too." And he no, and he no. This one says, "He's no different from me, I believe in the resurrection and so does he," and that rascal over there says, "Paulus believes the Messiah has already come and that makes him a heretic." Mama, save me from the arrogance of a man who's ready to die for his God! And he yes. And he yes. That one there says, "Paulus keeps all the commandments, he performed his ablutions and offered a sacrifice as soon as he got here," and that one says, "If Paulus took such care with all the commandments, he would demand it of his disciples, too." And that one, "Paulus is a man of God, he speaks the word of the Lord." **(Excitedly)** He's been acquitted! All the Pharisees voted for him. It's a miracle from Heaven.

Paulus: Distinguished rabbis! Now let me tell you why Hananiah put me on trial before you. It wasn't for relaxing the demands of the Law. It was for saying that God loves all men created in His image.

Hananiah: Your trial is over, Paulus.

Paulus: The Roman, the Greek, and the Egyptian too, the woman, the poor man, and the slave.

Hananiah: **(To the guards)** Shackle him.

Paulus: That's why we must together spread the knowledge of God in this world, so that all men may worship Him.

Hananiah: Shackle him!

Trophimos leads Paulus away before the guards can reach him. Darkness.

¹⁶ Based on Jeremiah, 4:19

Scene 8

Light falls on a path in the prison yard in Rome. A lame old man is sweeping the yard. Paulus enters, escorted by the officer and two soldiers, the cross on his shoulder. At the end of his strength, he staggers and falls.

Officer: **(Whipping him)** Get up! On your feet!

1st Soldier: Where are all your servants, Your Majesty? Why don't you call on them to come to your rescue? Can they have fallen asleep?

2nd Soldier: Where is your God? Where are His angels? They haven't resigned, have they? Maybe He's fired them.

The old man drops his broom and helps Paulus to rise and shoulder the cross.

Old Man: May I touch the corner of your cloak and heal my leg?

Paulus: Are you the old man who helped our Lord the Messiah carry his cross on his last way in Jerusalem? God bless you.

Old Man: I've heard you can heal the ill, sir.

Paulus: Be of good cheer, father. Your faith will save you.

Officer: We have no time, Paulus. You're not the only Christian being crucified today. **(Whips the old man)** Leave him alone before you're crucified with him.

Paulus: Fear not, father. Redemption is nigh.

Paulus staggers off-stage with the cross. Darkness.

Scene 9

Nighttime. Adima's home. Adima enters and lights a lamp. Paulus and Trophimos enter, carrying their bags.

Paulus: Don't worry, Trophimos. We'll set out for the Sanhedrin before the crack of dawn and the Pharisees will take us under their protection.

Trophimos: You think Hananiah is just twiddling his thumbs? If he can't kill you legally, he'll send someone to murder you. Maybe he's already done it. Someone could be lying in ambush right outside the door. **(To Adima)** If you value his life, talk to him. **(She says nothing)** I see a pack of dogs licking the blood of two corpses dumped in a field.

He exits. Silence.

Paulus: No one except you would have dared take me in, Adima.

- Adima: My house is your house, Paulus.
- Paulus: I'll have workmen come tomorrow to fix the roof.
- Adima: I don't need any workmen.
- Paulus: In the winter it will leak.
- Adima: I won't be here in the winter.
- Paulus: Where will you be?
- Adima: I'll be with you.
- Paulus: With me? How will you be able to?
- Adima: I'm only crazy when I'm driving away the fools who badger me.
- Paulus: You're not crazy at all, Adima. But neither do you believe in our lord the Messiah. You've always scorned Him,
- Adima: I heard you speak at the Sanhedrin.
- Paulus: And your eyes were opened all at once?
- Adima: So were yours once.
- Paulus: Travel across the sea is difficult. I go from place to place and have much on my mind.
- Adima: I want to serve you. I won't seduce you in order to have children. I know I'm barren.
- Paulus: I'm afraid you don't mean what you say.
- Adima: I swear to God.
- Paulus: Do you want a man who can't love? Who doesn't know how to? Wasn't all we suffered in our marriage enough for you?
- Adima: The believer in redemption through love doesn't know how to love?
- Paulus: There's not only good in me, Adima. There's sin too. When I'm with you, I'm helpless to save myself from my own body¹⁷. My lust comes between me and my God.
- Adima: Lust was given us to worship God.

¹⁷ Based on Romans 7: 18-24

- Paulus: I'm afraid our lust has been our undoing. In all the years we lived together in this house, we couldn't even light the Sabbath candles once in purity of heart.
- Adima: Our hearts were always pure.
- Paulus: Don't lead me again unto temptation, Adima.
- Adima: Will you be celibate all your life? And your followers, too? What devil put that idea into your head? Every Jew must fulfill the commandments of the flesh, even saints and scholars. **(She tries to embrace him.)** Your body is in the image of God. How can you love God and hate His image?
- Paul: **(Pushing her away)** My body is sinful.
- Adima: Why?
- Paulus: My lust for you blinded me. Because of it, I failed to see Jesus' holiness. Because of it, I persecuted him.
- Adima: God Almighty, Paulus! When you handed him over to the Sanhedrin, no one saw his holiness but a handful of his disciples. After so many years since seeing him on the cross, his suffering still wrenches you? You're not to blame for his death. No one could have saved him. If he rose from the dead, you deserve to live, too.

She embraces him again. He resists her. Nero enters.

- Nero: Come to Rome, Paulus. Take her with you and you'll redeem each other from your misery.
- Paulus: I'm a mere mortal, Your Majesty. Only God can redeem us, if we're worthy.
- Nero: God is the invention of scoundrels who made him up in order to convince gullible fools that He'll redeem them. On the day that *I* am God, man will discover his powers and redeem himself.
- Paulus: Don't you see, Your Majesty, that there is evil dwelling in me too, and without God I might choose it?
- Nero: I'll teach you to choose the good.
- Paulus: If you were able to choose the good, Your Majesty, the streets of Rome would not be sunk in bestiality and fornication and in the plunder of the poor and weak. Blood would not flow in them like water.
- Nero: Blood flows like water because no one listens to me. Come with me, Paulus. Stand by my side. Be my voice. Move men's minds and hearts.

