

ADULT QUARTERLY



CHURCH GROWTH —EXTENSION— ACTS 15-28

SUNDAY SCHOOL
SPRING QUARTER, 2013
MARCH, APRIL, MAY

Adult Quarterly

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SPRING QUARTER, 2013

Church Growth—Extension

A Study in Acts 15—28

Written by David Robinson

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QUARTERLY AIM: The student will learn biblical principles of church planting by studying the extension of the first church led by the apostle Paul.

MARCH

3—Clarifying the Message	4
10—Church Planting in Philippi	11
17—Church Planting in Thessalonica	18
24—Church Planting in Corinth	25
31—Church Planting in Ephesus	32

APRIL

7—Strengthening Brethren in Miletus	39
14—Persecution in Jerusalem	46
21—Testimony in the Temple	53
28—Accusations in the Sanhedrin	60

MAY

5—Defense Before Felix and Festus	67
12—Defense Before King Agrippa	75
19—Protection in the Storm	83
26—Preaching in Rome	90

About the Writer



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He has pastored churches in central and southern Arkansas. From 1967 to 1999 he served as an instructor in the Missionary Baptist Seminary. He served as Registrar at the school from 1978 to 1988, and as Chancellor and Editor of the Missionary Baptist Searchlight from 1988 to 1999. He served as Chaplain for the Pulaski County Sheriff's Office from 1992 until 2007. He served on the Baptist Sunday School Committee of the ABA from 1987 to 1998 and as President of the ABA in 1999 and 2000. He has served as Parliamentarian for the ABA since 2001. Presently he is pastor of Landmark Missionary Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, where he has served since 1971.

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American Baptist Association

Through-the-Bible Series Sunday School Lessons

	Winter	Spring	Summer	Fall
2013	Acts 1—14	Acts 15—28	1 Samuel 2 Samuel 1—4 1 Chronicles 1—10	Mark 1—8
2014	Mark 9—16	2 Samuel 5—24 1 Chronicles 11—29 1 Kings 1; 2	James 1 Thessalonians 2 Thessalonians	Psalms 1—72
2015	Psalms 73—150	Galatians	1 Kings 3—22 2 Chronicles 1—24 2 Kings 1—13 Joel; Obadiah	1 Corinthians
2016	Proverbs Ecclesiastes Song of Solomon	Luke 1—13:21	Luke 13:22—24	Hosea; Amos; Micah; Jonah; 2 Kings 14—16 2 Chronicles 25—28
2017	2 Corinthians	Isaiah 1—39 2 Chronicles 29—32 2 Kings 17—20 Nahum	Isaiah 40—66 2 Kings 21—23 2 Chronicles 33—35 Zephaniah	Philemon Philippians Colossians
2018	Ephesians	1 Timothy 2 Timothy Titus	Jeremiah Lamentations 2 Kings 24; 25 2 Chronicles 36	John 1—10
2019	John 11—21	Ezra; Nehemiah Habakkuk; Haggai Malachi; Esther	1 Peter 2 Peter	1, 2, 3 John Jude
2020	Daniel Ezekiel Zechariah	Revelation 1—11	Revelation 12—22	Genesis 1—11 Job
2021	Genesis 12—50	Matthew 1—13	Matthew 14—28	Exodus
2022	Romans	Leviticus Numbers Deuteronomy	Hebrews	Joshua Judges Ruth

1

Clarifying the Message

Text: Acts 15:1-41

Focus: Acts 15:1-11, 22, 24-31

Key Verses:

“And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

Acts 15:8, 9

Sunday Devotional: Definition of the Gospel, I Corinthians 15:1-4.

Application: Clarity of the saving gospel is essential. Additions to or subtractions from the message pervert it. Learn the basics of the gospel message and share it.

A FIRST LOOK

One certain thing about the work of church planting is that there will be problems associated with it. It is almost certain that the problems cannot be anticipated. If we were to make a list of the things that could possibly trouble us, we would leave off some problems that will occur, and we would worry about many possible troubles that will never happen. This is the situation we find in our lesson today.

The work of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles had attracted a great deal of attention. At this time, there were others who came to Antioch not to help but to spread false doctrine. Jesus taught that when the good seed was planted the briars would also grow. Paul and Barnabas had sown the good seed of the gospel. Now, the false teachers had come along to sow the thorns and briars of false doctrine.

Like most lies, this one was plausible. It seemed reasonable, and, no doubt, many did accept

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Gentiles Not Under the Law, Acts 15:12-21.
- T. — Dividing Forces Multiplies Impact, Acts 15:33-41.
- W. — John Mark—Profitable for Ministry, 2 Timothy 4:11.
- T. — One in Christ Jesus, Galatians 3:24-29.
- F. — God of Jews and Gentiles, Romans 3:24-30.
- S. — In Christ the Wall Is Gone, Ephesians 2:11-22.

it. We must remember that these things took place before the Bible was completed. The only spiritual information available to these brethren was their knowledge of the Old Testament and the words spoken by those who taught them.

However, God was in the work of Paul and Barnabas, and He would not allow it to be ruined by false doctrine. In the solution to this problem, we can learn many valuable lessons about how Christians from different backgrounds and cultures should relate to each other.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. The False Doctrine

Acts 15:1-4

- 1. And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.**
- 2. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.**
- 3. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.**
- 4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.**

What happened here was wrong in many ways. The certain men who came from Judea were not missionaries like Paul and Barnabas. These men were not sent by God, and they did not come to preach to lost people. They had come to instruct the Gentile believers in Antioch. God never sends anyone to preach false doctrine.

These men were clearly usurping the authority of Paul. Simply put, they did not believe that Paul was an apostle like Peter and the others. They felt the need to correct the doctrine of a man who had been an eyewitness to the resurrected Jesus. Also, they felt that the Gentiles were not saved unless they had been circumcised.

Consider this for a moment at face value. If this were true, only men could be saved. We can assume that at least half of the church at Antioch was made up of women. If circumcision were necessary for salvation, how could women be saved? Was a Gentile man who was circumcised automatically saved without believing in Jesus? This was an unsound argument, but false doctrine never makes biblical sense.

Another facet of this error is that this is not taught at all in the Old Testament. Circumcision was never a part of salvation. Circumcision is about a covenant relationship with God, not about the saving of a soul. The only basis for this teaching was the prejudice of the Jews against the Gentiles. The Pharisees were circumcised, so they thought that everyone should be.

Paul and Barnabas did their best to expose the error of these teachings, but they were not able to change the minds of these Jews. Before we use our mouths, we should use our ears. Those who wish to teach should begin by learning, and the first part of learning is realizing what we do not know. Paul and Peter had learned this lesson, but these Jews had not. The conclusion was for both parties to go to Jerusalem and place this whole matter before the other apostles.

The church in Antioch provided the means for the journey, and the group traveled down the coast to Jerusalem. As they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, Paul and Barnabas declared how the gospel had gone out to the Gentiles, and this brought great joy to the brethren who heard this good news. When they got to Jerusalem, Paul gave a report to the church, and this report was the starting place for the discussion that followed.

II. The Council in Jerusalem

Acts 15:5-11

5. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the law of Moses.

6. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

7. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men *and* brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

- 8. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as *he did* unto us;**
9. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
10. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
11. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

At some point, a gathering of the elders, the apostles and Paul and Barnabas was convened for the purpose of considering the matter of Gentile believers. We should always remember that there is great benefit to wise counsel. Wisdom may not always prevail in such meetings, but it is always good to put things before many witnesses. Truth loves the sunshine, and suspicion grows in the dark.

The Pharisees declared that the Gentiles not only had to be circumcised, but they also had to keep the Law of Moses. These Pharisees obviously had not completely abandoned their old way of life to follow Jesus.

One thing to remember is that preaching to Gentiles was not the work of men. It was the work of God. God had directed that Paul and Barnabas be set aside for this work. God had directed them to their fields of labor, and God had given the increase when the seed of the gospel was planted. Now, God would see to it that the work he had started would go to completion.

We can only imagine the amount of disputing that went on in this assembly. We know that some of the believers in Jerusalem did not trust Paul. We also know that the Pharisees had already made up their minds about the Gentiles. As the arguments were being made, Peter stood up and set the matter right. He had heard both sides of this issue; in fact, he had lived on both sides of this issue. He was able to offer these wonderful words of wisdom. God had prepared Peter for this moment when he was in the house of Cornelius.

First, Peter told this assembly that God had chosen the Gentiles to hear the gospel. Christianity was not to be an extension of Judaism. This is important because going all the way back to the sermon of Stephen, there were many Jews who believed that Christianity was exclusively for the people of Israel.

Peter declared that the Gentiles, in a state of uncircumcision, had received the Holy Spirit as the Jews had. God had made no difference between a circumcised Jew and an uncircumcised Gentile when it came to purifying their hearts. All men are saved by faith, no matter where they are born. If anyone there honestly considered these words, he would realize that they were true. The things Peter mentioned were matters of public knowledge and everyone there knew that they were true.

Peter asked a convicting question. Why were these Jews trying to put a burden on others that they were not able to bear themselves? Peter had heard the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus declared the real meaning and purpose of the Law of Moses. He knew that no one could keep the Law, and that the Law was a teacher that was supposed to bring us to Christ. The men of the Old Testament could not keep the Law. The men present could not keep the Law, and neither can men in our day. The Law is about realizing that we are sinners. It was never meant to save anyone.

Notice that this false doctrine went to the heart of the relationship of the Gentiles with God. The men of Judea did not question the sincerity of the Gentiles; they questioned their salvation. This whole dispute was about how to be saved and about who was saved. This is why it is so serious.

Peter clearly stated how we are saved in verse 11 and when he made this statement, the dispute was over. The multitude listened to Paul and Barnabas and rejoiced at what they heard.

III. The Wise Decision of the Council

Acts 15:22, 24-31

22. Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

24. Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye *must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment:

25. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,

26. Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

27. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.

28. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

30. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle:

31. Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

The decision of the council had been made, and now it needed to be implemented. The church in Jerusalem decided to send Paul and Barnabas along with Judas Barsabas and Silas back to Antioch to announce the decision to the Gentile believers there. These men were not only eyewitnesses at the council in Jerusalem; they were also men who had risked their lives in the service of the Lord. Their testimony could be trusted.

The decision of the council was that there were doctrines that must not be compromised and there were also preferences that should be respected. No one had to be circumcised to be saved, but it would be good for the Gentiles to avoid unnecessary offense to their Jewish brethren. The Gentiles could do this through harmless and simple changes in their behavior. First, they were to abstain or not eat meat offered to idols. Paul would deal with this subject later in 1 Corinthians 8. The Gentiles were not to eat blood or animals that had been strangled, and they were to avoid fornication which is always wrong.

None of these things had anything to do with being saved, and they were not a part of the original false teaching. These dietary regulations were brotherly accommodations to avoid having an in your face attitude toward the believing Jews. As Paul wisely stated in 1 Corinthians 8:13, "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." There are many things that are not wrong to do, but that could needlessly offend others, and we should be careful to consider those who are spiritually weaker. Our liberty should never become a stumbling block to others who are weaker.

Those who had journeyed to Jerusalem returned to Antioch in Syria and announced the decision of the council. This decision was well received, and the Gentile believers rejoiced because wisdom had prevailed.

A FINAL WORD

False doctrine must be dealt with and often it must be dealt with forcibly. This was the case here. It might seem that Paul and Barnabas should have ignored these Judaizers and gone on with their work, but this was an important matter for the work of the Lord, and it needed to be resolved.

We also learn that there is much wisdom in good counsel. Many minds applied to the same problem may find a solution that is not apparent. The Jews who came to Antioch would not listen to Paul and Barnabas, but they did hear the counsel of Peter. This does not mean that Peter was superior to Paul. It does mean that we are not interchangeable. At this time, Peter had the influence to make this judgment, and his message was heard.

We also learn that the truth must be communicated to those who need it. The decision was made. It was good, but it did not help the church in Antioch until the men from Jerusalem traveled there and announced it. All this took time, money and energy from all involved, but it was worth the cost so that the truth of God could be firmly established in the future work of these churches.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What is the danger if people share a confusing or contradicting gospel message?
2. Why do you think the believing Pharisees added circumcision to the gospel message?
3. How was the heretical and divisive issue concerning circumcision resolved?
4. What can be learned from the way these Christian leaders resolved that serious conflict? Can their attitudes and actions be applied to divisive issues today?

2

Church Planting in Philippi

Text: Acts 16:1-40

Focus: Acts 16:6, 7, 9, 10, 13-15, 23-34

Key Verses:

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”

Acts 16:9, 10

Sunday Devotional: Confess—Believe—Receive, Romans 10:9, 10.

Application: God opens and closes doors of ministry for His servants. As you follow the lead of the Holy Spirit and share the gospel, people will be saved.

A FIRST LOOK

These verses record the beginning of the second missionary journey of Paul. Before this trip began, there was dissension between Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark along but Paul did not. The contention was so sharp that they decided to split up. Barnabas took John Mark, and Paul chose Silas.

A part of the purpose of this trip was to deliver the letters and decrees from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem concerning Judaism to these young churches. This problem needed to be resolved.

An important component of this lesson is an insight into the working of the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit leads us in one of two ways. First,

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Faithful Young Timothy, Acts 16:1-5.
- T. — Life Is in His Son, 1 John 5:11-13.
- W. — Saved by Grace Through Faith, Ephesians 2:8-10.
- T. — Justified by Faith—Peace with God, Romans 5:1, 2.
- F. — Believe and Receive, John 1:12, 13.
- S. — Faith Is What Counts, Galatians 5:1-6.

He leads through the teaching of the Bible. The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit. When we read the Bible, God is literally speaking to us. We can always be assured that when we do as the Bible teaches we are following the leadership of the Holy Spirit. We can also be certain that, if we ignore anything that the Bible teaches us, we are going against the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit also leads us by opening and closing doors of opportunity. We will learn how this works in our lesson today. Paul and Silas were not traveling at random. They had specific goals in mind, but God also had a plan for this journey.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. God Closes and Opens Doors

Acts 16:6, 7, 9, 10

6. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

7. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

9. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

10. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

The purpose of this trip was to visit and strengthen the churches that were planted by Paul and Barnabas on their first journey. Paul and Silas visited these churches and accomplished this part of their mission. Now, Paul and Silas wanted to go and preach the gospel and establish churches in other areas.

They first desired to go into Asia, but the Holy Spirit forbade them from preaching there. We do not know exactly what happened, but in some way God convinced Paul and Silas that this was not the way for them to go. They attempted to go to Bithynia, and once again the Holy Spirit would not allow them to go there. God could have used many means to deny them access to these areas, and there is no need to speculate. The point is that

God had closed the doors to these two areas for these two men at this time.

God leads us by denying us access to the places He does not want us to go. We should be wise enough to recognize this and stop trying to beat down doors that are obviously closed. Paul and Silas graciously accepted that they could not preach in Asia and Bithynia. They humbly sought the will of God for their journey. They passed by Mysia and came to Troas, across the Aegean Sea from Macedonia. Once there they prayed and asked God for leadership.

Now God led them by positively opening a door of opportunity. Paul saw a vision of a man asking them to come there and help. Paul and Silas immediately recognized what this vision meant, and they immediately made plans to travel to Macedonia. They concluded that this was the place God wanted them to work.

The lesson for us is that we should first work where we know we can. Paul and Silas went to the churches that were already established. God put a desire in Paul's heart to revisit these churches, and Paul obeyed this desire and went back where he had already been.

