

Lesson 7 | July 16, 2023

Committed to the Gospel

Study Text: Acts 27:1 through 28:31

Central Truth: Followers of Christ may be called to herald the gospel in difficult places and circumstances.

Key Verse: Reference

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 (KJV).

For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense. He welcomed all who visited him, boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him (NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will recognize God's grace in Paul's voyage to Rome.
- Students will trust God to give protection and empower bold witness in the midst of conflict.
- Students will share the truth of Jesus Christ in every circumstance—whether easy or difficult.

Introducing the Study

Say: What level of control does God exercise over the weather? Does He allow natural processes to take their course? Or does He intervene often to bring about His purposes? We often seem at nature's mercy, but instead we should depend on the mercy—and power—of the God we serve.

Opening Activity—Ancient Travel

Ask. Put yourself in the position of someone traveling by sea nearly two thousand years ago. How much longer would your journey take? What modern technology would you miss the most? (Allow time for discussion.) The greatest advances in the way we travel—engine-powered ships, trains, automobiles, and aircraft—have all been developed since 1800. For most of human history, travel depended on wind, water currents, animals, and the strength of one's own body.

Say: God's hand on Paul's life was clear not only in times of freedom but also when he was imprisoned. In today's lesson, Paul was taken into custody and set sail to Rome to defend himself against charges brought by his own people. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Falsely accused, Paul appealed to Caesar, the leader of the Roman forces occupying Israel. Paul's voyage to Rome was eventful, and the travelers were shipwrecked by a storm lasting two weeks. However, God showed himself mighty on Paul's behalf. Not

only was Paul saved from death, but all those onboard survived as well, demonstrating God's mercy and power. Once Paul arrived in Rome and was placed under house arrest, God continued to extend His message through Paul for two more years.

Part 1—Paul's Voyage to Rome

Traveling as a Prisoner

Acts 27:1–12

Say: In charge of Paul and several other prisoners was the centurion Julius, “a captain of the Imperial Regiment” (Acts 27:1, NLT). Luke's use of “we” indicates that he accompanied them along with Aristarchus, who was with Paul at Ephesus (verse 2; see Acts 19:29). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Resource Packet Item 1: Paul Travels to Rome

Distribute the map to each student. Throughout the lesson, draw attention to the locations Paul visited and the distances he traveled.

The travelers arrived the next day at Sidon (Acts 27:3). Julius allowed Paul to visit friends there, and the Greek text suggests they provided him with personal comforts such as clothing and other needs for the voyage.

The winds dictating their route, they journeyed north of the island of Cyprus and past the regions of Cilicia and Pamphylia to the city of Myra (verses 4–5). There, they boarded a ship from Alexandria, an Egyptian port (verse 6). Egypt supplied Italy with grain; the ship they boarded was loaded with wheat (verse 38).

After more difficult sailing, they arrived at Fair Havens, on the southwest part of the island of Crete (verses 7–8). They faced two difficulties. First, they had already lost much time on their journey. Second, navigation was unsafe from the beginning of November to the middle of March. The term “the fast” refers to the Day of Atonement, placing these events sometime after late September (verse 9, KJV).

Paul warned that continuing immediately would bring damage to the ship, cargo, and their own lives (verse 10). However, the centurion sided with the captain and the ship's owner (verse 11). Paul was also overruled by the majority of the travelers, who wanted to depart the exposed harbor of Fair Havens and go farther up the coast to Phoenix, which was a better place to spend the winter (verse 12).

Discuss

? What does the treatment of Paul by the believers at Sidon encourage us to do for believers in custody or facing other difficulties?

? How should you respond when circumstances beyond your control stall your progress?

Divine Promise of Safety

Acts 27:13–26

Say: The travelers' attempt to reach Phoenix was short-lived, and a powerful wind blew them out to sea (Acts 27:13–15). Sailing by the island of Cauda, about 20 miles southwest of Crete, they decided to lift the lifeboat before it was lost or destroyed by the storm (verse 16). This was difficult because the lifeboat was likely filled with water by the storm. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The sailors worked to preserve the ship by running ropes around the hull to keep its sides intact (verse 17). They also lowered the sea anchor, attempting to stay away from the quicksand of Syrtis off the northern coast of Africa. The next day, to lighten the ship, they began to throw the cargo into the sea (verse 18). One day later, they threw overboard all the equipment unnecessary for survival (verse 19).

Luke records the utter hopelessness of those aboard the ship (verse 20). Their inability to navigate by the sun and stars was devastating after so many days. Paul offered the hope they so badly needed (verses 21–22). He drew attention to the majority's poor decision to ignore his advice earlier but assured them that everyone aboard would be kept safe. Only the ship would be lost.