They've lost their innocence. They no longer believe in redemption in the Great Beyond. They want to be redeemed in this world.

Paulus: That's so, Your Majesty. Mankind is no longer innocent. It won't choose an hour's worth of pleasure in this world when it can be preparing for eternal life.

Nero: There is no eternal life. There is no other world.

Paulus: Then what's the point of this one?

Nero: It's all there is.

Darkness falls on Nero. Eleazar enters.

Eleazar: Uncle! Thank God I've found you. A harnessed wagon is waiting in the yard. Board it and leave the city.

Paulus: First I must appear before the Sanhedrin.

Eleazar: The Zealots have heard of the pact you offered Hananiah. They're on their way to kill you.

Paulus: Who did they hear it from? From Hananiah? Did he send them?

Eleazar: They don't need him to send them.

Paulus: But why? What have I done to them?

Eleazar: They're awaiting the Messiah, Uncle. They don't want you distracting the Sanhedrin with your false Messiah.

Paulus: What makes them think he's false?

Eleazar: We're groaning under the Roman yoke and he hasn't saved us.

Paulus: He came to save the whole world.

Eleazar: He couldn't save my own mother when she was trampled to death by Roman horses coming back from the market with her baskets. **(Firmly)** Clear out, Uncle. Clear out and don't come back. Jews are killing Jews for doing business with Gentiles, for eating with them, for drinking their wine, for speaking their language, for sleeping with their wives. If now you tell us to share our God with them too, you're starting a war that will be the ruin of us all. Jews will burn each other alive with their houses and property. And when they're done, the Romans will turn their troops on us. Not a single child will be left.

Paulus: I fear your becoming a Zealot yourself more than I fear for my own life.

Eleazar: Board the wagon and go before they come for you and find me here.

Trophimos enters, with his and Paulus' bags. Adima takes her bag, too.

Paulus: **(To Adima)** You're not coming with me. You really do have to be mad to link your fate to that of a doomed man. **(To Trophimos)** What are you standing there scratching your head for? Do you have lice? Get a move on.

Trophimos: The wagon's over there.

Paulus: And so are the murderers hiding under it. **(The two exit)**

Scene 10

Lysias' headquarters in the Citadel. Two soldiers stand at the entrance. Paulus enters with Lysias.

Paulus: I'm asking permission to sleep in your Citadel for one night only, sir. In the morning, your soldiers will escort me to the Sanhedrin.

Lysias: My soldiers will escort you out of town right now. **(To the soldiers)** Take him.

Paulus: Then throw me in the pit, sir. Me and my servant.

Lysias: And who will stand guard over you there? I'm sick of trying to maintain order in this city. Every day someone else here is redeeming the world.

The soldiers lead Paulus away. Hananiah enters, carried on a litter.

Hananiah: Wait, Captain. I want to try him before the Sanhedrin. I have proof that the man he brought into the Temple is really a Greek.

Lysias: **(To Paulus)** I couldn't care less if he's a Greek or a Jew. But if you want to take him to the Sanhedrin, and that's where he wants to be taken, why don't you go together?

Paulus: I'm afraid I can't, sir.

Hananiah: You're afraid?

Paulus: How can I not be when I see how you fear me? **(To Lysias)** He means to hand me over to the Zealots, sir.

Hananiah: **(To Paulus)** It's my misfortune, Paulus, that you're dearer than a brother to me. **(To Lysias)** I'll be responsible for him.

Paulus: I'm afraid your fear is greater than your love. **(To Lysias)** If I've broken Temple regulations, let me be taken to the Sanhedrin by Roman soldiers.

Hananiah: **(Offering Lysias a purse)** Here are two hundred drachmas for your pains, Captain.

Paulus: **(To Hananiah)** You're trying to bribe him?

Lysias: **(To Hananiah)** He's yours.

The soldiers seize Paulus and turn to go.

Paulus: Wait a minute, sir. If he tried bribing you in front of me, he's obviously not worried that I'll tell the Sanhedrin about it. That means he knows I'll never get there.

Lysias: **(To the soldier)** Halt!

Hananiah: **(To Paulus)** I don't want you dead, Paulus. God is my witness that I don't.

Paulus: Swear that you'll take me to the Sanhedrin.

Hananiah: What for? So that you can cast doubt on the commandments in front of it? So that it can debate their abrogation? The commandments safeguard us as much as we safeguard them. If we weren't in awe of them, we'd eat one another alive. You have my word that no one will touch a hair of your head. You'll stay in my house until you are convinced.

Paulus: And if I'm not convinced?

Hananiah: I'm trying to prevent disaster, Paulus. If you say that the Gentiles can be redeemed without commandments, the Jews won't keep them, either.
(To Lysias) Here's two hundred more drachmas.

Hananiah Tosses Drachmas to Lysias

Paulus: **(To Lysias)** My blood will cry out to you from the earth,¹⁸ sir, until the last day of your life

Hananiah: For God's sake, Paulus, trust me just this time. If I wanted you dead, my men would have chopped off your head the minute you entered the city.

Lysias: I've heard enough. **(He gives Hananiah back the money and turns to the soldiers.)** Into the pit with him!

Darkness.

¹⁸ Based on Genesis, 4:10.

Act II

Scene 11

The site for crucifixions in the prison yard in Rome. Two women kneel and pray.

Women: Out of the depths have I cried unto you, O Lord.
 Lord, hear my voice:
 Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.
 If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?
 But there is forgiveness with you, that you should be feared.
 I wait for the Lord, my soul does wait, and in his word do I hope.¹⁹

Paulus enters bearing his cross, escorted by an officer and two soldiers.