We should never be afraid to try new things. Paul and Silas attempted to go to Asia and Bithynia. God closed the doors to these areas, but he did not scold His men for trying to go there. Everything we attempt to do for the Lord will not be a success, but we should try to spread the gospel everywhere we can. When a door closes we should seek another place to work and not look back on what might have been. It takes a wise servant to simply walk away from a closed door.

We should never give up. Paul and Silas did not go back to Antioch thinking that their work among the Gentiles was done because two doors had been closed. They kept seeking the will of God until another door was opened. The opening of the door to Macedonia was as positive as the closing of the doors to Asia and Bithynia.

When they finally found an open door, they immediately went through it. Paul did not organize a committee or do a feasibility study in Macedonia. He simply obeyed the Holy Spirit and went there to preach. His work in Macedonia would be a great success, but Paul did not know this when he journeyed from Troas into a new territory to preach the gospel.

II. The First Conversion in Philippi

Acts 16:13-15

13. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

14. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

15. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

Paul and Silas sailed for Troas and landed at Neapolis, the port near Philippi. This was a distance of about one hundred fifty miles, and it took them two days to make the trip. Philippi was a Roman colony which meant that the people who lived there were recognized in the same way as the citizens of Rome. The people there were given many privileges, including exemption from taxes.

Paul and Silas did not begin to evangelize the city randomly even though they knew God had called them there. They took time to rest, pray and make their plans. It is great to know where God wants us to labor, but we must also trust him to show us when and how He wants us to work.

There was no synagogue in Philippi. It required ten men to found a synagogue, so there were not many Jews in Philippi. However, there was a place of prayer by the river outside the city. Paul and Silas went there, and they encountered a remarkable woman who had gone there to pray. Paul had been obedient to the Lord, and the Lord had gone before him to prepare the way.

Lydia was a successful businesswoman from Thyatira, a city known for its purple dye. She may have come to establish a business in Philippi. God brought her to Macedonia so that she could hear the gospel and be saved. She was already a worshiper of God. Lydia was a Gentile but she openly worshiped with the Jews. She was not an idol worshiper, and she was seeking the truth.

Paul and Silas joined this group of women, and Paul spoke to them. The word used in verse 14 suggests a personal conversa-

tion rather than formal preaching. This was person to person witnessing, and Lydia responded and was saved. Here is a wonderful example of Romans 10:17. Faith came by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

Lydia openly and publicly identified herself with Jesus by being baptized. They were at a riverbank, so God had seen to every detail. Others present from her household also believed and were baptized at this time. She insisted that the missionaries come and stay in her home. This was not merely a casual invitation. Lydia literally constrained these men to make her home their home in Philippi. Since Lydia was from Thyatira, she may have known that these strangers would have a difficult time in this city.

This was the beginning of the church at Philippi. A core group had been saved and baptized and now Paul and Silas could teach them the Word, and others could join them in the beginning of this great church.

We have events and people coming together to accomplish the will of God. Paul and Silas came from Troas, through Neapolis to the river bank and this group of ladies. Lydia came from Thyatira to Philippi and down to the river to pray. As Paul preached the gospel, the Holy Spirit came in conviction of Lydia's heart and she was saved. Then God led Lydia to invite Paul and Silas to her home and the nucleus of a church was planted there.

God works on many sides and in many hearts, and when all concerned will honestly seek his will, many blessings will follow. This is the lesson of the beginning of the gospel in Macedonia.

III. The Conversion of a Jailer and His Household

Acts 16:23-34

23. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely:

24. Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

25. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.

28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed *their* stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

Just because we are following the leadership of the Holy Spirit, does not mean we will not encounter difficulties. Paul and Silas were beaten and put in prison in Philippi because they had denied evil men the profit they made from taking advantage of a demon-possessed girl.

The jailer treated these missionaries like they were dangerous, hardened criminals, putting them in the inner prison and confining their feet to stocks. Paul and Silas were not discouraged and at midnight they were singing praises to God. The other prisoners heard their remarkable reaction to a very bad situation.

God brought an earthquake to Philippi. This earthquake broke open the doors of the prison and loosened the stocks that held Paul and Silas. Everyone in the prison was free to leave in the dark and confusion that followed this event.

The jailer thought that the prisoners had escaped, so he prepared to kill himself with his sword. In a moment, this man's life had been so upset that he was willing to kill himself rather than face the unforeseen consequence of a prison break. Note the different reactions of the jailer and of Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas were singing praise to God while the jailer was so distraught that he wanted to kill himself.

Out of the darkness Paul cried that every prisoner was still in the prison. The jailer called for a light to be brought into the

darkness and destruction of the jail and discovered that indeed Paul was telling the truth. The jailer had been on a roller coaster ride emotionally and now he realized in a flash that he was lost and needed to be saved. The prisoners were still there and his life was no longer in danger, but he was not prepared to die. He asked Paul what he needed to do, and Paul told him succinctly and accurately. The man believed and was saved.

A FINAL WORD

The jailer allowed Paul to preach the same message to everyone present. He brought Paul and Silas into his own home, dressed their wounds and fed them. His entire household rejoiced now, not because the earthquake had come and not because the prisoners had not fled, because this man had found the Lord in his heart.

In a diverse group, from women praying by a riverside to a jailer and his household, the gospel had been planted in Philippi, and a church would grow and be strong because of it.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Has God ever closed a door of ministry for you? Did He open another door of ministry? Explain.
2. Lydia was a worshiper of God but was not saved until she listened to the words of Paul, and God opened her heart. Is it possible to worship God and, yet, be lost?
3. Is it strange that Paul followed the call of God to Macedonia and it led him into prison?
4. Have you ever followed the will of God directly into trials or difficulties? Share that experience with the class.

Church Planting in Thessalonica

Text: Acts 17:1-34

Focus: Acts 17:1-6, 10-12, 15-18,
22, 23, 32-34

Key Verses:

“And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

Acts 17:2, 3

Sunday Devotional: How Shall They Hear? Romans 10:11-15.

Application: Proclaiming the gospel to lost people is the first step of church planting. If people must hear to believe, the gospel must be shared in words they understand.

A FIRST LOOK

We may discover the open doors God has given us, but we should never think that simply because we are following the Lord we will not have problems along the way. Paul and Silas endured an awful time in the jail at Philippi, but the wonderful result was the salvation of precious souls. The gospel had been sown in Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, and now these men moved on to other fields.

In this lesson, we find a practical example of the truth of the parable of the sower that Jesus gave in Matthew 13. This parable is about planting and it teaches us that the condition of the soil always determines the harvest. Paul and those with him did not change their message as their cir-

Daily Devotionals

- M. — How the Gospel Came, I Thessalonians 1:1-10.
- T. — Bold Despite Contention, I Thessalonians 2:1-8.
- W. — Laboring in the Gospel, I Thessalonians 2:9-12.
- T. — Our Crown of Rejoicing, I Thessalonians 2:13-20.
- F. — Paul's Support in Thessalonica, Philippians 4:15-17.
- S. — Paul's Love for the Thessalonians, I Thessalonians 3:5-13.

cumstances and situations changed. They preached the same truth everywhere they went. The difference was that some hearts were hardened, and some hearts were ready to gladly receive the Word. Paul recognized this and went where the gospel was readily received.

The personal courage of Paul and Silas is beyond question, but as servants of the Lord, they realized that everyone would not receive their message. They told the truth, and when evil men refused to hear and heed it, they went to other places and preached there. In these exchanges, Paul, Silas and Timothy never lost a thing. Instead, the evil men who drove them away suffered the loss. They lost the opportunity to hear the gospel and to be eternally changed by this wonderful, life-giving message.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. A Miracle Was Performed

Acts 17:1-6

- 1. Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:**
- 2. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures,**
- 3. Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.**
- 4. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.**
- 5. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.**
- 6. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also.**

This is the record of the founding of the church at Thessalonica. Paul summarized his experiences in 1 Thessalonians 2:2, “But

even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.”

The missionaries left Philippi and passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia. No doubt, they were still following the leadership of the Holy Spirit that had brought them to Macedonia in the first place. We see Paul’s missionary strategy in his comment in 1 Thessalonians 1:8, “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” Paul sowed the gospel in the major cities, and that precious seed spread throughout the whole region. In this way, the message of the gospel could be spread much further and faster than if Paul and his companions had been acting alone. Paul was teaching others so that they could teach others and so on.

When Paul came into Thessalonica, he went to the synagogue. Any Jew could stand and speak in a synagogue, and Paul used this means to spread the gospel. Today a missionary would not be wise to seek out a synagogue as a place to preach, but we should use the wisdom God has given us to look for ways and means to spread the gospel.

Paul was not arguing about the minor points of the Law in his messages. His specific goal was to present Jesus to those who were lost. He began by using Old Testament Scriptures to show that the Messiah of Israel would suffer, die and rise again from the dead. He made his case on three consecutive Sabbath days. This was quite a revelation to those present and Paul was thorough in his presentation. For three weeks he stayed there and drove home the two points of his message.

He preached that the Christ, the Messiah, had to suffer, die and be raised from the dead, and he preached that Jesus of Nazareth had done this. This is the essence of the gospel. This is summed up in the answer to two simple questions. Was Jesus who He said He was? Did Jesus do what he said He did? Jesus said that he was the Son of God, and He claimed that he died and rose again. If these statements are true, everything about our lives is changed. If they are not true, our faith is in vain.

God added the convicting power of the Holy Spirit to this message and a great number of people readily accepted it. They wanted more and more fellowship with Paul and Silas, and they

found these missionaries ready to teach them. Many of the devout Greeks and the chief women of the city were also attracted to this group. This fellowship of believers formed the nucleus of the church at Thessalonica.

We read in 1 Thessalonians how these people turned to God from idols and served the true and living God. We read of their earnest expectation that Jesus would come again for them. However, when there is great revival, there is also an opportunity for persecution.

II. Planting a Church in Berea

Acts 17:10-12

10. And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

12. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

The unbelieving Jews in Thessalonica stirred up the rabble of the town against Paul, and the uproar forced Paul to leave the city at night. Berea was about forty-five miles from Thessalonica. It was quite a journey to get there.

Once again, Paul followed his plan of going to the Jewish synagogue to gain an audience for his message. Paul and Silas had been able to persuade many in Thessalonica, as we read in 1 Thessalonians, but the ground was more fertile in Berea. We see again that the condition of the soil determines the harvest.

The interesting term, *more noble*, in verse 11 literally suggests that the people in Berea were ethnically different from those in Thessalonica. Thessalonica contained what the Bible calls “lewd fellows of the baser sort” (verse 5). Evidently, these people were not present in Berea. The gospel ground in Berea did not contain as many thorns and rocks, and the gospel quickly took hold there. The characteristics that made this possible are clearly stated for us.

First, the Bereans received the word with ready minds. This suggests that these people were not bound by senseless traditions and preconceived ideas that kept them from hearing the truth.

Many people have their minds made up, and they do not want to be confused with the facts. The Bereans gave Paul and Silas an honest audience and a fair hearing.

Second, we see that they searched the Scriptures daily to verify the message that Paul and Silas presented. This is precisely the same admonition Jesus gave in John 5:39. No honest preacher will ever ask you to take his word for what he says. Instead, he will point you to the Bible and urge you to read it for yourself and build your faith on the Word of God, not on the opinion of a man. The Bereans did this every day, and they came to the conclusion that Paul was accurately interpreting the Old Testament and Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God.

As a consequence of these steps, many people in Berea believed in Jesus. This group was diverse. Of course, it included some of the Jews who worshiped at the synagogue, but there were also many honorable Greek men and women who believed. When the truth of the Word of God is received into ready minds that will honestly search the Scriptures, belief in Jesus and spiritual change will inevitably follow.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation. We must never forget that we present the most powerful, life-changing force in the world when we preach the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ.

The unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica evidently heard of Paul's success in Berea and traveled there to stir up opposition against him. Satan hates the truth, and he will do his best to silence God's messengers. Paul had to leave Berea, and he traveled alone by ship to Athens, leaving Silas and Timothy there to minister to this young church.

III. Preaching to the Philosophers in Athens

Acts 17:15-18, 22, 23, 32-34

15. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

16. Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

17. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

18. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

22. Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

23. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

32. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

33. So Paul departed from among them.

34. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

Paul was waiting at Athens for Silas and Timothy to come, but as he saw the many lost people around him, he was stirred in his spirit to preach to them. Athens was a Greek city, so Paul not only went into the synagogue, but he also went into the marketplace and spoke with those who would hear him.

As he was witnessing, two groups of philosophers called the Stoics and Epicureans brought Paul to a place on Mars' Hill to better hear what he had to say. The Athenian Greeks literally lived to hear some new thing, and they thought that Paul was preaching about a new god named Jesus.

Paul used this opportunity to deliver a masterpiece sermon that began with the unknown god of the Athenians and moved logically to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sermon deserves much attention and study. It is a wonderful lesson about how to preach to idol worshippers in any culture.

Paul preached Jesus and the crowd was receptive until he came to the resurrection. At that point, some began to mock him, and others delayed their response saying that they wanted to hear more from Paul later. At this point, Paul left the crowd, but several people there had heard the gospel and were saved. They went with Paul and, no doubt, learned much more about Jesus and the resurrection.

The sermon at Athens is a great lesson about using what we might consider idle time to witness to others. We never know what effect the gospel will have unless we share it with others.

A FINAL WORD

We have seen three very different kinds of soil in these verses. There was the harsh soil of the hard hearts of the Jews in Thessalonica. Although many believed, the hard-hearted Jews did not, and they followed Paul to other places to try to stop his message. This shows us how Satan fears the simple preaching of the Word. He will literally do anything he can to stop God's people from sharing their faith.

We also see the noble Bereans who were willing to hear the gospel and receive this message into their hearts. Everyone who hears the gospel will not receive it, but everyone will not reject it either. If Paul had become discouraged and quit, these noble Bereans would never have heard the gospel from him. We must never give up simply because some will not believe what we preach and teach. There are still noble souls like those in Berea, and they will accept the gospel message when it is presented to them.

Finally, there are those like the curious Athenians who mostly look on the gospel as a kind of curiosity and view God's preachers as babblers who should be heard but not believed. Even in this atmosphere, the gospel will prevail, and some who hear it will be saved. Our job is to spread the gospel everywhere. Some sow, others water and God will always give the increase.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What can you learn from Paul's practice of first seeking to reach people who have some Bible knowledge (people who attend the synagogue)?
2. What does the descriptive accusation, "These that have turned the world upside down" mean to you? What did it mean to turn the world upside down?
3. What characteristic made Luke describe the Bereans as more noble than the Thessalonians?
4. What is the difference in how Paul presented the gospel to philosophers and pagans on Mars' Hill (Acts 17:22-31) compared to his method in the synagogue at Thessalonica (verses 1-4)? How were they different? What can you learn from his varied methods of sharing the gospel?

4

Church Planting in Corinth

Text: Acts 18:1-28**Focus: Acts 18:1-17****Key Verse:**

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”

Acts 18:8

Sunday Devotional: Paul's Commitment in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Application: The target of gospel preaching and church planting is the whole world. The more immoral and godless the people, the more essential the work of true churches.

A FIRST LOOK

Paul's ministry in Corinth appears to be among his most fruitful, but, honestly, we cannot make such a judgment. The main way we fail in the work of God is if we do not serve God at all. We may have no obvious results from our labor, but when we sow the seed, God will be the judge of our efforts. Paul's ministry planted the seed of the gospel wherever he went, and no matter what happened or did not happen, his work was successful.

Corinth was a wicked city at this time. This explains some of the content of 1 and 2 Corinthians. Paul stayed there for eighteen months and won a great victory when the ruler of the synagogue was converted. After his harsh treatment at the hands of the Jews, this must have seemed a sweet moment for Paul's ministry.

Corinth also marked the reunion of Paul, Silas and Timothy. They had been separated by the persecution at Berea.

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Paul Strengthens the Disciples, Acts 18:18-23.
- T. — The Way of God More Perfectly, Acts 18:24-28.
- W. — Corinthians—Saved from Such Sin, 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
- T. — Faithful Helpers in Christ, Romans 16:3-5.
- F. — Paul's Support in Corinth, 2 Corinthians 11:7-9.
- S. — Effect of the Hidden Gospel, 2 Corinthians 4:3-6.

Now, they were together again, and this must have been an encouragement to all of them.

No matter who we are or how important our work may be, we all need the refreshing times when we see our work succeed. We need to be reunited with old friends and share blessings with them. We need to make new friends and see how God is leading in our lives. Most of all, we need to hear from God. We need the strength that can only come from personal contact with the Holy Spirit. All these blessings came to Paul in Corinth.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Success in Corinth

Acts 18:1-6

1. After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;
2. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.
3. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.
4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.
5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.
6. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Paul came into Corinth, the chief city of the province of Achaia. By all accounts this was a beautiful but wicked place. At first, he kept a lower profile than we see in other places. He went there alone and he took his time laying a foundation for his ministry.

We are introduced to the trade that Paul used to support himself on his journeys. Although Paul had an education and was a scholar, he also knew how to work with his hands. Jewish families of that day insisted that their children learn a trade no matter what else they learned. Then and now, there is nothing

dishonorable about working with your hands to earn a living. Paul was a tentmaker, a skill much in demand in ancient times. Paul probably made tents of cloth and perhaps of leather to serve the many needs of that day. Farmers and shepherds used these tents as they followed their flocks. Soldiers relied on them in their travels.

In pursuing this occupation, Paul met two people who offered much encouragement to him and the work of the Lord. Aquila and Priscilla were Jews who were exiled from Rome by Claudius. They had settled in Corinth and, no doubt, were happy to meet a fellow Jew who was also a tentmaker. This small group strengthened each other, and Paul renewed his pattern of going into the synagogue every Sabbath and persuading those who met there.

When Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, he was encouraged to return to the synagogue and testify about Jesus. Silas and Timothy joined him, and the presence of his traveling companions was another encouragement for Paul to testify to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. Notice the pattern revealed here.

First, he reasoned with them publicly in the synagogue every Sabbath. Paul used the Scriptures and the power of reason to present his case. This calls to mind the great invitation of Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” When honest men think rationally about matters of eternity, they turn to Jesus and are saved.

Paul used his powers of persuasion. This means he used every device he had available to share his own understanding of the Scriptures with these unbelievers. He would later write in 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” Paul did not present a cold factual argument and leave it at that. He made an impassioned plea for the lost to be saved. There is a powerful combination in a reasonable argument that is presented with personal passion.

We also read of his earnest concern for those to whom he spoke. He was “pressed in the spirit” (Acts 18:5) to testify to them about Jesus. The love of Christ was constraining him to do everything he could to see to it that those who heard him were saved.

Everyone did not believe, but as Paul put it, “they opposed themselves” (verse 6). He declared that their fate were now in their own hands and he stated his intention to preach to the Gentiles. As so often happens, when we are about to give up, God opens a door of opportunity.

II. Encouragement for Paul

Acts 18:7-11

7. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain *man's* house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

9. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:

10. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.

11. And he continued *there* a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of a believer named Justus. When Paul decided to turn away from the Jews, the chief Jew of the whole place accepted Jesus. The man's name was Crispus and when Crispus was saved, many others followed him. His whole household was saved, and many other Corinthians heard about this. They were saved as well. The whole group was baptized and a great church was born in Corinth.

Often we labor with those who oppose themselves, and we can become discouraged and think that our witnessing has been for nothing. We can even decide that we need to go in a different direction, but God begins to bless. We realize that what we do is not of ourselves; it is of God. We plant and water, but God gives the increase.

It must have been a great encouragement to Paul to be in the house next door and know that the ruler of the synagogue was saved. Paul's ministry was having an impact on the whole community.

We must never forget that we serve God. When we do the work of the Lord, we never do it in our own strength alone. We always

have the Holy Spirit to help and guide us. God Himself assures us of success. (See Isaiah 55:11.)

God always sees things we do not see. In fact, only God sees things as they really are. We only have part of the picture. God knew that Paul was doing a great work and He told him so directly. This had to be a refreshing experience for Paul.

God told Paul not to be afraid and to continue with his witnessing. It is often tempting to stop when we meet resistance. However, that is when we need to keep on for the Lord. God was not directing Paul to do anything different. He was encouraging him to keep on doing the things that God had called him to do in the first place. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and it was imperative that Paul keep on preaching to those in Corinth. God assured Paul that He was there with him. Do not overlook this simple statement. Even if all others forsake us and if it appears that our work is in vain, God is still there to help and guide us.

God told Paul two things that only God could know. He told him that no one in this city would hurt him, and He told Paul that there were many people in this city who were believers. God assured Paul of success, and this is one of the great lessons of the Bible. When we do God's work in God's way, we are always assured of God's blessing.

III. Insurrection and Judgment

Acts 18:12-17

12. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat,

13. Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.

14. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you:

15. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters.

16. And he drave them from the judgment seat.

17. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

The gospel is a powerful message. It has the power to change lives and save our souls, but it also has the power to stir up hatred in the hearts of those who will not believe it. This is shown here, and it is still true twenty-one centuries later. Here we see the Jews and the Greeks reacting violently to the success of the gospel in Corinth.

The Jews brought Paul before Gallio the deputy or governor of the Roman province of Achaia. They accused Paul of persuading men contrary to their Law. They were referring to the Law of Moses, but before Paul had a chance to answer, Gallio interrupted and told them that if this were about Roman law he would hear the case. Since it was about Jewish laws and customs, he refused to be a judge in this matter. Gallio was indifferent and callous. He was not defending Paul. Rather, he did not want to be bothered. He literally drove the accusing Jews out of his court.

The Greeks, seeing that Paul would not be punished, took Sosthenes, the ruler of the synagogue who had replaced Crispus, and literally beat Sosthenes right there before the judgment seat of Gallio. Gallio showed his indifference by ignoring the whole thing and Sosthenes had to suffer the beating unjustly.

The great importance of this judgment is that Gallio refused to declare that Christianity was an illegal religion. He had, in effect, recognized Paul's preaching as a valid religion. The Jews tried to force the Roman deputy to declare the Christian faith illegal, but Gallio did the opposite. By refusing to hear the case, Gallio made it clear that Rome would not get involved in cases involving Jewish religious disputes. As far as Gallio was concerned, Paul and his disciples had as much right as the Jews to practice their religion and share it with others.

God's promise of success had come to pass for Paul and the work continued in Corinth.

A FINAL WORD

Anyone can become discouraged. We do not always meet with stunning success, and we do not always fail. The truth is that more often than not the results of our service are a mixture of both. We have some victories, and we have some reverses. It is easy to concentrate on the things that we think go wrong and to forget the things that have worked out well. At such times, we

need encouragement from new and old friends. We need to look honestly at the blessings God has given us, and we need to listen to the Word of God. When we do, we will be encouraged to keep on serving the Lord, no matter what.

It's easy to complain and criticize, and there are many willing to fill these positions. It is better to be an encourager and look to the Lord for our strength and help. No matter where you are in the service of God, it is too soon to quit. Do not faint. We will receive a reward in due season, and the promises of God will sustain us in time and throughout eternity.

There are always people like the Jews who accused Paul before Gallio and there are always people like the Greeks who beat Sosthenes, but God is always in control. God had control of the uncaring mind of the Roman judge. His will was done so that Paul had official freedom now to preach the gospel in the Roman empire.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Are there places that are too wicked for missionaries to attempt evangelism and church planting? Consider the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:9-11), the residents of Sodom (Gen. 18:32) and Nineveh (Jonah 1:1, 2).

2. Did Paul consider it wrong for missionaries to work with their own hands to support their ministries?

3. Why do you think the Lord appeared to Paul and reminded him of His presence (Acts 18:10)?

4. Why do you think opposition to Paul and the gospel seemed to follow wherever he ministered? Is opposition to the gospel and work of Christ in existence today? In what ways?



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5

Church Planting in Ephesus

Text: Acts 19:1-41

Focus: Acts 19:1-10, 18-20, 23-28

Key Verses:

“Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all *men*: and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

Acts 19:19, 20

Sunday Devotional: The Power of the Gospel, Romans 1:16.

Application: Only God through the gospel has the power to change lives and revive communities. Make it a priority to share the saving gospel with the lost in your community.

A FIRST LOOK

Today we examine the ministry of Paul, and those who were with him, in Ephesus. Ephesus was a great city of Asia famous for the temple of Diana. This temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Those who worshiped this false god believed that the image they worshiped had fallen down from Jupiter (Acts 19:35). Like the people in Athens, these people were very superstitious. However, there were many there who would listen to the gospel and believe it. Paul was able to build on the work Apollos had started, and a great church was born in this city. It is estimated that Ephesus may have had as many as three hundred thousand inhabitants when Paul arrived there. Paul spent three years in Ephesus, two of those years teaching in the school of Tyrannus. His teaching ministry enabled the gospel to be spread throughout the region. He may have been in

Daily Devotionals

- M. — No Exorcism by Proxy, Acts 19:11-17.
- T. — The Baptism of John, Matthew 3:1-17.
- W. — The Testimony of John, John 3:26-30.
- T. — Believe and Confess, Psalm 32:5.
- F. — We Confess—He Forgives, 1 John 1:8, 9.
- S. — We Persuade Men, 2 Corinthians 5:9-11.

Antioch only about one year, but his stay at Ephesus was the longest of his missionary career.

This chapter tells us of the founding of the church that was the recipient of the Epistle to the Ephesians. Reading that wonderful book will be helpful in understanding how successful this church was in a very challenging mission field.

One important lesson here is the commitment Paul had to reaching lost people. Paul was a preacher first and he focused his ministry on reaching those who were lost and hopeless with the life-changing and soul-saving gospel of Jesus Christ. The first and greatest step in planting churches is the salvation of the lost.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. The Way of Truth Explained

Acts 19:1-7

1. And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples,
2. He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.
3. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.
4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.
5. When they heard *this*, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.
6. And when Paul had laid *his* hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.
7. And all the men were about twelve.

Paul had been in Ephesus before but had cut his stay short so that he could go to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. Paul had taught in the synagogue and the Jews there had received him readily. While he was away, Apollos came to Ephesus and began to teach and preach about Jesus. Apollos was a gifted speaker, but he only knew about the baptism of John the Baptist. He

was like a traveler who was still using an old map when a new map had been printed. What he said was not wrong, but his knowledge was incomplete. Aquila and Priscilla had been taught by Paul, and they took Apollos and explained the way of the Lord more perfectly, or more completely, to him.

When Paul returned to Ephesus, Apollos had departed to Corinth, and Paul dealt with the disciples Apollos had left behind. Paul's first question to these twelve men concerned their reception of the Holy Spirit. This is important because the presence of the Holy Spirit is an infallible proof of our salvation (Rom. 8:9, 16). These men were vague and uncertain about the Holy Spirit and told Paul that this was something new to them. Our experience in baptism is a picture or indication of our experience of salvation. To be uncertain about the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to be uncertain about our own salvation.

It was not that these men had not been immersed. They had been, but they had been baptized with reference to the same baptism administered by John the Baptist. Paul explained that this baptism was in preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. Of course, Jesus had come, lived, died and was resurrected, so the baptism of John had been replaced with the baptism commanded by Jesus, and administered by His churches.

The lesson here is that simply being immersed in water is not the only requirement of scriptural baptism. These men had been immersed, but with reference to the wrong man. When they heard the truth from Paul, they were immediately baptized in the name of or by the authority of Jesus. The Holy Spirit came to them, and they were no longer uncertain of his presence.

For baptism to be valid, it must be done to the proper candidate, a saved individual. It must be done in the proper way, by immersion in water, and it must be done by the proper authority, a New Testament church. These verses clearly show us that it is possible to get baptism wrong.

The New Testament pattern, clearly revealed, is that we receive the Holy Spirit when we are saved, and we are to be baptized by the authority of a New Testament church. It was important to Paul to get this right in Ephesus. The Bible does not say that these men were baptized again. Their first immersion was invalid, and they were only truly baptized once and that was when Paul baptized them. Scriptural baptism involves more

than a willing participant and water. These men were satisfied with what happened under Apollos, but God was not.

II. The Life Changing Impact of the Gospel

Acts 19:8-10, 18-20

8. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

9. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

10. And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

18. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

19. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

20. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Paul went again to the synagogue in Ephesus. He had been well received there before his departure to Jerusalem, and he returned to the Jews who wanted him to tarry longer there. Paul spoke in the synagogue every Sabbath day for three months, the same length of time as this quarter of our Sunday School.

Paul spoke boldly. This means that he was not ashamed of his message or shy about witnessing to these Jews. Paul was disputing and persuading those who heard him. He used his ability to reason to make a case from the Old Testament that Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul was teaching about the kingdom of God. His message was that the kingdom of God was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises that were given to the nation of Israel.

The result of this teaching was that some hearts were hardened and many did not believe what Paul taught. They could not refute his arguments, but their hard hearts rejected Jesus, and they resorted to the last refuge of the mentally defeated. They spoke evil about the things Paul had preached.

Paul realized that his work in the synagogue was finished, and he left and took those who wanted to follow him to the school of Tyrannus. This school may have been a kind of divinity school of the Jews, commonly found in large cities in addition to a synagogue. These schools were called *beth midrash*, meaning “a house of enquiry, or of repetition.” Whatever the school was, Paul taught there every day for two years. In the synagogue he had taught once a week; now, he could teach every day. The trouble in the synagogue had actually increased his opportunity to teach and witness.

The result of this teaching was that the gospel spread throughout the whole province of Asia. Paul’s plan was to teach others who would in turn go and teach in the remote areas of the provinces (2 Tim. 2:2). This is still a great way to spread the gospel to remote areas of the world.

Paul’s teaching also had a great influence in Ephesus. This city was the home of the temple of Diana and many people there had purchased books and relics that were related to this idol. When the people were taught the truth, they realized that their relics and books were worthless and they brought them to a central place and publicly burned them. The value of these books was fifty thousand pieces of silver, a fortune then and now.

When these evil obstacles were removed, the Word of God came to the hearts of the people, and the Word grew greatly in the hearts and minds of the people in Ephesus.

III. The Enemies of the Cross Rise Up

Acts 19:23-28

23. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.
24. For a certain *man* named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;
25. Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.
26. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:
27. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

28. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

It soon became obvious that the things Paul taught were a threat to those who made a living making shrines to Diana. The craftsmen who made these idols were not concerned for the truth, only for their profits. They correctly recognized that the teaching of Paul would make their craft unnecessary and they could not replace the shrines of Diana with similar shrines to Jesus.