Officer: Halt! **(Paulus halts. The officer addresses the men.)** Prepare the cross!

The soldiers take the cross from Paulus' shoulders and lay it on the ground.

Paulus: **(While this is being done)** My God,
 The soul you have placed within me is pure;
 You created it, you formed it, you breathed it into me,
 And you guard it while it is within me.
 One day you will take it from me
 And restore it to me in the time to come.
 As long as the soul is within me,
 I will thank You,
 Blessed are You, Lord,
 Who restores souls to lifeless bodies.²⁰

The two women address the officer.

1st Woman: Have pity on him, sir.

2nd Woman: Forgive his sins.

Paulus: Have no fear for my life, women. My sins have been forgiven.

1st Woman: He's the Lord's servant.

2nd Woman: The Messiah's.

Officer: **(To the soldiers)** Get them out of here.

Paulus: Let them be. They're here at God's bidding, like the women who begged mercy for our lord the Messiah as he went his last way.

Officer: Christian whores! **(He flicks his whip at them.)**

¹⁹ Psalms, 31:1-5.

²⁰ From the morning prayer

Paulus: (To the women) God be with you. Wait by my grave. In three days' time I will rise.

The women are driven away. The prison yard grows dark.

Scene 12

Light on Nero sitting on the city wall of Caesarea. He holds his zither and sings.

Nero: It's no easy job to be God.
It takes work and responsibility.
It calls for pity, patience, and love,
And no small amount of ability.

It's no easy job to be God
When humans display such rigidity.
Offer them beauty and wit --
They'd rather have ugly stupidity.

It's no easy job to be God.
When mankind's so given to knavery.
Offer it freedom and choice --
It would rather be servile in slavery.

It's no easy job to be God.
Sometimes, for convenience's sake,
You have to lop off a few heads
And burn a few souls at the stake.

It's no easy job to be God.
In the end all your nerves are on edge.
And the power men put in your hands
Makes you play the devil instead.

Nero laughs and bows to the audience. Two Roman soldiers appear, leading Paulus and Trophimos, their feet in shackles, to the city gate.

Trophimos: I don't know which is worse, my gullibility or my loyalty. Our goose is cooked. Last night, when these fools fell asleep, we could have escaped and hid in some village. Where can we hide in Caesarea? In Felix the Roman procurator's bedroom?

Paulus: I'm not escaping and I'm not hiding.

Trophimos: (**Mockingly**) Of course not. You have a God above. If we're thrown into a raging sea, He'll stick out a hand, grab you by the hair, and pull you out. But who'll pull me out?

Paulus: The procurator will try us and acquit us.

The soldiers approach the gate.

1st Soldier: Open up! We've been on the road from Jerusalem for three whole days.

2nd Soldier: Yesterday we ran out of water.

1st Soldier: Our food went moldy.

2nd Soldier: Open the gate!

The first soldier bangs on the gate. It doesn't open.

Trophimos: When we're brought before the procurator, you'll watch what you say, do you hear me? Not a word about that Messiah of yours! No preaching and no evangelizing!

Paulus: He himself will ask me about our lord the Messiah.

Trophimos: And you'll tell him he heralds the redemption?

Paulus: Yes.

Trophimos: Don't be a fool. If you do that, he'll sentence us both to death. Let me do the talking, Master. I'll tell them you lost your voice from too much preaching in Jerusalem.

The first soldier bangs on the gate again.

1st Soldier: Open up! Tell the procurator we're here with Paulus the Christian.

2nd Soldier: We've been slogging over the mountains in the crazy heat of this country for the past three days, and you're all taking an afternoon snooze?

1st Soldier: And tell all the whores to soap and wash themselves. Those Zealots haven't left a single damned whore in all Jerusalem.

The gate is opened by an irritable gatekeeper.

Gatekeeper: Who are you? What do you want? Don't you know that in heat like this we keep the gate closed till sunset? Where's your human kindness? I've been sitting in the latrine since yesterday, trying to unstop my clogged guts before they explode (**Crossly**) What would have happened had you waited in the shade of some tree? Highwaymen would have kidnapped you? Assassins would have knifed you? Zealots would have started a revolt? All night long I was opening and shutting and opening and shutting the gate. Soldiers in full battle gear kept coming and going like mad. Do you think they gave a damn for an old gatekeeper trying to have a peaceful shit? You might at least have brought me an enema.

(Enter Drusilla, the procurator's wife, in the company of a soldier)
 God be with you, Princess Drusilla! It looks like we have some highborn guests and I rushed to open the gate for them.

Drusilla: Welcome to Caesarea, Paulus.

Paulus: God be with you, my lady.

Drusilla: **(To the soldiers)** Unchain them.

1st Soldier: The centurion in Jerusalem ordered us to bring him to the procurator for trial, Your Ladyship.

Drusilla: Unchain them anyway.

The two soldiers remove the shackles from Paulus and Trophimos' legs.

Drusilla: **(To the gatekeeper)** Take them to the barracks.

The gatekeeper and soldiers exit.

Drusilla: Please, Paulus, do me the honor of being my guest in my palace.

Paulus: I thank you, most gracious lady. But if we're excused from standing trial, we should be on our way to the port for the first ship that sails.

Drusilla: That's a ship sailing for Athens tomorrow. I'll talk to my husband and you'll be put on it. **(He hesitates)** My servants have drawn you a bath and prepared a meal for you.

Trophimos: We'll be happy to be guests in your palace, ma'am. My master is hungry and tired. He needs to rest and wash up. I have to lance the blisters on his feet and launder his clothes and underclothes.

Paulus: I'm a wanted man here, my lady.

Drusilla: I need your advice.