These evil men had correctly interpreted the message of Paul. There were no gods made with hands, and these men would be out of work if Paul and the message of Jesus prevailed.

It is interesting to note that their objection was not a matter of principle or truth. They were only concerned about money. Paul's preaching would endanger their craft, and it would also lessen the impact of the great temple in Ephesus so that people would no longer be drawn to Ephesus to see this architectural wonder.

The obvious fact these silversmiths ignored was that if Diana were a real god, she could easily defend herself. If they really believed in Diana, they could have ignored Paul and prayed to Diana to stop him. The truth was that somewhere deep in their hearts they probably realized that Diana was only a tourist attraction.

The result was that the silversmiths created an uproar in Ephesus by crying out the popular saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (verse 28). The uproar went on for two hours and was finally ended when the town clerk reminded the raucous crowd that Paul and the other Christians had done nothing wrong and they were in danger of upsetting the Roman authorities.

A FINAL WORD

At this point after three years of labor, Paul realized that his work in Ephesus was over, and he made preparations to move forward. Paul had never intended to stay in Ephesus permanently, and the uproar provided an opportunity to leave.

Paul had built the work in Ephesus on a firm foundation. He began by making sure that the believers there had scriptural baptism and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This is absolutely vital in the founding of a New Testament church. He taught the people in the synagogue and then in the school of Tyrannus, every day for two years and three months. These were wonderful, life-changing lessons delivered to a hungry audience. The truth communicated in these lessons spread through the entire province of Asia and many souls were saved and many other churches were established because of the work at the school of Tyrannus.

Paul finally encountered opposition. The work of the Lord and the workers of the Lord can expect trouble in this world. This is the specific promise of Jesus in John 16:33, but we should never let trouble discourage us. When our work is through in one place, God will lead us to another and the work can continue for the honor and glory of the Lord. The work in Ephesus was not about the Ephesians, or even about Apollos or Paul. It was about the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What truth were the disciples of John missing? (Hint: Acts 19:3, 4).
2. Paul spoke to, disputed with and persuaded people that Jesus was the Christ. What were some of the methods he used to share the saving gospel?
3. What methods do you use to share the saving gospel?
4. “There arose no small stir about that way” (verse 23). Does it bother you that there is no large stir created by unbelievers because of our presentation of Christ? What should you do about that?

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6

Strengthening Brethren in Miletus

Text: Acts 20:1-38

Focus: Acts 20:18-24, 26-36

Key Verse:

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”

Acts 20:28

Sunday Devotional: Meet the Needs of Others, Galatians 6:1-6.

Application: It is the duty of each Christian to strengthen the brethren. You may fortify the faith of others by prayer, example, concern and words of encouragement.

A FIRST LOOK

No matter how successful our work may be, it will one day come to an end. Through the ministry of Paul in Ephesus, the gospel had gone out into the entire region of Asia. Paul had worked there for three years, but the time came when Paul had to move on. Today we examine Paul's farewell address to the elders in the Ephesian church. This is a beautiful and useful passage that reveals the depths of the love that Paul had for the churches he started, and his careful instructions to those he left in charge of the work.

Paul was going to Jerusalem and his ministry would take him away from this church physically, but he would always keep them in his heart. His concern for these brethren is evident in the book of Ephesians and also in his letters to Timothy. For various reasons we must often be separated from those we love. For the children of God, these separations are only temporary, and all must realize that the work of God is greater and more

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Sunday Worship in Troas, Acts 20:6-12.
- T. — Love Thy Neighbor, Galatians 5:13, 14.
- W. — Strengthen Your Brethren, Romans 15:1-3.
- T. — Serve One Another, John 13:13, 14.
- F. — The Sign of True Disciples, John 13:34, 35.
- S. — The Crown of Righteousness, 2 Timothy 4:5-8.

important than any individual. God constantly replaces his workmen, but His work continues.

The work in Ephesus had been successful, and Paul believed in his heart that it was time to move on in his ministry. As painful as it was for him personally and for those he left behind in Ephesus, he determined to do what he believed God wanted and go where he believed God was leading him.

In his last address to these brethren in Ephesus, we find many encouragements and warnings concerning the work of churches. Although these things were said long ago, they still resonate in the hearts of those who are serving God in the twenty-first century. Listen and learn.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Paul's Example

Acts 20:18-21

18. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

19. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:

20. And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

21. Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

We often hear someone tell us to do as they say, not do as they do. Paul was not ashamed to plainly tell the elders gathered at Miletus to look at his service and follow his example. Paul had lived a transparent life. He did not have dark secrets that he kept from his brethren. This does not mean that he was never discouraged, but it does mean that he was willing to share both heartaches and blessings with others.

Paul did not gradually work up to preaching the gospel. He began on the first day he was in Ephesus. He did not change over the years but remained a strong preacher of Jesus in all seasons.

Paul was motivated simply by his desire to serve the Lord. He

had a servant's heart. Paul did not come to Ephesus to supervise others; he came to be a servant. He did not say that he was serving the church in Ephesus or the church in Antioch that had sent him out. He plainly states that he was serving the Lord. We should never forget whom we are serving. This kind of focus helped Paul through the tears and temptations that he found in Ephesus, and it will help us in our trials as well.

Paul's manner of ministry was an example for others to follow. Paul was not a big preacher who demanded that others show deference to him. He preached publicly, and he preached from house to house. This shows us that Paul used every means at his disposal to preach the gospel to everyone he could. If there was a public gathering, Paul preached there. If there was not a public gathering, then he went from house to house. He preached to crowds, and he also witnessed to individuals. There was no specialization in his ministry. He did whatever work was before him, and this is the example he left for other preachers.

Paul was plain about his message. He was not trying to solve all the problems in Ephesus or deal with all the conflicts in the lives of those who heard him. Paul's message was repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. It is easy to allow our ministry to get sidetracked, and often the good can be the enemy of the best. The life-changing message of the gospel is repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ. This should be our first concern and primary message.

II. Paul's Commitment

Acts 20:22-24, 26, 27

22. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there:

23. Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

24. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

26. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I *am* pure from the blood of all men.

27. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Paul revealed his commitment to serve the Lord in every way he possibly could. Some have suggested that Paul was mistaken in his zeal to reach the Jews. Indeed, the Holy Spirit warned Paul about the consequences of his decision to go to Jerusalem. Whether Paul was correct in interpreting the leadership of the Holy Spirit or not, we cannot question his dedication to doing what he thought was right.

Paul knew what was waiting for him in Jerusalem. Indeed, this trip to Jerusalem would drastically change his ministry and would ultimately lead to his death. Paul knew that the Holy Spirit had revealed to him that bonds were waiting for him in Jerusalem. He knew that he would be put in prison if he went there.

His dedication and his servant's heart are expressed in his statement that he was not moved by the warnings he received. Paul was not overly concerned for his own welfare. Instead, he was concerned for the lost souls of his brethren in Israel. He was willing to die if it meant that he could finish the course of his ministry and testify of the grace of God in Jerusalem. We can truly admire this kind of dedication wherever it is found.

Too many servants of God find a safe place on the wayside when the going gets tough. Paul is showing us that we need the dedication to Jesus and the love for our lost friends to persevere no matter what obstacles are placed in our path. Paul would later write to Timothy and tell him that he had indeed finished his course. For Paul, the course would not be finished until he went to Jerusalem and preached to the lost Jews.

Paul made the remarkable statement that he was pure from the blood of all men. As a steward of Jesus Christ, Paul knew that he had to give an account of his ministry, and he declared that he had faithfully preached the gospel. Paul was a witness who told what had happened to him, and he was a preacher who revealed the whole counsel of God. Both the life that he lived and the message he preached gave honor to Jesus Christ.

III. Paul's Warning

Acts 20:28-31

28. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

- 29. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.**
30. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.
31. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Paul warned these elders about the dangers that were in their future. God placed a great importance on the churches in Asia, and he wanted these leaders to know that troubling times were ahead. The first defense against danger is a well-fed flock. If the flock is well-fed on the Word of God, it is much more able to defend itself against the wiles of the devil.

Paul warned of dangers from outside. Wolves would arise to ravage and destroy the flock. No doubt, these are the false teachers who followed Paul from place to place. These men were counterfeit Christians who were leading others astray for their own personal gain. Such evil men are still present in our world and the weak and underfed sheep are easy prey for them.

Paul also warned against dangers from within churches. Pride among individual church members would lead some to say perverse things, and ambition for power would lead some to gather other believers into groups of disciples of men, not disciples of Jesus. We still have men like Diotrophes, who loved to have the preeminence among men (3 John 9-11). Paul sternly warned these men to look to themselves. The greatest dangers to our faith may lie in our own hearts.

IV. Paul's Commendation

Acts 20:32-36

- 32. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.**
33. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.
34. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.
35. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.
36. And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

In verses 31-35, Paul listed several things that might arise from within the hearts of God's men that would weaken the churches they served. These were his warnings to these men personally.

In verse 31, Paul warned these men not to be careless, but to be alert and remember the labor and tears that had brought them their faith in Jesus.

In verse 32, Paul warned these men about having a shallow ministry. He commended them to the Word of God and to the grace of God, knowing that these things would build them up and stabilize their lives so that they would be able to help others. No one can preach something that he does not know. A lifelong Bible study and a love for the Word is absolutely vital for anyone who would faithfully serve the Lord. Literally, nothing on earth will substitute for simply knowing the Word.

In verse 33, Paul warned against coveting the things of the world. He had given them an example. He had not desired any material reward for his spiritual ministry. The ministry of the gospel is its own reward although God has ordained that "they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor. 9:14).

In verse 35, Paul warned against being lazy and selfish. He was an industrious servant who worked night and day. Here Paul quoted something Jesus said that many do not believe. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Our industry will allow us to give to others and so be blessed ourselves.

These warnings about troubles that arise from within our own hearts are applicable today. We may fear the wolves and those who love preeminence, but the greatest threat to the servant of the Lord will come from within his own heart. No one can make you stop serving Jesus unless you decide that you will stop. Outside forces can be great, but ultimately our decision to serve the Lord or to stop serving Him is made in the depths of our own hearts.

A FINAL WORD

When this great message was concluded, Paul knelt down in the middle of this group of elders and had prayer with them. Prayer is always appropriate and necessary. This was not a last ditch prayer, but it was a prayer for guidance, revelation,

strength and wisdom for those who would be left in charge of the work of preaching in Asia and Ephesus.

Those who heard this message were sorrowing most of all that they would not see Paul again. No doubt, this was a shock to them because Paul had gone to Jerusalem before and had returned to Ephesus, but now he believed he was saying a last good-bye. We can only hope that later on these men remembered this great message and recalled the wonderful things that Paul taught there. God inspired Luke to write this down and it has been an encouragement to many of God's servants through the years. It still offers us many valuable lessons about what to expect as we serve the Lord and how to handle the personal pressures that arise as we do so.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What did Paul continually testify? (Hint: Acts 20:21.) Are churches to continue this testimony?
2. What did Paul mean by saying, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself" (verse 24)? What does it mean to not count your life dear to yourself? In what ways can you do that?
3. What do you consider "all the counsel of God" (verse 27) to be? How would a church declare the whole counsel of God? Are you doing that?
4. Are there "grievous wolves" (verse 29) seeking to destroy the flock of God today? What would you consider to be serious threats to your church today?

7

Persecution in Jerusalem

Text: Acts 21:1-40

Focus: Acts 21:4,5, 10-14, 18-32

Key Verse:

“And when he was come unto us, he took Paul’s girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.”

Acts 21:11

Sunday Devotional: Consequences of a Godly Life, 2 Timothy 3:10-12.

Application: Ridicule and persecution are the price you must pay to actively live for Christ and serve Him in this present, evil world. Remember: First the cross—then the crown.

A FIRST LOOK

Paul went to Jerusalem to witness to the Jews, but he had other purposes for this trip. He wanted to minister to the poor saints in Jerusalem, and he wanted to give a report to the church of the progress that had been made in the Gentile churches. As he said in Acts 20:16, Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost. All this was a part of his desire to witness to the Jews of the saving power of Jesus Christ.

Our vision is clear when we look back on history and dim when we look ahead to the future. When Paul traveled to Jerusalem, he did not know that in a few short years the Romans would completely destroy the city and exile the Jews. At this time, the church in Jerusalem was going through difficulty, and money had been collected among the Gentile churches for the relief of the poor saints in Jerusalem. Paul refers to this in Romans 15:25-31.

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Living Among the Blessed, Matthew 5:10-12.
- T. — Paul’s Love for His People, Romans 9:1-5.
- W. — It Pays To Serve Jesus, Mark 10:28-30.
- T. — Unmoved by Afflictions, 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4.
- F. — God’s Will in Suffering, 1 Peter 3:16-18.
- S. — Think It Not Strange, 1 Peter 4:12-16.

Paul also used this opportunity to report to the church in Jerusalem about the good things God had done through him while he traveled among the Gentiles. We should note that the church in Jerusalem did not send Paul out. Paul was a missionary from the church in Antioch, but he also reported to the church in Jerusalem. A missionary should desire to report to all the Lord's churches, not only to his sponsoring church.

Paul took his companions with him and traveled to Jerusalem. One of these men was Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus. Although this caused trouble for Paul, it was important for the Jews in Jerusalem to personally see the love and concern of a Gentile who labored with Paul.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Warnings of Imprisonment

Acts 21:4, 5, 10-14

4. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

5. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.

10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus.

11. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

12. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

13. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

As Paul made his way down the coast toward Jerusalem, he visited with many of the brethren who lived along the way. Here

we have the record of certain events that took place at Tyre and Caesarea.

At Tyre, Paul spent a week with some disciples he had not met. These brethren were led by the Holy Spirit to warn Paul that he should not continue his journey to Jerusalem. In spite of this advice, Paul was determined to continue the journey, so these people gave him aid to complete his journey.

They *brought us on our way* is a metaphor that means these brethren contributed money for the expenses of the trip. They and their families traveled with Paul to the outskirts of the city, and they had a prayer meeting and sent Paul on his way.

The next stop was Caesarea, which was the Roman headquarters in Judea. Here Paul met Philip who twenty years earlier had been a deacon in the church in Jerusalem. This must have been an interesting meeting because Philip was a coworker of Stephen, who was martyred with Paul's consent. While in this city, Paul was approached by a prophet named Agabus.

Agabus took Paul's girdle, bound his own hands and feet and told Paul that this same kind of imprisonment was waiting in Jerusalem, and Paul would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles if he went there.

Paul did not argue with Agabus about his prophecy, but he stated that he was willing to be bound and die, if necessary, to go to Jerusalem. The brethren who witnessed this powerful message from Agabus tried to persuade Paul to change his plans, but when Paul would not be persuaded, they stopped their attempts at persuasion and committed the whole matter into the hands of the Lord. Thus, Paul continued on his way to Jerusalem.

II. A Report from the Gentile Churches

Acts 21:18, 19

18. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

19. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

Paul was graciously received in Jerusalem. The next day after he arrived, he met with James and the elders of the church and began by giving a report on his work among the Gentiles.

Luke does not refer to the part of this meeting where the money collected from the Gentiles was presented to the church, but Paul tells us about it in Acts 24:17. Presenting this gift was one of the purposes of the trip. We have no record of the reaction of the church to the gift, but we can safely assume that this offering went a long way toward establishing a good relationship between the Jewish Christians and the Gentiles.

However, there was much more to this meeting than money. Paul met with James and all the elders of the church and told them about the things that God had done through him while he worked among the Gentiles. Even a cursory reading of Acts chapters 16—19 will show us that Paul's many adventures would have made for a truly fascinating report. It must have thrilled these struggling believers in Jerusalem to hear of the great work that God was doing in other parts of the world.

There is a wonderful and important lesson here concerning the responsibility of any missionary to share his work with others. You may know what you are doing, and God knows what you are doing, but others will not know unless you tell them. Time spent away from the field reporting about the work being done is not wasted time. If churches are to get their hearts into mission work, they must have a continual supply of information from the mission fields. In our day of multi-media communication, every missionary and every sponsoring church should see to it that all who have an interest, or might have an interest, in their work are well informed.

III. A False Accusation and a Questionable Solution

Acts 21:20-25

20. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

21. And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise *their* children, neither to walk after the customs.

22. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

23. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

24. Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave *their* heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

25. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from *things* offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

While the brethren in Jerusalem glorified God for the work done among the Gentiles, their attention was almost immediately turned to the problems that they were having in Jerusalem. Our present troubles can easily obscure our past and future blessings.

It is obvious that James and the elders of the church at Jerusalem had a double standard concerning the Law. There was one standard for Jewish Christians and another for Gentiles. This was the time of the feast of Pentecost. Literally thousands of Jews were in Jerusalem from all over the world. Many of these were believers, but they had never been taught beyond the Old Testament and were still zealous to carefully observe the Law.

The Temple in Jerusalem was a holy place for Jews, and many of the ones present would only have been able to worship in the Temple on special occasions like this. The elders of the church saw this as a recipe for trouble. Many of these Jews in Jerusalem at this time had heard about Paul and the things that he taught. The Jews had violently opposed Paul in several of the cities he had visited. Some of these Jews could have been in Jerusalem at this time. Of course, these Jews would observe every custom of the Levitical law.

The elders devised a plan for Paul to demonstrate to these thousands of Jews that he walked orderly and kept the Law. There were four men, evidently men in the church, who had taken a vow. This may have been the vow of a Nazirite. Paul was asked to pay the bill for these men and go to the Temple with them publicly so that the Jews present would see him and know that he was orthodox. Paul agreed to this plan. It is interesting that Paul had systematically refused the advice of others, but now listened to this plan from James. Why did Paul, who had preached against such things, consent? He tells us himself in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22. He became as a Jew to win the Jews.

Whether this plan worked or not is immaterial. Paul was willing to do whatever it took so that others could come to know Jesus. Looking back, we may question the wisdom of this recommendation and of the choice of Paul to go along with the plan, but we can also see that Paul reacted to a potentially troubling situation with humility and love.

IV. All Jerusalem Is in an Uproar

Acts 21:26-32

26. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

27. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

28. Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

29. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

30. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

31. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

32. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

Paul entered the Temple, but the Jews from Asia saw him there, and they stirred up the people and actually arrested Paul. They erroneously thought that Paul had brought Greeks into the Temple because they had seen Trophimus with Paul earlier. The truth was lost in the scuffle and before long the whole city was in an uproar.

The people ran into the Temple, seized Paul and drew him out of the Temple and shut the doors so that he could not return. Their plan was to kill him, as they had killed Stephen many

years earlier. Before they could carry out this plot, the news of the riot reached the captain of the Roman guards that the city was in an uproar. The captain quickly told his superior officers, and a band of soldiers and centurions ran down from the nearby fortress of Antonia into the Temple compound and stopped the riot. When the crowd saw the Roman soldiers approaching, they stopped beating Paul. The Romans chained Paul and began to get to the cause of this disturbance.

This was the first in a series of events that would ultimately lead to Paul being sent to Rome and, eventually, to his death at the hands of Caesar.

A FINAL WORD

The prophecy of Agabus had come to pass. Paul was now a prisoner, and he would remain so for many years to come. Paul had a desire to witness to the Jews at Jerusalem, but this was not to be. He later did get to defend himself before the Jews and Romans.

Many have speculated about this move by Paul and have come to various conclusions. We may doubt his wisdom, but we cannot doubt his dedication and love for his brethren in the flesh. Paul was a Jew, and he loved his nation. He wanted his brethren in the flesh to believe in Jesus as he had, and he was willing to risk everything for a chance to accomplish his goal. This shows us the great heart of this wonderful servant of the Lord.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. By ignoring the God-given warnings, do you think Paul was doing God's will or his own will?
2. As you consider the cultural differences between Jewish and Gentile believers and churches in the book of Acts, what can you learn about the impact of cultural differences in churches today?
3. How can you discern between acceptable cultural influences in worship and unacceptable doctrinal departures?
4. Discuss ways in which members of the class have suffered or been persecuted for the cause of Christ.

8

Testimony in the Temple

Text: Acts 22:1-30

Focus: Acts 22:3-8, 12-22

Key Verses:

“And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.”

Acts 22:14, 15

Sunday Devotional: Witnesses to the World, Acts 1:6-8.

Application: God’s plan for believers is that the testimony about Jesus Christ—His person, His salvation, His purpose—be readily communicated by His people.

A FIRST LOOK

This lesson gives us a wonderful lesson about telling the consistent truth in the most difficult of circumstances. This was not a formal trial, and Paul had done nothing wrong. He was falsely accused of bringing a Gentile into the Temple simply because he had been seen with Trophimus.

People in large groups are no more intelligent or rational than people as individuals. The majority is not always right; in fact, the majority is often dead wrong. Paul had not brought a Gentile into the Temple. He was completely innocent of any wrongdoing, but the crowd was so angry that they wanted to execute him on the spot.

When the chief captain, a man named Lysias, heard the commotion in the Temple, he ordered his soldiers to investigate. There was confusion, and at first, Lysias thought that Paul was an

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Among all Nations, Luke 24:46-48.
- T. — Fulfilling God’s Call, Acts 9:15-20.
- W. — Fellowheirs in Christ, Ephesians 3:1-6.
- T. — Apostle of the Gentiles, Romans 11:11-14.
- F. — Preaching Unsearchable Riches, Ephesians 3:7-10.
- S. — One in Christ Jesus, Galatians 3:26-29.

Egyptian who had previously led four thousand men in a failed rebellion. When he learned that Paul was a Jew from Tarsus, he allowed Paul to address the crowd. The Temple was next door to the fortress of Antonio. This fortress or castle was the seat of Roman government in Jerusalem, and it was from these steps that Paul spoke to the crowd.

Paul was speaking to a crowd that had already made up its mind to kill him even though Paul was innocent of any charge against him. In fact, the violence that the crowd had caused was a violation of the Temple rules. Paul was attempting to set the facts before the crowd, but an angry mob is seldom influenced by the truth.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Paul's Early Life

Acts 22:3-5

3. I am verily a man *which am* a Jew, born in Tarsus, *a city in Cilicia*, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, *and* taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

4. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

5. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

Paul knew that he was defending himself before this crowd and that he did not have to do this. This was not a court; it was an angry group of Jews. Paul was moved with love for them. These Jews had come from all over the world for the feast of Pentecost, and if he could win some of them to the Lord, the gospel could go home with them. Because this was a Jewish crowd, he spoke in Hebrew. The Romans probably did not understand much of what he said, so they would later want to question him again about the riot at the Temple.

Paul began with his birth and told of his relationship with the Law. He mentioned Gamaliel, a notable lawyer, and recounted his former zeal for all the things of the Law. He told them that

his initial response to Christianity was to persecute Christians. Here we learn the extent of this persecution. Paul not only put Christians in prison, but he also actually executed men and women for believing in Christ. Paul could call the high priest as a witness to his zeal. He told how he had obtained letters, what we would call warrants, to go and arrest Christians at Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem.

Now, Paul brought Jesus into his story. Paul was accused of bringing a Gentile into the Temple in violation of the Law, but he used the occasion to tell these people about Jesus. Jesus came into his account because Jesus had come into Paul's life. It took great courage to mention Jesus to this angry crowd.

Wisely, Paul did not speak about his recent activities in Asia. He did not mention his missionary journeys or his relationship with the church in Antioch. We are not under an obligation to tell everything that we know. Paul knew that any mention of Trophimus or of the church at Ephesus would further enrage this crowd. Therefore, he limited his remarks to make his chosen points.

The wonderful thing about personal testimony is that it cannot be refuted. You may accept it or you may reject it, but you cannot argue that these things did not happen to Paul. This is why a personal testimony is always a powerful witness. We do not have to know everything to know what happened to us. Paul had experienced the things he was telling. No doubt, there were some in this crowd who knew that he was telling the truth about Gamaliel and about his persecution of the Christians, and this would establish Paul's credibility.

II. Paul's Conversion to Christ

Acts 22:6-8, 12-16

6. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

8. And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

15. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

16. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

This is almost a word-for-word repetition of the account in Acts 9 of this same incident; however, some things stand out here especially vividly. For instance, we learn that it was about noon when Jesus appeared to Paul. The sun was at its highest and brightest when a light from Heaven made the sun look pale by comparison. The powers of men pale when compared to the powers of what we call nature, and the powers of nature pale when compared to the power of God. You may think the sky is bright at high noon until the light of God shines where you are. No wonder those who saw this light were afraid.

Saul told what happened. He heard a voice. At first, a voice he did not recognize, asking him a question he never answered. Saul was persecuting Jesus. Whatever we do to the least of the brethren of Jesus, we are doing to Him. (See Matthew 25:34-46.) Saul naturally asked who was talking to him, and Jesus identified Himself. This was the first mention of Jesus in this defense, but it was his relationship with Jesus that Paul wanted to bring to the front of the conversation. Paul then continued and included his ministry to the Gentiles, but he began with his relationship with Jesus.

If we are called on to make a similar defense we would do well to learn from this passage and do our best to steer the conversation around to our relationship with Christ.

From this point on, Paul was following orders. He did what Jesus told him to do. Paul mentioned his blindness to show this crowd that even when we think we are seeing clearly, we need someone to lead us. Had anyone in this crowd actually seen Paul with a Gentile in the Temple? No, they simply heard what someone else said. The blind were leading the blind. No one had seen Paul and a Gentile together in the Temple because he did not violate any of the Temple laws.

Paul made a persuasive case. He used his Jewish name, Saul, here. Paul was the Greek form of the name, but he avoided using it. Although by this time, he was commonly called Paul. He recounted the miracle of the recovery of his sight. He also told the crowd the wonderful message that God gave Ananias for him.

Saul was a chosen vessel, chosen by God for a special work. The work was to be a witness to all men of the things that he had seen and heard. This is one of the best definitions of witnessing we will ever find. We are to tell others the things that have happened to us. We do not have to be theological experts to be witnesses. We do not have to understand every Bible mystery and be able to answer any question. We simply have to love the Lord and be willing to tell others the things that we have seen and heard. Paul did this, and no one could deny that he was telling the truth.

So that nothing was left out, Paul mentioned his baptism. When Paul used the expression, *wash away thy sins*, he was not teaching that baptism was necessary for sin to be forgiven. Only God can forgive sins. If our sins are not forgiven by God first, baptism is a meaningless ritual. Paul was showing this ritualistic crowd what the ritual of baptism really meant. Baptism is the outward evidence of an inward conversion.

III. God's Plan for Paul

Acts 22:17-22

17. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

18. And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

19. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

20. And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

21. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

22. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

Paul left out many details of his life. This was not a day-by-day account of his ministry. He now skipped to his return to Jerusalem. He mentioned the fact that he had previously worshiped in the Temple and prayed there with no interference from anyone.

While Paul was in the Temple praying, he stated that he was in a trance. The Greek word Paul used gives us our English term *ecstasy* and means he was in a condition in which ordinary consciousness and perception were withheld, and his soul was susceptible only to the vision given by God.

In this condition, Paul heard Jesus tell him to leave Jerusalem quickly. Paul argued that he had been faithful to persecute Christians, so that others would know he was serious when he told of his conversion. Paul went back to the martyrdom of Stephen, which took place twenty years earlier. We learn that Paul was consenting to the death of Stephen when it happened. Paul is cleverly reminding this crowd how a popular group decision can be a wrong decision.

Paul quoted what Jesus told him years before in the Temple. He was to leave Jerusalem and be sent to the Gentiles. Paul was careful to tell this crowd that he was following the orders of his Lord when he went to the Gentiles and worked among them, but this wisdom was lost on the angry mob.

They, at least, listened to Paul until he used this particular word. When he said, *Gentile*, the crowd raised its voice and began to shout its verdict. They declared that such a man as Paul was not fit to live and should be removed from the earth.

A FINAL WORD

We see the unreasoning power of prejudice in the verdict of this crowd. No one denied anything that Paul said. They did not refute any argument he made. They did not state that Paul had lied or misrepresented anything that he said. They did not deny the miracle of his meeting with Jesus, or the testimony he gave about his life. They simply pronounced a death sentence on Paul because he spoke a word they did not want to hear.

Above all things, this lesson shows us the great power of language. Solomon said that death and life are in the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21), and it was here.

The trials of Paul were not an attempt to discover the truth. Paul had done nothing at all that would merit imprisonment, let alone death. However guilt or innocence does not matter much when facing an angry mob.

Notably, we have no record of the leaders of the Jerusalem church offering any help to Paul. Prayer was offered for Peter and others who were put in prison, but no prayer meeting is mentioned here. To Paul's eternal credit, he never changed his story, and he did not act in any way that would bring discredit to anyone. He is a wonderful example of wisely telling the truth in very difficult circumstances.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. As Paul stood before the Jewish mob, did he try to identify with them? Why?
2. Paul shared details of his conversion. Why is your personal testimony of salvation an important part of sharing your faith?
3. After sharing his personal testimony, what did Paul say that enraged the Jewish crowd?
4. Why do you think this fact enraged them? Who composes the Gentiles today?

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9

Accusations in the Sanhedrin

Text: Acts 23:1-35

Focus: Acts 23:6-16, 22, 23, 26-31

Key Verse:

“And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”

Acts 23:11

Sunday Devotional: Paul’s Great Assurance, 2 Timothy 4:16-18.

Application: God provides for His people. When you live to serve the Lord, He will always guide, even through hard and difficult times.

A FIRST LOOK

When one door of opportunity closes, God always opens another for those who want to serve Him. Paul’s arrest in Jerusalem marked the end of his church planting among the Gentiles, but now he would have a number of opportunities to witness before the officials of the Roman empire. He would have access to situations and circumstances that would allow the gospel to be heard in the high places of government.

As we read about Paul’s defense, we must remember that he was completely innocent of all the charges that were brought against him. Like many innocent men, he seemed to believe that, if he could explain what had happened, reasonable people would see that he had done nothing wrong. The trouble was that Paul was not dealing with reasonable men. As he appeared before the council, also called the Sanhedrin, he was before a group that had already decided that he was guilty. When Paul declared his innocence, the high priest ordered him smitten on the mouth. Paul did not recognize Ananias as the high priest, perhaps

Daily Devotionals

- M. — When God Stands with You, Psalm 46:1-5.
- T. — No Fear in His Presence, Isaiah 41:10.
- W. — He Will Never Leave Thee, Hebrews 13:5, 6.
- T. — He Will Be with You, John 14:16-18.
- F. — The Things That Count, Philippians 3:3-8.
- S. — Peace in the Storm, John 16:33.

because of his failing eyesight. He apologized for his outburst; however, Paul was correct. His initial punishment was contrary to the Law this body was supposed to be upholding.