Trophimos: A good bath will revive him, ma'am. Once he's eaten and drunk, he'll give you all the advice you want. **(To Paulus, firmly)** His servant would like to wash, eat, and drink, too.

Two servants arrive, bearing Hananiah on a litter.

Drusilla: Welcome to Caesarea, High Priest.

Hananiah: God be with you, Princess Drusilla.

Drusilla: Had my husband Felix known you were arriving, he would have come to greet you.

Hananiah: I don't want to trouble the procurator over a trifle, my lady. I'll just take Paulus and head back to Jerusalem.

Drusilla: Not even the High Priest can come to Caesarea and walk away with anyone he wishes.

Hananiah: He needs to stand trial before the Sanhedrin, my lady. You're a Jew, the daughter of King Agrippa. Your father always heeds me, and so should you.

Drusilla: Paulus is my guest for dinner tonight, sir.

Felix enters, accompanied by two soldiers. He is clearly drunk.

Felix: Welcome, Hananiah!

Hananiah: God be with you, Procurator!

Felix: Is this then the famous Paulus?

Paulus: God be with you, Procurator. **(He bows)**

Felix: **(To the soldiers)** Hang him!

Drusilla: What on earth for, Felix?

Felix: I'm sick and tired of all these disturbers of the peace.

Paulus: I'm no disturber of the peace. My servant and I are sailing tomorrow to Athens.

Felix: Hang him!

1st Soldier: What about his servant?

Trophimos: Why, what has his servant done? He hasn't opened his mouth. He hasn't stirred a speck of dust. He hasn't frightened a bird in the branches.

Felix: The servant will be freed for lack of evidence.

Two soldiers carry in a gallows. The first knots a rope.

Paulus: I'm a Roman citizen, sir. I was sent to be tried by you.

Felix: You just have been. You've been found guilty. **(To the soldiers)** Hang him.

The first soldier drags Paulus to the gallows and slips the noose around his neck.

- Paulus: But what am I guilty of, sir? Caesar grants all his subjects the right to worship their god.
- Drusilla: This man is a herald of redemption, Felix. I want to hear him out.
- Felix: **(To Drusilla)** When I hear the word "redemption," I see thousands of corpses strewn over a battlefield. **(To the soldiers)** Hang him.
- Paulus: The redemption that I preach, sir, does not come from the battlefield. It comes from faith in the Messiah and his grace.
- Felix: And whoever has no faith, off with his head. **(To the soldiers)** Hang him.
- Trophimos: Mr. Procurator, sir, Paulus is a man of words. He's never carried a sword in his life. On our way from Jerusalem, we slept in a cave. He was bit by a mosquito and now he's hallucinating.
- Felix: Hang the servant too!
- Drusilla: **(To the soldiers)** Wait! **(To Felix)** Let's go to the palace now, Felix. We'll have something to eat and drink and we'll think it over.
- Paulus: Please, sir, you're mortal like the rest of us. When your day comes, you will stand before the throne of the Holy One Blessed Be He and He will judge you according to your deeds.

The Soldiers gag Paulus and Trophimos.

- Drusilla: I implore you, Felix. Go to the baths. Wash yourself and cool off.
- Hananiah: Procurator, this man caused Jews to riot in Jerusalem. If I put him on trial before the Sanhedrin, the riots will stop.
- Felix: Since when do rioting Jews care about the Sanhedrin?
- Hananiah: If you hang him, sir, his followers will declare him a messiah too, just as they did with Jesus of Nazareth. Let me have him and the Sanhedrin will see to it that he's imprisoned.
- Drusilla: And no one will blame you for his death, Felix.
- Felix: **(To the soldiers)** Hang him.

The soldiers drag Paulus and Trophimos to the gallows. The two struggle.

- Drusilla: What's possessed you, Felix? Do you want to be a murderer? What wrong has he done you?

Felix: Don't you know? The day you took to reading his epistles was the day you became a nun. You're my wife. You're the mother of my children. This man's gospel has made you shun me like a leper. You preach it to me every night: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."²¹ Hell would be better. **(To Hananiah)** I married a king's daughter, a princess. I wouldn't exchange her for any other woman in the world. **(To Paulus)** If you go on preaching around the empire, we'll all have nuns for wives. **(To the soldiers)** Hang him until he's dead and his gospel dies with him and I get my wife back!

The soldiers tighten the nooses around Paulus and Trophimos' necks. Paulus manages to tear off his gag.

Paulus: Your Excellency, The mouth that forbid can also permit. I'll talk to your wife.

Felix: What will you say to her?

Paulus: I'll say that I don't expect abstinence of others as I do of myself. Let every man know that his body is a temple for the Holy Spirit and honor God with it²². Let those who cannot remain continent marry. Better to marry than to burn.²³

Felix: That's all?

Paulus: I'll say of those who are married: Let the husband perform his duty to his wife and the wife her duty to her husband²⁴.

Felix: That's not enough.

Paulus: I'll say, the wife has not power of her own body but the husband, and the husband has not power of his own body but the wife²⁵.

Felix: She won't listen to you.

Paulus: I'll say, do not refuse one another, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency²⁶.

Felix: And what will she say?

Drusilla: I'll say, "You're my husband and I'm your wife."

Felix: **(To the soldiers)** Remove the noose from his neck.

²¹ Corinthians I, 7:1.

²² Corinthians I, 6:19.

²³ Corinthians I, 7:9-11

²⁴ Corinthians I, 7:2-3.

²⁵ Corinthians I, 7:4.

²⁶ Corinthians I, 7:5.

Trophimos: What about my neck?

Felix: Throw him in prison. **(To Paulus)** You'll be released when I see she's kept her word.

The soldiers remove both nooses.

Felix: Let's go to the baths, Hananiah. Then we'll feast on the Jewish dishes my wife has made in his honor. **(He points to Paulus.)** Perhaps you can dampen her enthusiasm for gospel preachers. Every time one of them comes to Caesarea, she runs to the town square to hear him and I never know if I'll see her again.