As we learn today, Paul switched tactics. He was no longer trying to tell what happened at the Temple. He was now using all his wit and ability to forestall the evil judgment of this group. Words are powerful things, and words can lead to violence, and even death. We can be put in mortal danger by the things we say, but wise use of our words can also get us out of many difficult situations.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Paul's Strategy and God's Comfort

Acts 23:6-11

6. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

9. And there arose a great cry: and the scribes *that were of the Pharisees'* part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring *him* into the castle.

11. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

Paul realized that this council was divided, and he used this internal division to his advantage. He seemed to understand that he could not establish his innocence by merely relating the facts of his matter. He had done that on the steps of the castle,

the fortress of Antonia, but the Jewish mob would not listen. The actions of the high priest indicated that the council would not listen either. Paul took a different approach. Here he was being wise as a serpent and as harmless as a dove.

Paul saw that the council was about equally divided between Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul then declared that he was a Pharisee and that the reason he was on trial was because he believed in the resurrection. This was altogether true. Paul was a Pharisee before he was saved, and the resurrection is one of the very fundamental truths of Christianity. Paul was not telling a lie; he was carefully telling the truth.

His statement threw a different light on the trial. Now, the Pharisees and Sadducees on the council began to argue among themselves, and the crowd was divided. They had all been against Paul, but now they were against each other. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, in angels or in spirits, and they denied that Paul had seen anything on the Damascus road. They did not believe that such things even existed. On the other hand, the Pharisees believed in all of these things. Thus, what Paul said was at least possible for the Pharisees.

This is a significant shift. Paul turned the accusation against him into a matter of doctrine, not one of personalities. The Pharisees on the council judged that, if a spirit or an angel had spoken to Paul, there was no evil in him. Of course, the Sadducees objected, and the argument escalated. The crowd was moved to violence.

There is a continuum of force where words escalate into physical violence and physical violence can end in death. That was happening here. The great principles and precepts of the Law of Moses had been ignored, and these men who were supposed to be leaders of Israel had degenerated into a mob.

It appeared to Lysias, the Roman captain, that the crowd would pull Paul into pieces, some defending him and others trying to harm him. The captain ordered the soldiers to go into the council and forcefully remove Paul and bring him into the fortress of Antonia, also called the castle. This fortress was the seat of Roman government in Jerusalem, and it was located on the northern wall of the Temple. Lysias knew that Paul was a Roman, and he did not want a Roman citizen to suffer the indignities of mob violence.

Paul had not won his case before the council, but neither had they killed him. The matter would have to be settled in a different kind of court; however, Paul was out of danger.

Although it might seem that Paul's ministry was at a dead-end, God was not through with him. Paul had brought an offering to the church in Jerusalem, and he had followed the advice of the church to go to the Temple. He had done his best to help, but all his good deeds had been turned against him. He had faced two trials and was kept in the castle for his own protection. He could not even go about his normal business.

God is with His children, no matter what men may or may not do. God had not forgotten Paul. God came to stand by him and declare that his ministry was not over. The events that started in the Temple in Jerusalem would end in Rome. Paul was being put on the center stage of the world, and we will only know in eternity the effect of these last years of his life and ministry.

We cannot judge the work of another, but we know that God wanted Paul to witness in Rome. Nothing that men could do would set the plan of God aside. Paul may have been a prisoner, and he may have been in danger, but he was never more secure than he was when Jesus stood by him and gave him this promise.

II. The Conspiracy To Kill Paul

Acts 23:12-16

12. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

14. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

15. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Once again we see the power of words. Paul had escaped the mob and the council, but when some of the Jews saw that the mob could not kill Paul, the Council had not taken his life and

the Romans were protecting him, they decided to take matters into their own hands.

There was no pretense of fairness or of legality. These Jews decided that Paul was guilty and that the punishment was death. His crime was bringing a Gentile into the Temple. It did not matter whether he did it. It did not matter that he had eloquently defended himself twice. It did not matter that he was a Roman citizen, a Pharisee, or he had brought a large offering for the poor saints of Jerusalem. None of this concerned the Jews. In their minds, Paul was guilty, and he must die.

Forty men took a solemn oath that they would not eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They intended to carry out this scheme in the near future. Their plan was to get the Romans to bring Paul before the council again. They engaged the men of the Sanhedrin to help them. No doubt, some of the Sadducees who were on the council agreed to help. They planned to assassinate Paul when they saw him and take the consequences.

We know that Paul was not killed, and we can only wonder if these Jews ever ate anything again. They did not kill Paul, and they likely did not keep their vow either. God had already promised that Paul would witness in Rome, and nothing that Satan could do would countermand God's decision.

Religion can arouse powerful passions. Many wars have been fought over what men believe about God. While we should stand firm in our resolve to preach the truth, we should also be aware that there are dangers involved when we do.

III. Paul Is Moved to Caesarea

Acts 23:22, 23, 26-31

22. So the chief captain *then* let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

23. And he called unto *him* two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

26. Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix *sendeth* greeting.

27. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

28. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council:

29. Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

30. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what *they had* against him. Farewell.

31. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought *him* by night to Antipatris.

The plot to kill Paul was discovered, and the captain of the Roman army in Jerusalem, Claudius Lysias, decided to send Paul to Caesarea for his own safety. We see the seriousness of the threat in the size of the armed guard that accompanied Paul. There were two centurions, two hundred foot soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen sent to guard one man. For added safety, they left Jerusalem under the cover of darkness at the third hour of the night.

Claudius sent a letter to Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, explaining what had happened in Jerusalem. He stated the events of the last few days fairly. The key to this narrative was that Paul was a Roman citizen and, as such, was entitled to the protection of Roman law. This meant that any further decisions in his case would be made by the Roman court system. This began with Felix and ended before the emperor in Rome.

Claudius also advised the Jews that they could appear before Felix and make their case against Paul. The Roman captain was being honest and fair to everyone concerned, while taking all necessary steps to prevent unnecessary violence and rebellion.

After traveling as far as Antipatris, about thirty-seven miles from Jerusalem, the horsemen went on with Paul while the foot soldiers returned to Jerusalem to aid in keeping the peace there. Paul and his company traveled another twenty-seven miles to Caesarea where Paul was turned over to Felix. Paul was safe from the Jewish plotters, but he still faced a trial before Felix.

Felix, the governor of Judea, was married to Drusilla, the Jewish daughter of Herod Agrippa I, who had left her husband to become the third wife of Felix. She was the sister of Herod Agrippa II whom we find in Acts 25.

Paul was protected by an escort fit for a king. He was not delivered to a prison, but to the palace built by Herod the Great, where the governor had his official headquarters. In returning to Caesarea, Paul had retraced his steps in Judea and had fulfilled the prophecy of Agabus.

A FINAL WORD

Paul had a greater force guarding him than the soldiers from the Roman army. Paul was in the care and keeping of Jesus Christ. The words of Agabus had come to pass. The Jews had delivered Paul to the Gentiles, but now he was in the hands of the Romans. God knew what would happen to Paul and God knew that Paul would still be used in a mighty way as a witness of the gospel of Jesus.

What we do and what we say can arouse strong feelings in many people, but when we dedicate ourselves to doing the will of God, no matter what the circumstances, we can always count on the protection and provision of God.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Read Acts 23:11. What effect do you think Christ's appearance made on Paul?
2. How important is it to testify for Christ, even in the face of persecution?
3. What fueled such hatred for Paul that forty men vowed to kill him?
4. What kind of opposition or ridicule have you faced because of your testimony of Christ?

10

Defense Before Felix and Festus

Text: Acts 24; 25

Focus: Acts 24:10-16, 24-26; 25:6-12

Key Verse:

“But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.”

Acts 24:14

Sunday Devotional: Be Ready To Answer, I Peter 3:15.

Application: The saving grace of God and promise of resurrection and judgment should constantly motivate God’s people to answer skeptical unbelievers.

A FIRST LOOK

The Jews had decided to assassinate Paul, and as a Roman citizen, Paul demanded Roman justice. In this lesson, Paul, Felix and Festus offer us a remarkable contrast. Felix was morally bankrupt. He had been a slave and had wormed his way into the relatively high position of governor of Judea. He was a governor who could not govern. He did almost everything wrong and, eventually, lost his seat to a political appointee, Festus. Under Felix, justice was for sale to the highest bidder, and Festus was looking for some political advantage.

On the other hand, Paul was a man who lived by moral principles. He had not done anything wrong since he was saved, and he would not do anything wrong no matter what pressure was brought to bear on him. None of this mattered to the Jews. They had lost all sense of reason, and Paul’s guilt or innocence was no longer in question.

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Job Believed in the Resurrection, Job 19:25-27.
- T. — Daniel Wrote About the Resurrection, Daniel 12:2, 3.
- W. — Resurrection and Judgment Are Sure, John 5:28, 29.
- T. — Necessity of the Resurrection, I Corinthians 15:12-27.
- F. — The Dead in Christ Rise First, I Thessalonians 4:14-16.
- S. — Offering for the Jerusalem Saints, Romans 15:25-28.

Then, as now, a trial is often about politics rather than justice. Public opinion and outrage influence judgments, even in modern courts. In this case we have one judge who was waiting for a bribe to be offered, and another who was looking for some political advantage. There was little chance for Paul to get a just hearing. These are the circumstances Paul faced in Caesarea.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Paul before Felix

Acts 24:10-16

10. Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

11. Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

12. And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

13. Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets:

15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

16. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

Paul believed in the resurrection and that was the reason he was on trial. A man named Tertullus had been hired by the Jews to present the case against Paul, but Paul was more skilled than Tertullus. Tertullus made accusations without merit. He did nothing to prove his case. He merely stated that the Jews had found Paul to be a nuisance and that Paul worshiped Jesus. In one respect, Tertullus was correct. The whole thing was about Jesus and whether He was living or dead. The resurrection was at the heart of this case.

At this time, Paul seemed to believe that, when he got a chance to explain himself, justice would be done. He was innocent and he welcomed the chance to defend himself. His defense is recorded in verses 11-21. Paul repeated the things he had said before the crowd and council in Jerusalem.

Only twelve days had passed since Paul came to Jerusalem. In that short time his mission of love and mercy had been completely ignored. Paul had not disputed with anyone in the Temple, and he had not tried to raise up a group in an attempt to overthrow the Romans. In fact, he had not done anything that should have offended anyone in any way, but he was on trial. He simply stated that there was no proof of any of the things that he was accused of doing. Paul wisely asserted his innocence because there was no proof of his guilt. He was on trial because of his belief in Jesus, not because of anything he had done in the Temple.

Paul asserted that what he believed about Jesus had its roots in what many Jews believed, that there was to be a resurrection, both of the just and the unjust. The resurrection is clearly taught in the Old Testament, and an honest examination of Paul would reveal that his beliefs and actions were consistent with Old Testament teachings.

One important lesson is that our beliefs about Jesus can bring out strong feelings. Wars have been fought and many people have died because of religion. Words are powerful, and Paul had awakened strong emotions among the Jews in Jerusalem.

At this point, Felix should have dismissed the charges and released Paul. However, he delayed stating that he wanted to hear from Lysias, the captain in charge in Jerusalem. Paul was placed under house arrest and judgment was postponed.

II. Felix Before Paul

Acts 24:24-26

24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

26. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

Drusilla was Felix's third wife. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa, who was eaten of worms. We read about him in Acts 12:23. Drusilla knew a lot about Jewish customs, and Felix brought her to hear what Paul had to say about the charges that were brought against him. During this time, Paul had general liberty to come and go, but a centurion kept him under guard.

On a certain occasion, Felix and Drusilla sent for Paul. They wanted to hear about the faith in Christ. Paul had a simple and direct message for this pair. Knowing their background, this message became even more appropriate. First, Paul reasoned about righteousness. Paul was speaking to two grossly immoral people. History reveals that both of these people lived selfish lives. The only thing that seemed to be important to Felix and Drusilla was advancement in the Roman empire.

Then, Paul reasoned about temperance or self control. Once again, here were two people who were accustomed to indulging in every fleshly lust and desire. Paul's message was that there was a greater power than Rome and there were eternal consequences to our fleshly sins.

Finally, he reasoned with them about the judgment that was to come. At this point, his message really hit home. If this life is all there is, there are few penalties for bad behavior and we escape them when we die. However, if there is life after death and a resurrection, things are not over when we die. We will live in eternity, and we will be accountable for the things we have done while on this earth. This is a sobering enough thought for a saved person, but it is absolutely terrifying to those who are lost.

At this point, the gospel had done its work. Felix and Drusilla were under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Felix did what many under conviction do. He stalled and delayed. He sent Paul away stating that this was not a convenient season for him to consider these things. He indicated that he would call for Paul again later.

Delay is denial. We may not like to think about it, but as every child instinctively knows, when Mom says, "Not right now," it means "no." It seems that men can find many convenient seasons

for sin and rebellion, but few occasions to hear the Word of God and make life-changing spiritual decisions. We can only wonder how many people are in hell today because they could never find a convenient time to repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus.

Felix was genuinely moved by Paul's message. He literally trembled, but his greed overcame his spiritual need. Felix saw an opportunity to make money, and the love of money is the root of all evil. Felix wanted someone to give him a bribe so that he could turn Paul loose. He sent for Paul often and, perhaps, was convinced of Paul's innocence, but he never decided to accept Jesus or to release Paul. In looking for a bribe, Felix sold out his eternal soul.

III. Paul Before Festus

Acts 25:6-12

6. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

7. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

8. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.

9. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

10. Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

11. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

12. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.

At first, Festus seemed to be a noble and able ruler. He was only in Judea three days when he decided to leave Caesarea and

go to Jerusalem. Felix had been relieved of his governorship in large part because he could not handle the unruly Jews. Festus wanted to see what the problem was, and he went to Jerusalem. No doubt, he wanted to see firsthand about all the controversy among the Jews.

When he got there the high priest immediately brought the case of Paul before him. The incident that caused Paul's arrest was now two years old, but the hatred of the Jews had not abated. The feast of Pentecost was long over, Trophimus, the Gentile was no longer in Jerusalem and the vows had been forgotten, but the Jews still hated Paul. The high priest asked Festus for a favor.

It was customary for a new governor to grant a favor to the people he was ruling, and the high priest was using political custom to get his way. The request seemed simple. He asked that Festus bring Paul to Jerusalem for trial. The high priest had no intention of having a trial. He was looking for a chance to kill Paul. What a remarkable revelation of how far we can slip into immorality. Here was the high priest of Israel conspiring to commit murder. He was breaking the specific commandment of God. He had to know this, but his hatred for Paul blinded his mind to his own sin. Hatred and anger can blind us to simple and sensible truth that we would otherwise know.

Festus decided that rather than bringing Paul to Jerusalem he would conduct his trial in Caesarea. Those who wished to accuse Paul could go there and make their case. Festus continued his tour of Jerusalem for the next ten days and then came to Caesarea. The next day he sent for Paul, and the trial began.

Paul was in a dangerous situation. He knew that it was customary for a new ruler to grant the first request of the people and the first request concerned him. Paul knew that he would be killed if he were taken to Jerusalem. Paul realized how much the Jews hated him, and the hatred had not let up during the two years Paul had been confined in Caesarea.