Felix, Drusilla, and Hananiah exit. The soldiers bind Paulus and Trophimos. Light falls on Nero, who addresses Paulus.

Nero: I was looking at you, Paulus, while the noose was being tightened around your neck, and I saw the terror in your eyes. I know it well. It's the terror we feel when we realize there's no God and understand how ridiculous is the belief that He'll come and save us in our hour of need. That's the moment it dawns on us that we have to fight our own battles. You, too, grasped that God is not going to help you and that you have no one to depend on but yourself, Isn't that so? Answer me. Isn't it?

Scene 13

A cell in the prison. Night. Paulus sits on a stool. His shackled feet are in a bowl of water. Trophimos soaps his blisters.

Paulus: Rabbi. **(Silence)** Let me see you, Rabbi. **(Silence)** Forgive me. Hananiah has no God in his heart. I take back the pact I offered him. I want to resume my mission in your name to the Gentiles alone.

Light falls on Jesus.

Jesus: And what will you preach to the Gentiles in my name?

Paulus: That they, too, are worthy of redemption.

Jesus: Of course they are. The Kingdom of Heaven is meant for all the humble and poor in spirit, for all who hunger and thirst for justice, for all who seek peace. But they cannot be admitted to it without preparing their hearts through all the commandments of the Torah. Didn't I say, "Whoever breaks the least one of the commandments shall be called last in the Kingdom of Heaven?"²⁷

Paulus: You did, Rabbi.

²⁷ Matthew, 5:19.

Jesus: I forgave you for persecuting my disciples, Paulus. I forgave you even for chaining me with your own hands at Gethsemane and for bringing me to the Sanhedrin. But I can't forgive your doing away with God's commandments.

Trophimos: **(To Paulus)** I can't do your blisters if your feet keep shaking.

Paulus: The commandments were given to Israel alone, Rabbi. The nations of the world are not obligated by them.

Jesus: The commandments ensure that they will act righteously.

Trophimos: If your feet are shaking, your heart must be too, master.

Paulus: And without them they can't be redeemed?

Jesus: I love all men, Paulus, to the far corners of the earth. My suffering on the cross atoned for their sins everywhere. But let us not hasten the end. The nations of the world will be redeemed when their time comes.

Paulus: When will that be?

Trophimos: You can lie down now, Master.

Paulus: **(To Jesus)** When will that be, Rabbi? **(Jesus vanishes)**

Trophimos: You have visitors, Paulus.

Eleazar enters with Adima.

Eleazar: You have to flee, Uncle. Felix has gone back on his promise. He'll try you at dawn.

Paulus: Try me? What for?

Eleazar: I don't know. Here's the key to your chains. **(He opens them)** Come with me, quick.

Paulus: Who gave you the key?

Eleazar: The ship for Athens is about to sail, Uncle.

Paulus: What are you doing here, Adima? Who brought you? Hananiah? **(She is silent. He turns to Eleazar)** Did he bring you too? How does he know Felix intends to try me?

Eleazar: He told us to beg you to flee before you're crucified.

Paulus: **(To Adima)** Is that what he told you, too? What have they done to you, Adima?

Eleazar: There's no time to waste, Uncle.

Paulus: I'm only leaving this city as an innocent, free man. If I flee and am caught, the procurator will have me put to death for escaping from prison. If I'm not caught, the Roman police will look for me everywhere. I won't be able to preach the gospel. **(The truth dawns on him.)** So that's why Hananiah sent you! He *wants* me to run away so that my mission will be over.

Eleazar: Your mission will be over, but not your life.

Adima: God has stopped speaking to me, Paulus. When I get into bed at night, I pray to hear His voice. What have I done to make Him fall silent? The Zealots are screaming in the squares and I don't understand. Swords ring out in the night, Roman soldiers gallop through the streets, women cry, children weep. Jerusalem is going up in flames. Who will save her? Who will save me?

Paulus: Eleazar will take you home, Adima.

Adima: And who will save you, Paulus? Do you want to die on the cross like your poor Jesus?

Paulus: **(Hugging her)** I'm not going to die. The day is not far when you'll come with me to Tarsus. We'll raise a dozen orphans together.

Eleazar: I should wring your neck! It's not just our lives that mean nothing to you. It's the lives of all Jews. You preach the world's redemption and no longer care about ours. That's why you don't support our rebellion against Rome to establish the kingdom of Israel, and crown a true Messiah. It's only my own sinful weakness that keeps me from killing you.

Eleazar takes Adima's arm and they leave. Paulus unshackles Trophimos.

Paulus: Go with them, Trophimos. I don't need you anymore.

Trophimos: I'm not leaving without you, Master.

Paulus: My house in Tarsus is yours. It's your recompense for all you've done. **(Takes out a parchment deed from his bag and hands it to him)**

Trophimos: My recompense will be getting you out of here and going there together with you.

Paulus: When my mission has ended.

Trophimos: It already has. No one believes the redemption will come even at the end of time. You've despaired of it yourself, too. You'd rather be dead than admit it.

Paulus: Oh how much I want my life. From the day I stood watching the crucified Jesus without heeding his cries, without pulling the nails from his hands and feet, without dressing his wounds and restoring him to life – from that day on God has not stopped hounding me. I'll be forgiven only if I keep winning men's souls for the redemption.

Trophimos: You know very well that you couldn't have taken him down from the cross, Master.

Paulus: I beg you. Go!

Trophimos takes the key from Paulus and re-shackles himself. A guard appears.

Guard: On your feet!

Scene 14

Felix's office. Felix, Drusilla and Hananiah are seated. A guard brings Paulus, his legs in shackles. Trophimos follows.