Paul was saved from death by his understanding of Roman law. Festus wanted to placate the Jews, but Roman law demanded that a Roman citizen be given a fair trial. It was Paul's appeal to Lysias that he was a Roman that had stopped the scourging two years earlier, and it was the knowledge that he was a Roman that prevented him from being tried before the

Jews. As a Roman, Paul had to be tried in a Roman court, and that court was at Caesarea. Festus was at Caesarea, and Paul was again on trial.

Three times in Acts Paul's trial before Festus is recounted. One is in our text; the others are in Acts 25:13-21 and in Acts 28:17-19. It is interesting to study these accounts, but here the situation is summed up for us succinctly. The Jews came and made many complaints against Paul but offered no proof for any of them. These things might have seemed strange to Festus, but obviously the Jews who accused Paul took their complaints seriously.

Finally, Paul had only one choice left. He had to appeal to Caesar to keep from being sent back to Jerusalem and certain death. This left the matter unresolved, and Paul was still a prisoner in Caesarea.

A FINAL WORD

In all his court appearances, Paul made an adequate and able defense. There was no proof that he had offended the Jews or the Romans in any way. These trials clearly reveal two things. One is that Paul was not guilty of anything at all. He had done nothing wrong and no provable charge had ever been brought against him. He did not take a Gentile into the Temple and no one saw the Gentile in the Temple. He did not incite a rebellion against Roman authority. He was innocent of all charges. Felix and Festus knew this and so did everyone else who observed the trials.

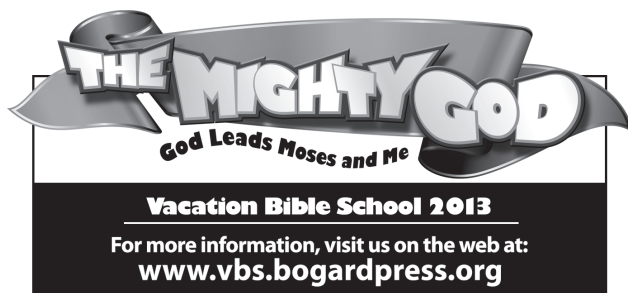
The second obvious thing was that the Jews wanted Paul's blood. It did not matter whether he was innocent or guilty; they wanted him dead. This may have been the result of the anger that Paul stirred up among the Jews during his missionary journeys.

In one way the Jews were correct. The truth Paul preached was a threat to them and what they believed. If Jesus is who He said He is, Judaism was nailed to the cross. History reveals that Jerusalem and the Temple were about to be destroyed at this time. In a few years the Romans would resolve the Jewish problem by destroying all they could of the nation. The Temple

would be destroyed, and Jerusalem would be torn down. All the while, Christianity would grow and flourish in the cities of Asia Minor and Greece where Paul and others had preached.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What was Paul's attitude in answering the false accusations? Have you ever been falsely accused? How did you answer your critics?
2. Why did the Jews consider Christianity to be heresy?
3. What did Paul mean when he said he believed, "all things which are written in the law and in the prophets"? (Acts 24:14).
4. What caused Felix to tremble (Acts 24:25)? Why?



11

Defense Before King Agrippa

Text: Acts 26:1-32

Focus: Acts 26:4, 5, 9-29

Key Verses:

“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”
Acts 26:28, 29

Sunday Devotional: The Difference Christ Makes, I Timothy 1:12-16.

Application: The changed attitude, words and life-style Christ brings into each believer at salvation will create opportunities to share Him with unsaved friends.

A FIRST LOOK

Paul’s appeal to Caesar brought Festus a new problem. As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to appeal to Caesar, and he had done so to avoid the lynch mob in Jerusalem. However, as governor of Judea, Festus had to send formal, written charges against Paul to Caesar.

Festus had already determined that Paul had not done anything that was worthy of death. Now, he was faced with the problem of sending a relatively minor case concerning Jewish practices to the highest court in the land. Augustus, as the emperor, might question the ability of Festus to govern effectively in Judea.

While Festus pondered this problem, Agrippa and Bernice came to Caesarea to greet the new Roman governor. Festus seized this opportunity to ask Agrippa to hear Paul and help him determine what charges should be sent to Caesar. This

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Light and Glory, Luke 2:25-32.
- T. — No Abiding in Darkness, John 12:44-48.
- W. — Walk in the Light, Ephesians 5:8-16.
- T. — Light Has Come, John 3:18-21.
- F. — Children of Light, I Thessalonians 5:4-10.
- S. — Delivered from Darkness, Colossians 1:12-14.

is the background for this wonderful opportunity Paul was given to witness before the heads of the government of Judea.

Unlike his other appearances in court, this time Paul would be allowed to tell the whole story, and the power of the gospel would do its wonderful work.

We can also see the hand of God at work in the affairs of men. God had promised that Paul would be a witness at Rome. Now, all the circumstances were coming together to make this possible. Paul would go to Rome and once there, he would have many opportunities to witness to many people from throughout the empire. This all began before Festus and Agrippa.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Paul's Life Before He Met Christ

Acts 26:4, 5, 9-15

4. My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

5. Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

9. I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

10. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

11. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

12. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

13. At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

14. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

15. And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

Paul welcomed the opportunity to present his testimony to this large crowd that included high government officials. At this time, Paul was not seeking to establish his innocence and be set free. He had appealed to Caesar, and his case would have to be tried in Rome. This defense was a testimony designed to present the gospel so that all those who heard would know how to be saved and would have an opportunity to repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus. Paul was able to accomplish his goal and he gave us a great example to follow in witnessing before a hostile audience.

Paul began in total honesty, with facts that could be easily verified. Paul was not a stranger to the Jews of Jerusalem. He had been an active member of the Pharisees, and his father before him was a Pharisee. He turned this to his advantage by reminding the court it was because of his hope of the resurrection that he was on trial.

Paul related his personal testimony concerning Jesus. The great strength of personal testimony is that it cannot be refuted. We may accept it or reject it, but we cannot state that it did not happen. Paul began with facts. He had been a persecutor of those who believed in Jesus. He actually had arrested Christians and consented to have them put to death. The early days of the Lord's churches were not trouble free. Many Jewish believers continued to meet in synagogues, and Paul had gone to these meeting places and taken prisoners. He had done everything he could to eradicate Christianity from Jerusalem and Israel.

All this changed when Paul met Jesus. As we have learned, Paul was going to Damascus when he was overwhelmed by a heavenly vision that was brighter than the sun. He heard a voice speaking in Hebrew, and Paul asked who it was. The simple answer was, "I am Jesus" (verse 15). In these three words, Paul affirmed all that he believed about the resurrection.

It was well-known that Jesus had been crucified. Jesus had died publicly, but many doubted that he had left the grave. Paul clearly affirmed here that he was an eyewitness to Jesus' resurrection. He saw Jesus, and he interacted with Him. This silenced the objection of the Sadducees.

Paul told how this meeting with Jesus had changed his life forever. The clear implication is that a meeting with Jesus will make permanent changes in anyone. Paul was preparing the

groundwork in the hearts of these evil rulers for the gospel to do its wonderful work.

II. Paul's Life After He Met Christ

Acts 26:16-23

16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

17. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

19. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20. But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

Now, Paul moved his account to the job Jesus gave him to do. Paul was no longer acting on behalf of the council in Jerusalem; he was acting on the orders he had received from the living Lord.

Paul was first commissioned to tell what had happened to him. He faithfully carried out that commission. Witnessing is, first and foremost, recounting our actual experiences to others. Of course, before we can be effective witnesses, we have to have a real spiritual transaction with Jesus. If you are saved, you have something about which to witness. Moreover, Jesus told Paul that he would reveal other things to him, and he would also bear witness of these future revelations.

Jesus also promised to deliver or protect Paul from all troubles as he witnessed to the Gentiles. Paul was sent to the Gentiles. Jesus was plain about this, and Paul understood and faithfully reported his commission.

The great purpose of Paul's ministry was to open the darkened eyes of the idol-worshiping Gentiles and turn them from darkness to light, to preach the truth to them so that they would have an opportunity to repent of their sins and place their faith in the living Jesus.

Paul took this commission seriously, and his life changed forever. He summed up many years of service during which he preached in Damascus, Jerusalem, throughout Judea and to the Gentile cities of Asia Minor. Paul included the gospel into his testimony. He declared that he was preaching that men should repent of their sins, turn in faith to God and do works that indicated that they had a true change of heart. Once again, this is the exact truth. Paul had preached this message, and he was once more preaching it to this hostile audience.

Paul now came to the actual case before the court. The Jews arrested Paul and accused him of bringing a Gentile into the Temple. This charge was completely false and easily disproven. Paul told the court that the real reason the Jews hated him was because of the message he preached of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

God had protected Paul, and he had continued to preach the truth. He carefully and accurately pointed out that this was the same message that all the Old Testament prophets had also delivered. What had happened to Jesus was the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Felix was a student of the Old Testament, and he should have understood this.

III. Paul's Witness to Festus and Agrippa

Acts 26:24-29

24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

As Paul was speaking, Festus interrupted with a voice louder than Paul's. He accused Paul of being beside himself, or insane. Festus did not interrupt Paul because he truly thought Paul was insane. If he had, he would have ordered his guards to escort Paul to a place of rest and safety. No Roman official would send a madman to trial before the emperor. Festus was revealing that he was under conviction. Paul's words had found their mark, and Festus was trying to escape them.

Interestingly, Festus had imagined a cause for Paul's madness. He attributed it to "much learning" (verse 24). This shows us the contempt Festus had for education. Learning does not make anyone insane. The truth sets us free; it is ignorance that destroys our minds and enslaves our souls.

Paul reacted calmly by telling Festus that he was not insane. What Paul had told was common knowledge and could be easily tested in the mouths of many witnesses. As a Roman official, Festus was aware of Christianity and of many of the things Paul had related.

One of the first reactions to convicting truth is to attack the messenger. This never works because the truth is true even if a madman declares it.

Paul turned to Agrippa and asked a simple and obvious question. He asked Agrippa if he believed the prophets of the Old Testament. Paul answered for Felix. It was common knowledge that Felix was a student of prophecy and that he believed what he had studied.

Felix responded with the famous remark that he was almost persuaded to become a Christian. These are sobering words, and they are not in the form of a question. Felix, like Festus, was under conviction and was close to giving his heart to Jesus. However, almost saved is still one hundred percent lost.

Felix knew that if he affirmed his faith in the prophets it was necessary to admit that Jesus of Nazareth had fulfilled the prophecies, and this would lead to an admission that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. Felix stopped short of admitting the truth and sealed his own eternal doom. As far as we know he never was fully persuaded to accept Christ.

Paul concluded by gently and lovingly revealing his heart to the court. He wanted everyone to share his faith. In fact, he stated that he wanted everyone to share his life experience, except for the part about being a prisoner.

A FINAL WORD

Agrippa and Festus both declared that Paul was innocent of any crime deserving the death penalty. God continued to record these official statements so that those who read this account would understand that Paul was an innocent man. Festus had declared that Paul might have been set free, had he not appealed to Caesar, but this was not necessarily so. If Paul had not appealed to Caesar, he would likely have been assassinated by the Jews. The appeal to Caesar ended the two yearlong campaign of the Jewish leaders to get Paul killed. They knew they could not successfully bring this fight against Paul to Rome.

Agrippa and Festus began this tribunal with themselves as the judges and Paul on trial. The eternal truth was that Paul was the judge and they were on trial. Instead of Paul being on trial for his physical life, Festus and Agrippa were on trial for the life of their eternal souls. They had been shown the truth and the way to salvation, but both of these men deliberately closed their eyes and refused to believe the truth. To them the trial was over, and Paul would go to Rome and trouble them no longer. It was true that the trial was over, but their sentence was still to come. It is being carried out now in eternity.

It is a wonderful thing to hear the gospel and have an opportunity to trust Jesus Christ and be saved. It is also a terrible tragedy to waste any opportunity because we never know whether we will have another. Festus and Agrippa may have pondered the things Paul said and changed their minds about Jesus, but there is no record that they did.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Did you notice the way Paul threaded his testimony of salvation into his defense statement? What do you think about that?
2. Discuss the value of each individual's testimony of salvation. How important is it?
3. Name the particular events Paul's testimony of salvation reveals.
4. Take turns incorporating these significant events into your salvation testimony and share it with the class.

12

Protection in the Storm

Text: Acts 27:1-44**Focus:** Acts 27:1,2,20-26,33-39,42-44**Key Verse:**

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me."

Acts 27:25

Sunday Devotional: Our God Is Able, 2 Timothy 1:8-13.

Application: The key to surviving trials and difficulties in this life is to trust God completely. When facing storms, doubts and losses, say, with Paul, "I believe God" (Acts 27:25).

A FIRST LOOK

Actively serving the Lord is an interesting and exciting life. Acts 27 discusses means God used to bring Paul to Rome. It also highlights the great difficulty of travel in earlier times.

Today, we complain if we have to wait awhile to get on an airplane or we get stuck in a traffic jam. We are used to traveling many miles quickly and in comfort whenever we want. However, in Bible times travel was difficult and dangerous. Often people started on a journey and were never heard from again. If they traveled by land they were in danger from outlaws and thieves. If they traveled by sea, they were at the mercy of the weather. (See 2 Corinthians 11:26.) Our modern ability to travel and communicate is a great blessing from God.

On this journey a group of people set sail from Israel to Rome. Julius, a centurion of Augustus, was in charge of the prisoners. Julius was gracious to Paul and allowed him to go ashore at Sidon to visit with his friends. At Myra, in Lycia, this

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Willingly Sacrifice for Christ, 2 Corinthians 11:23-31.
- T. — God Always Keeps His Word, Numbers 23:19.
- W. — You Can Trust God, 2 Chronicles 20:20-22.
- T. — Stagger Not at the Promise of God, Romans 4:19-25.
- F. — Call on Him When in Trouble, Psalm 107:23-31.
- S. — Trust in God Who Raises the Dead, 2 Corinthians 1:8-10.

group boarded a ship from Alexandria that was going to Italy. It was this ship and the two hundred seventy-six people on it who would endure the great trials mentioned in our lesson.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. The Journey Begins

Acts 27:1, 2

- 1. And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.**
- 2. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.**

The journey began in Caesarea, in northern Israel where Paul and other prisoners were delivered into the care of Julius. The word used for the other prisoners means “others of a different kind.” This suggests that these prisoners may have been bound to Rome for execution, not trial before Caesar. We can infer that this was a notable group because a centurion, a commander of at least a hundred soldiers, was put in charge of the mission. Julius had the authority to kill these prisoners rather than let them escape.

The voyage was intended to follow the coast of Asia. This was due to the normal navigation methods of the day. With the coast on the right of the ship, the ship was sailing toward Rome, but with the coast on the left of the ship, the ship was headed for Africa. As long as the coast was in sight from time to time the destination was not in doubt.

A problem arose after the ship left Sidon. The winds were contrary and instead of following the coast, the ship sailed to the south of Cyprus. Sailing over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, the ship came to Myra, a city in Lycia. It would be helpful to locate these places on a map to trace this journey. These few words sum up many days of travel.

At Myra, Julius decided to abandon the slower coastal ship, and he put Paul and the others on board a large, grain ship from Egypt that carried two hundred seventy-six passengers. Rome

depended on Egypt for much of its grain supply, and these ships sailed regularly from Egypt to Rome. However, they did not normally come close to the coast of Judea.

Strong winds again hindered their progress, and the ship was forced to sail to Crete, passing Salmone, and finally struggling into Fair Havens. Julius had to decide whether to pass the winter at Fair Havens or try to reach the port of Phoenix or Phoenicia on the southern coast of Crete, about forty miles away. Here we learn a valuable spiritual lesson. This is a bad example of how to determine the will of God.

Paul advised them to stay in Fair Havens. They had already encountered adverse winds, and it was the beginning of the stormy season. Every sailor knew that sailing was difficult from mid-September to mid-November, and impossible from mid-November to February. Unfortunately, the men in charge ignored Paul's warning.

Notice the factors that governed Julius' decision. First, he was not in a comfortable place because Fair Havens was more open to the winter storms. Phoenix had a more sheltered harbor. Second, Julius listened to the advice of the master and owner of the ship. He advised that the ship head for Phoenix as fast as possible. It was only forty miles away and they had already lost time. When Julius summed it up, the majority, including the experts, wanted to sail.

Now, the final argument came with a change in the weather. The south wind began to blow, and that was what they needed. However, it was not long before the south wind became a storm. Sailors called this wind *Euroclydon*, which means "a northeasterner." It was impossible to steer the ship, and the crew let it drift. The wind drove it south, to the island of Clauda. The sailors pulled in the small boat normally towed behind larger ships, so it would not be lost or cause damage.

As the storm grew worse, the crew did what they could to keep the ship afloat. They wrapped ropes around the hull so that the ship would not come apart, and they took down some of the sails. The second day, they started throwing some of the cargo overboard, and the third day they jettisoned the ship's furnishings. They could not see the sun or the stars. It was impossible to determine their position. The situation seemed hopeless, and this had happened because Julius would not listen to the wise advice of Paul.

Impatience, accepting expert advice contrary to God's will and trusting what appears to be ideal conditions are tools Satan often uses to get us into trouble.

II. The Great Storm

Acts 27:20-26

20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

At this time the ship was drifting in the storm. They had no idea of their position, and no way to control the ship. The storm was still raging in its fury, and the experienced sailors had given up hope that they would be saved. The situation was desperate, and there was literally nothing that any human agency could do to save the people. The experienced seamen had done the best they could to handle the ship. Their competence was not in question, but no matter how competent we may be, we can face storms that overwhelm us. This is when we need help from God. No matter how smoothly things may be going and no matter how good a plan we may have, the wind can change, and we can find ourselves in an uncontrollable storm of events.

Paul had kept silent ever since the ship sailed from Fair Havens. He now spoke, and he began by gently rebuking those in charge for their foolish decision to leave Fair Havens. When we have made a bad decision, we need to know about it. We often excuse our blunders by saying that anyone would have done the same thing, or that events were beyond our control, but the truth

is that we are all capable of ignoring wise advice and foolishly sailing into trouble. When we do, we need someone to tell us that we have ignored wise advice.

Paul gave them a plain and simple encouragement from God's Word. Paul was not giving his opinion; he was revealing what God had told him. The ship itself would be lost, but the people on the ship would all be saved. No one would lose his life in this storm. Paul's conclusion was to be of good cheer, to take heart and look at the bright side of the situation.

Paul did not ask the people to accept his word in the matter. He told them that an angel of God had appeared to him that night and had given him the reassuring message that he would appear before Caesar, and God in his grace would spare the lives of all on the ship.

No doubt, Julius thought he was in charge. Perhaps, the master and owner of the ship thought he was in charge. The men were acting of their free will, but the will of God was overriding their will. This journey was not about the grain from Egypt or the prisoners from Caesarea. This was about Paul and the promise of God that Paul would go to Rome and appear before Caesar.

Paul stated that he belonged to God, that he served God and that he believed God. These three things will allow us to be of good cheer in a troubling situation. The sure mark of a Christian is his cheerful attitude in times of trouble. The solution for a child of God to any trouble is to rejoice in the Lord. We can do this because we realize that God has a plan for our lives, and He also has the power to carry out His plan.

Paul pointed out that the ship would be lost. The bad decisions of Julius and the captain had consequences that God did not take away. However, the lives of the people were spared because of the presence of Paul. Many people have been blessed because they were close to those who were in the center of God's will. As Moses said to his father-in-law, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good" (Num. 10:29).

III. Protection from the Storm and Safety Ashore

Acts 27:33-39, 42-44

33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast *themselves first into the sea*, and get to land:

44. And the rest, some on boards, and some on *broken pieces of the ship*. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

Paul encouraged the people to eat and prepare for the rough time ahead. Paul was their example and the people ate and began to feel better about their chances of survival. They took action. They threw the wheat into the sea to lighten the ship. When it was light, they saw that they were near land and their hopes of survival were renewed after many days in the storm.

As the ship made its way to the shore, it encountered rough waters and began to break apart. The soldiers advised Julius to kill the prisoners so that they would not escape. Julius had learned his lesson. He had learned to trust Paul, and he refused to kill the prisoners. Instead, he ordered the people to abandon the ship and swim to the shore. The people on the ship used various means to get ashore. Some swam, and some floated on broken boards from the ship. The important thing was that the word of Paul had come to pass, and everyone on the ship was now safe on the shore.

A FINAL WORD

These verses offer us an interesting metaphor for our lives. When the sea was smooth and the journey was routine, the ship

was loaded with many things that were really not necessary for the journey. This was a large ship, able to accommodate the two hundred seventy-six people on board. They had to have food and supplies for the journey. Perhaps, they had other cargo that was being sent to Rome. It would surprise us to learn of all the various things that are on any great ship that sets out to sea.

There comes a time when all the things that we think we need are only burdens that will drag us down. First, the sailors threw all the non-essential cargo overboard. On the next day, they examined the rigging of the ship and discarded all the tackling that they did not need. Now, the ship was down to essentials. The goal was no longer getting the cargo into port, or keeping the passengers and crew comfortable; the issue was survival.

If we look at life properly, we will realize that we can live without many things we think are essential. When survival is the issue, we can lighten our load considerably. We should not wait for a storm in our lives to realize that we may be carrying things that we really do not need, and they are only weighing us down.

For instance, consider the admonition in Hebrews 12:1. Many people are carrying a load of sin that makes life more difficult. If we will deal with our sins every day, our spiritual ship will be much lighter.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Did Paul possess superhuman faith, or can Christians today trust God as much as he did?
2. Have you ever gone through a dangerous or life threatening event? How did you survive it?
3. In your opinion, what revelations from God increased Paul's faith during the harrowing events?
4. What positive promises from God's Word help you make it through tough times?

13

Preaching in Rome

Text: Acts 28:1-31

Focus: Acts 28:1-6, 16-24, 28-31

Key Verses:

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

Acts 28:30, 31

Sunday Devotional: Be Willing To Go, Isaiah 6:8.

Application: Whether convenient or not, accepted or rejected, loved or hated, the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is to be communicated to everyone, everywhere.

A FIRST LOOK

Our circumstances will change, but our dedication and direction should not. Wherever we go and wherever we are, we should remain faithful to witness of the saving power of Jesus at all times and in all situations.

Over the years our service for the Lord may take many different forms. We cannot know all the things the future holds, but we can know that no matter where we are or what the circumstances may be in our lives, we will have opportunities to serve the Lord and be the witnesses for Jesus.

Paul had been faithful to witness to his companions on the ship. He was faithful to serve the Lord on the island of Melita following the shipwreck and was a witness in Rome. Throughout the dangerous and time-consuming journey to Rome, Paul had constantly been a witness

Daily Devotionals

- M. — Thank God for His Word! 2 Peter 1:19-21.
- T. — Pray To Speak Boldly, Ephesians 6:18-20.
- W. — Rejoice That Christ Is Preached, Philippians 1:12-18.
- T. — Pray To Make It Clear, Colossians 4:2-4.
- F. — That the World May Know, Psalm 98:1-9.
- S. — The Light of the Nations, Isaiah 49:5-13.

both in word and deed of the power of the gospel. When he finally arrived in Rome, he continued to serve the Lord, witnessing to the Jews and the Gentiles.

Earlier in his ministry, Paul helped Barnabas teach in the church in Antioch. God called him to the mission fields, and he had served there faithfully. Now, God had opened another door for him, and the apostle would be as faithful to this part of his work as he was to all the others.

A CLOSER LOOK

I. Kindness on Melita

Acts 28:1-6

- 1. And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.**
- 2. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.**
- 3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.**
- 4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.**
- 5. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.**
- 6. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.**

When the storm was over and the ship had been lost, the passengers found themselves stranded on the island of Melita, what we call Malta. The people did not speak Greek or Latin and because of this they were called barbarians. As we learn from these verses this did not mean that these people were cruel, vicious or unkind. We can find kindness and compassion in any culture.

After the storm, it was still raining and cold. The two hundred seventy-six passengers could not be accommodated indoors so

the people built a fire to keep them warm. They showed great kindness to these shipwreck victims, perhaps providing them food and dry clothing.

Then, we see the true servant's heart of the apostle Paul. Others were gathering wood for the fire, and he joined in the work. No job is too small or ordinary for the true servant of God. The menial work of gathering sticks for the fire was a job Paul undertook willingly. As Paul put his bundle on the fire, a viper, a poisonous snake, came out of the sticks and bit Paul on his hand.

When the people of Melita saw the snake, they immediately jumped to the conclusion that Paul was a murderer. Although he had escaped the storm, the snakebite was vengeance for his crimes. Consider for a moment this twisted reasoning. First, there was the superstitious connection between a snakebite and punishment. Why assume that snakes are used as instruments of vengeance? There was no indication at all that Paul had committed murder. This was pure supposition. Greatest of all was the supposition that the storm was punishment meant for Paul, and he had escaped death in the sea, only to be killed by a snake on the shore. This shows us the dangerous process of unreasonable superstition.

When Paul shook the viper off his hand, the beast fell onto the fire, but Paul himself suffered no harm. The people thought that his body should have swollen or that he would have died suddenly after the bite. When these things did not happen, their superstitions brought them to another false conclusion. They changed their minds. They now thought that Paul was a god. As before, there was no basis for this conclusion, only the superstitious attempt to explain a puzzling circumstance.

The lesson for us is that we should not jump to any conclusion based on partial or incomplete evidence. We should not deduce a cause from every effect nor an effect from every cause. As Solomon wisely warned in Proverbs 18:13, "He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."

Paul and the others with him spent three months on Melita and while he was there, Paul healed many sick people. No doubt, he used this opportunity to preach the truth to these superstitious people. We can only imagine the reaction of Julius and the others who were on the ship with Paul. They must have realized that Paul was a special man and God was indeed working in the life of this apostle.

II. Paul's Ministry to the Jews in Rome

Acts 28:16-24

16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

17. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men *and* brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

19. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

20. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

22. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into *his* lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

After the winter months were passed, Paul and the others with him took passage on a ship bound for Italy, and in a short time they arrived at Rome. At Rome, Julius delivered his prisoners safely to the captain of the guard, but Paul was different and he was allowed to rent his own house with a soldier assigned to guard him. It is evident that the Romans did not think Paul would try to flee.

Paul got right to work. Only three days later he called the chief Jews together and made his case before them. Paul was not on trial before the Jews and he did not have to speak to them, but he wanted to state his case. His heart's desire was to influence his brethren in the flesh to trust Jesus Christ.

Paul briefly and accurately stated the facts that had led up to his presence in Rome. He told the Jews how he had done nothing wrong but was forced to appeal to Caesar by the circumstances in Judea. Paul brought no accusation against his nation, and he plainly declared that he was in prison because of his belief in the Messiah, the hope of Israel.

The Jews replied that they had not received any communication from Judea concerning Paul or his case, nor had any of their brethren spoken anything against Paul. The Jews desired to hear what Paul had to say. They knew that he was a believer in Christ and they also knew that the Jews universally had spoken against Christianity. The Jews spoke of Christianity as “this sect” (verse 22). Transliterated this word would be *heresy*. The Jews regarded Christians as a heretical branch of Judaism.

The chief Jews agreed to appoint a special time for a meeting, and many Jews gathered in the house where Paul was staying. From the morning through to the evening, Paul made a persuasive case using the writings of Moses and the Old Testament prophecies to prove that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. Evidently, the crowds listened intently to this wonderful presentation of the gospel.

As Jesus had taught in Matthew 13, the nature of the spiritual harvest is determined by the condition of the soil. Some of these Jews believed what Paul taught while others did not.

The Jews in Rome could not agree among themselves about the ministry and message of Paul, and Paul realized that any further witnessing to them was pointless. He quoted Isaiah 6:9, 10 to them describing the sad spiritual state of the people of Israel at this time. Paul declared that he was going to preach salvation to the Gentiles and they would hear it. This caused more discussion among the Jews, and they left Paul and went their own way.

III. Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles in Rome

Acts 28:28-31

28. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and *that* they will hear it.

29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

**30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,
31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.**

Paul turned to the Gentiles in Rome, and he found a receptive audience. The religion of most Romans was polytheism, which is a big word for many gods. The Romans had largely adopted and renamed the various, imaginary Greek gods. These gods were the figments of legends and imagination and were mostly fierce beings that had little or no respect for human beings. It was a welcome relief for the Gentiles to hear of a God who loved them and wanted the best for them. Paul preached that Jesus is a living God, in sharp contrast to the many idols that were all around Rome. These statues could not speak or hear, but the people worshiped them in ignorance.

Paul preached the kingdom of the one true God and taught the Gentiles the things that concerned the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul spoke out of the conviction of his heart. He had risked his own life for this message, and he was absolutely sincere in delivering it to others. For two years, Paul was under house arrest in Rome and no one attempted to interfere with his preaching ministry.

One interesting footnote to this two year imprisonment is that the men who guarded Paul were likely guards rotated back to Rome from all over the empire. Each guard was relieved every six hours, and each guard had to listen as Paul preached, taught and prayed. No doubt, many of them were saved and took the gospel with them throughout the Roman empire.

During these two years in Rome, Paul wrote Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. He had Luke, Timothy and many others with him. Although Paul was not free to move about the city, nevertheless, he exercised a great ministry and was used by God to spread the gospel while he was under arrest.

A FINAL WORD

The work of God will not be stopped because some will not believe. If the Jews did not want the gospel, the Gentiles would,

and God sent this truth to them. Truth always lives in the hearts of those who will receive it, and it always leaves the hearts of those who will not.

This ends the record of the book of Acts, but it did not end the ministry of Paul. God used this great man as a witness during the time of his imprisonment. Paul would continue to fight the good fight of faith, even in confinement. He would keep the faith even though his ministry had taken a different turn. He would finish his course and complete the job that Jesus had given him to do. He would end his ministry as he had started it, in obedience to the heavenly vision that he had of Jesus Christ.

In many ways the book of Acts is chapter 1 of the history of the Lord's churches. It seems we are living in the closing chapter today. Only God in Heaven knows how much longer it will be before the record of the earthly ministry of the Lord's churches is completed.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Notice the effect companionship or brotherhood had on the apostle Paul. (Read Acts 28:14, 15.) Has your church fellowship positively affected your life? Discuss ways fellowship benefits the church.

2. Though repeatedly rejected by his Jewish brethren, Paul continued seeking to win them to Christ. Why do you think he was so persistent?

3. Notice the wording of verse 25 regarding God's Word. Who spoke through whom? What is this doctrinal belief named?

4. Through years of suffering, neglect and sacrifice, what was Paul committed to do? (Hint: verses 20 and 31.)