Trophimos: Overnight my master's in the dock. And why? Because a High Priest's scheme has been thwarted? Because a man is on fire for his wife? Because a woman can't satisfy her husband? **(To Felix)** Paulus has gone out of his mind, sir. He's not fit to stand trial. He was up all night crying. **(To the audience.)** For his life. For his enemies. For those who hate him. For the God who has left him. **(To Felix)** He can't tell the truth from lies. Light from darkness. Commandments from sin. Man from God. **(To the audience.)** He wrote three epistles last night and asked me to mail them to his followers when he's dead. Could you ask for better proof that he's gone mad? **(To Felix)** My master's lost his tongue, Your Excellency. It's stuck in his mouth from sheer sorrow. Let me speak for him.

Felix: Get him out of here.

Trophimos: You might at least unshackle him, sir. His sandals have no soles and his feet are all blistered. I have to lance them, sir. **(The guard leads him out of the office.)**

Felix: **(To Hananiah)** Make it short, High Priest.

Hananiah: Procurator, last evening I received letters from Jews living abroad. They demand that Paulus be tried by the Sanhedrin. They're worried he'll turn up among them, preached the abrogation of the commandments and foment disturbances.

Paulus: You can set your mind to rest, sir. I'll keep away from the Jews.

- Felix: **(To Hananiah)** Does that satisfy you?
- Hananiah: No, Procurator. Even if Paulus only preaches against the commandments to the Gentiles, he'll be contravening our God and hence making trouble.
- Felix: **(To Drusilla)** That's quite likely.
- Drusilla: Paulus isn't contravening his God. He's claiming that the six hundred and thirteen commandments of the Torah were given to the Jews alone.
- Paulus: And whoever is not a Jew can believe in God and His Messiah without them.
- Hananiah: **(To Paulus)** A non-Jew can believe in the God of Israel and His Messiah? Doesn't the Torah say that the Messiah is sent by God to His people Israel? That he will uphold the Torah of Israel and fight the battles of Israel?
- Paulus: **(To Felix)** The Master of the Universe has created all men, sir. And He has sent His Messiah to all men, too. Our prophet Isaiah has said: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on top of all the mountains and all the nations shall flow to it."²⁸
- Hananiah: The prophet Isaiah didn't excuse anyone from the commandments.
- Paulus: The prophet Isaiah didn't ask the nations to convert before flowing to the mountaintop.
- Drusilla: That's so.
- Hananiah: In the same verse, my lady, the Gentiles say, "Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths." That means that they take upon themselves the observance of the Torah and all its commandments.
- Paulus: The prophet Zechariah says, "And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day and shall be my people."²⁹ God doesn't say they have to observe the commandments first.
- Drusilla: That's so.
- Hananiah: No, my lady. Zechariah says in the same verse, "And I will dwell in the midst of thee." That means the Torah will dwell in their midst.

²⁸ Isaiah, 2:3

²⁹ Zechariah, 2:11

Felix: That's enough. **(To Drusilla)** It's a deep, difficult dispute, but it's purely a Jewish one and Paulus should be judged by the Jews. **(To Hananiah)** He's yours.

Drusilla: We're not here to decide a dispute, Felix. We're here because of Paulus' right to preach to the citizens of Rome.

Hananiah: Indeed, my lady. But even if Paulus preaches to Roman citizens, the Jews will hear of what he says.

Drusilla: Let them hear. I've had my bellyful of your complaints. Is every new interpretation of the Law such a catastrophe? Is every one who follows the dictates of his heart a traitor? You yourself whisper behind my back that on the day I was married I went from being a king's daughter to the Romans' whore.

Felix: That's enough, Drusilla.

Drusilla: Was I such a sinner for doing what my heart told me? Under the wedding canopy I said to my father, "One day all will be able to marry all – Roman, Greek, Egyptian, or Jew. The next day I was ostracized by my people and family.

Felix: I beg you, enough!

Drusilla: That's why I followed Paulus who says: Everyone is worthy of God's grace, and with God's grace let everyone follow his own heart.

Felix: Enough, I said! **(Drusilla falls silent.)** You're a free man, Paulus. You'll sail tomorrow at dawn. And don't show your face here again. **(To Drusilla)** Come.

Drusilla: Bless me, Paulus.

Felix: I said, come! **(Darkness)**

Scene 15

Light falls on the crucifixion site in the prison yard in Rome. The officer whips Paulus.

Officer: Take that for your insolence! Take that for your arrogance! Take that for your faith! **(He slashes with the whip.)** The man goes to his death like a bridegroom to his wedding feast. Prison must have driven him mad. **(He slashes again.)** Take off your clothes! Maybe your bride will like what she sees.

Paulus undresses and hands his clothes to the two soldiers.

Paulus: Give my shoes to whoever is barefoot and my clothes to whoever is naked.

Officer: Bind him to the cross!

1st Soldier: **(To the second soldier)** You first.

2nd Soldier: **(To the first soldier)** No, you.

1st Soldier: Why me?

2nd Soldier: Why me?

Paulus: Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.³⁰

Officer: Bind him! **(Darkness)**

Scene 16

A street in Caesarea. Paulus and Trophimos hurry to the port. Paulus walks with difficulty. Trophimos carries their bags. Light falls on Nero.

Nero: Where are you bound for, Paulus?

Paulus: For a ship, Your Majesty.

Nero: The one sailing for Athens? **(Paulus is silent)**

Trophimos: Faster, master.

Paulus: My feet hurt, Trophimos.

Trophimos: I don't want to be hanged because of a blister on your feet. I see you care more for your feet than for your neck. Sit down.

Paulus sits on a rock. Trophimos bandages his feet.

Nero: Don't make me beg. I'm not the bloodthirsty tyrant my enemies say I am. Ever since I can remember, I've seen high-born Romans kill one another for no reason. I've only killed those who mocked my divinity. But out of the goodness of my heart I've shown mercy to too many, and the war between man and God isn't over yet. If you take God's side, man will lose. He'll go on howling at the heavens. From time to time he'll break the collar around his neck, bite the legs of people in the street, devour his own whelps, quench his anger on their blood, and slip his neck back into his collar. Is that your gospel for mankind, Paulus? Can't you see how cruel his God has made him?

³⁰ 25 Luke, 23:34

Paulus: You deny God's existence, Your Majesty, because you've never felt the pain that God alone can heal. On the day that you do, you too will cry out for His mercy.

Nero: And if I do, will I be answered? **(Paulus is silent.)** Come with me, I'm warning you. I'm an accomplished artist and I know the art of death better than the Angel of Death. **(Paulus is silent.)** Come! **(Paulus is silent.)** Your death will be more terrible than your Messiah's.

Nero exits. Trophimos finishes bandaging Paulus' feet.

Trophimos: Hurry, Master!

Trophimos takes the bags and the two turn to go. Hananiah appears and bars their way.

Hananiah: Wait, Paulus. Please listen to me before you inflict a terrible disaster on every Jew in every corner of the world. If you promise the Gentiles that they'll be redeemed by their faith alone, they will look at us and ask: If faith alone can save us, why must the Jews bother with all their commandments?

Paulus: My answer is that that's what God has told them to do.

Hananiah: Your answer is already in your epistles. The Jews must follow the commandments because they are sinners. You'll make the Gentiles hate each and everyone of us forever.

Paulus: Quite the opposite. On the day the Gentiles all worship God, they'll thank the Jews for having opened their eyes. **(He turns to go)**

Hananiah: In the name of God, Paulus. This is the crux of it all. It's a question for the Sanhedrin to resolve. If it gives you its blessing, I won't stand in your way.

Paulus: I no longer need its blessing. If you were to see the darkness men live in, you too would realize the greatness of the commandment "I will give you for a light unto the nations"³¹. If the Jews cease to follow it, they cease to be His people.

Hananiah: The Jews do not cease to be His people. You've ceased to be a Jew.

Paulus: If I must cease to be a Jew so that all mankind can be redeemed, then I'm no longer a Jew.

Paulus turns to go. Hananiah signals to two masked men. They enter and block Paulus' way.

³¹ Isaiah, 49:6

Trophimos: Run for it, Master! Run! **(To the street)** Police! Soldiers! Help! They're kidnapping my master!

Trophimos tries to free Paulus from the masked men's grip. One of them stabs him with a dagger.

Trophimos: Good people, help! I've been murdered. I'm dying.

Paulus: He's bleeding!

Trophimos: A doctor, Master!

Paulus: Bandage his wound!

Trophimos: A doctor! Get me to a doctor!

Soldier: **(To Paulus)** Move.

Paulus: Have mercy on him.

Trophimos: I'm done for. The life is draining out of me. Should I look up at the sky now and scream for God's mercy? If there is a God up there, I'd rather curse him for letting me die such a miserable death.

He dies. The masked men drag away his body.

Scene 17

Two soldiers throw Paulus into a prison cell. Jesus is waiting for him.

Paulus: What was his sin, Rabbi? His loyalty? His generosity? His love? He was guilty of nothing and they threw his body to the dogs.

Jesus: God will comfort you by bringing the redemption, my son.

Paulus: If we wish to bring it, we need to set the Jews aside and find other believers. We need to write new books, appoint new rabbis, build new synagogues.

Jesus: We're Jews, Paulus. You, too, even if you say you aren't any more.

Paulus: You're the only one who says you're a Jew.

Jesus: My gospel is meant for Jews, too. The day is near when they believe in me with all their hearts and they will all be my apostles to the nations. They will all teach God's Law and then redemption will come.

Paulus: The Jews are enslaved to their Law, Rabbi. That's why they insisted on handing you over to your crucifiers.

Jesus: Because they did, I was able to atone for humanity's sins. All your life you've been trying to atone for handing me over to the Sanhedrin and letting me die on the cross. Did I ask you to take me down from it?

Paulus: Was it right to leave you there?

Jesus: You've wanted so badly to atone for a sin you never committed that you've gone and sinned by cutting yourself off from your people. If you turn to the Gentiles on your own, you will only delay the redemption.

Felix and Hananiah enter with Adima and Eleazar, led in shackles by two soldiers. They have obviously been tortured.

Felix: If Paulus has rebelled against Rome, High Priest, he will be tried by the laws of Rome.

Hananiah: He has indeed rebelled. He's no different from Jesus of Nazareth, who told his disciples: "After the Holy Spirit is come upon you, ye shall receive power, and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem."³²

Paulus: He told us to bear witness to God's Torah.

Hananiah: The Zealots hear Paulus speaking of redemption and know it's a call to rise up.

Paulus: I've always said that Caesar has been ordained by God. Whoever resists Caesar resists the will of God.³³

Hananiah: Let these two testify. **(To Adima)** Did Paulus speak to you of a revolt against Rome?

Adima: **(Barely able to speak)** Yes.

Hananiah: What did he say? **(She is silent)** Well, what?

Eleazar: He said the Messiah would cast off Caesar's yoke. That he would reign in Jerusalem. That he would do battle with the enemies of Israel and destroy them. He said Rome would sink to the bottom of the sea.

Felix: Hang them!

Paulus: But what have they done? Hang me instead.

Felix: Hang them. And nobody is to know they were forced to lie.

³² Acts, 1:8.

³³ Romans, 13:1-2

Paulus: Talk to him, Hananiah! Save them and I'll give up my mission. I won't preach any more. Let me take them with me to Tarsus and you'll never hear of me again!

Hananiah says nothing. Adima struggles with the soldiers.

Adima: I'll wait for you at the gates of heaven, Paulus. You'll soon come, and Seraphs will welcome us singing, "Holy, holy, holy," and you'll take my hand and lead me to God's throne. The Holy One Blessed Be He will make us a wedding canopy and marry us. On a bed of clouds I'll conceive and bear you a son.

She manages to reach Paulus and to embrace him. The soldiers tear her from his arms and lead her and Eleazar away.

Felix: **(To the soldiers)** Hang him too.

Paulus: I'm a Roman citizen, sir. I insist on the right to plead my case before Caesar.

Felix: And I'm a Roman procurator and I want you dead. Every time you open your big mouth and start praising that God of yours who created the world, I have to swallow the insult to my god Jupiter, the king of heaven who created light. Jupiter, who sits on his heavenly throne – Jupiter, who rules the thunder and the lightning -- Jupiter, founder of Rome – Jupiter, the source of law and justice in the world! I want nothing to do with your invisible, bodiless God who has no shape and can't even be imagined. I won't allow you to undermine Jupiter's statues and topple the pillars of his temples. **(To the soldiers)** Hang him.

The soldiers shackle Paulus and start dragging him away.

Paulus: **(To Hananiah)** I go willingly to my death, but the day is near when I shall again bring mankind the tidings of our lord the Messiah, by whose grace all men are free and all kingdoms dissolved and all kings dethroned. On that day the gates of heaven will open, and our lord the Messiah will descend with a blast of bugles and sit on the throne of mercy and justice, and all who believe in him will rise from the dead, and he will judge his foes and pass sentence on them. And I will be there by his side, pointing to the persecutors who put me through grievous sufferings and took my life, and he will revenge me to the uttermost, and destroy your land and your Temple, and scatter you over the face of the earth, and you will be cursed forever.

The soldiers seize Paulus and begin to take him away. Drusilla enters

Drusilla: Let go of him. **(To Felix)** If he dies, you'll never see me again. **(She kisses his hands.)** Let him live and I'll do anything you ask me to.

Felix: I don't want you to do anything for me for his sake. **(To the soldiers)**
Hang him!

Drusilla: Let him go or I'll go to the emperor and tell him of all your crimes in Caesarea. Of all the blood you've spilled. Of all the property you've stolen. **(She pulls his dagger from its sheathe and threatens him with it)** Let him board his ship! **(He knocks her down and takes the dagger from her. She kneels in front of Paulus)** Forgive me, Paulus, for the sin of my helplessness. I'll atone by gathering your disciples and building synagogues for them. They'll preach in your name and your teachings will live.

She kisses Paulus' feet. Felix pulls her to her feet.

Felix: **(To the soldiers)** Stop! Put him on a ship to Rome. Let him be tried there and hanged there and buried there without even a grave or a tombstone that can be kissed.

Felix leads Drusilla away. Hananiah settles into his litter and his servants carry him out. The soldiers help Paulus to his feet. Light falls on Jesus.

Paulus: Save me, Rabbi. The Romans will kill me.

Jesus: Return to your people and to your Torah and I'll save you gladly and lovingly.

Paulus: Save me for the sake of your gospel.

Jesus: Yours isn't my gospel.

Paulus: Did I deny your Messiahship? Your Godhood? Your grace spans the world, Rabbi. Since the day you were revealed to me, I've worshiped you with all my heart and might. Can't you let me differ with you for the sake of Heaven?

Jesus: I implore you, Paulus. Return to your faith, or you'll die.

Paulus: Is this my punishment for defending all mankind? Have I sacrificed my life in vain? Did you sacrifice yours in vain? Answer me, Rabbi! If all who fight for human redemption are put to death, perhaps God doesn't care about redeeming us. Perhaps He's tired of man and has abandoned him. **(Darkness)**

Scene 18

The crucifixion site in the prison yard in Rome. Light falls on the ghost of Trophimos .

Trophimos: **(To the audience)** He said: "Abhor the evil. Cleave to the good. Be kind one to another with brotherly love. Bless them which persecute you. Bless and curse not. Avenge not yourselves."³⁴

Light falls on Paulus, his arms and legs bound to an erect cross. Two soldiers stand beneath it with a hammer and nails.

Officer: Nail him to the cross, I said. **(The soldiers hesitate. He flicks his whip at them)** Nail him to it! **(They hesitate)** Here, give me the hammer.

The officer takes the hammer and the nails and goes over to Paulus.

Trophimos: He said, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."³⁵

Paulus: I'd like to say a last prayer, sir.

Officer: To whom? Who will answer you?

Trophimos: **(To the audience)** He said, "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."³⁶

The officer lays a rock at the foot of the cross, stands on it, steadies a nail against Paulus' forearm, and raises the hammer. Nero appears.

Nero: **(To the officer)** Stop.

The officer and soldiers take Paulus down from the cross.

Nero: **(To Paulus)** I suppose you're thinking now that God will answer your prayer and call down from heaven, "Hands off!" **(He laughs)** Well, let's hear from Him! **(Heavenward)** Hello, is anyone there? **(To Paulus)** Do you hear anything? **(To the soldiers)** Do you? There's no one there, Paulus. It's I who passed sentence on you, I, Nero, emperor of Rome. I'm the good and I'm the evil. I'm the compassionate and I'm the vengeful. I give life and I bring death, I and no other. I am God. I've come to watch you die with my own eyes. And I don't want to have to wait for you to spit out your damned soul on that cross. **(Commanding)** Take him down. **(To Paulus)** On your knees! Kneel!

Paulus: I've borne this cross the whole suffering way, sir. Let me die on it now.

³⁴ Romans, 12: 9,10,14,19

³⁵ Romans, 12:17

³⁶ Roman, 12:21

Nero: On your knees!

The officer knocks Paulus to the ground.

Nero: **(To the officer)** Off with his head!

Paulus: My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me?³⁷

The officer beheads Paul. Darkness.

The End

³⁷ Matthew, 27:46