God himself was the source of Paul's great confidence. He sent an angel to Paul with the message that he would be tried before Caesar and God's protection of Paul would extend to all those traveling with him (verses 23–24). Paul encouraged them to share his confidence that God would protect every one of them despite the loss of the ship (verse 25–26).

Discuss

? Does God still use angels to communicate to His people and perform His will? Explain.

? How can your faith spill over and encourage those around you—even leading them to trust Jesus?

Part 2—Dangers at Sea and on Land

Saved after Shipwreck

Acts 27:27–44

Say: The fourteenth night after leaving Fair Havens, having been driven across the sea of Adria, the sailors could sense land (Acts 27:27). They verified their location by taking measurements with a weighted line and dropped anchors from the stern to slow their movement (verse 28–29). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul had said everyone would survive but that the ship must run aground (verse 26). Contrary to Paul's declaration, the sailors tried secretly to escape in the lifeboat (verses 30–32). This time, the centurion and soldiers listened to Paul's warning and cut loose the lifeboat so no one could abandon ship.

For two weeks those aboard had not eaten regular meals; they were too busy trying to keep the ship afloat (verse 33). Paul urged them to eat, so they would have the strength to cooperate with God's plan. He bolstered their confidence, promising, "Not a hair of your heads will perish" (verse 34, NLT).

In the presence of Gentiles, Paul did not hesitate to acknowledge the God who was preserving their lives (verse 35). His faith encouraged all those around him (verses 36–37). After eating their fill, they pitched the remaining wheat into the sea (verse 38). Their only objective was to keep the ship afloat until they reached the shore.

The next morning, they saw an unfamiliar coastline and decided to attempt running the ship aground (verse 39). However, they struck a sandbar stretching out from the land, positioning the ship to be broken apart by the powerful waves (verses 40–41).

Because it seemed the ship would be lost and prisoners could potentially become free, the soldiers onboard became concerned. Roman law included the death penalty for anyone who allowed prisoners to escape, and the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to avoid that penalty (verse 42). However, Julius wanted to spare Paul and did not allow the soldiers to harm the prisoners, telling everyone to swim ashore instead (verse 43). By following the centurion's orders, none drowned, none were swept out to sea, and all reached the island safely (verse 44).

Discuss

? In what ways are you tempted to reject God's plan and do things your own way? How can you resist this temptation?

? Is God's plan ever dependent on our cooperation? Why or why not?

Saved from Snakebite

Acts 28:1–10

Say: Once ashore, the survivors learned they were on the island of Malta (Acts 28:1). Once called Melita from the Greek word for "honey," the island lay between Africa and Sicily. The islanders welcomed Paul and those with him, building a fire to comfort them in the rain and cold (verse 2). (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul did his part by gathering sticks for the fire (verse 3). When a viper emerged from the pile and bit him, the islanders stated, "Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live" (verse 4, NLT). Paul may have survived the shipwreck, but the islanders believed he would die by snakebite, proving he was a murderer. They reconsidered when Paul shook off the snake and suffered no ill effects (verses 5–6). At

first, they believed Paul was under the judgment of the gods. Now they believed Paul himself was a god!

The miracles continued when Paul, Luke, and the others were taken in by Publius, “the chief official of the island” (verse 7, NLT). His father was sick with “fever and dysentery,” a condition Luke describes with medical precision (verse 8, NLT). Paul prayed, laid his hands on Publius’s father, and healed him. Paul’s protection from the viper bite and his healing of the official’s father parallel Jesus’ promise: “They shall take up serpents . . . they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18, KJV).

Resource Packet Item 2: Biblical Examples of the Laying On of Hands Hand out the worksheet and ask small groups to read the assigned Scriptures and record their responses. Allow class members to briefly share their own experiences with laying on hands to pray for the sick.

The travelers waited three months before sailing again, and there was ample opportunity for the other islanders to come and receive healing (Acts 28:9). Their gratitude led them to honor the shipwreck survivors with many gifts, including all the provisions they needed to continue their journey (verse 10).

Discuss

? List as many healing methods recorded in the Bible as you can.

? How can ordinary believers minister healing to one another and to those who do not yet know Christ?

Part 3—Preaching under Roman Guard Salvation for the Jews

Acts 28:11–24

Say: The survivors of the shipwreck, including Paul, were able to rest and receive the supplies they needed to proceed on their journey. The islanders’ hospitality undoubtedly strengthened Paul as he looked ahead to what was waiting for him in Rome. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

The group left Malta on another Alexandrian ship (Acts 28:11). After stops at Syracuse and Rhegium, they reached Puteoli, a major port of Rome (verses 12–13). There, some believers hosted them for a week (verse 14). Paul was encouraged when other Roman believers traveled as far as 40 miles to meet him (verse 15). Paul lived in his own rented home with a soldier to guard him (verse 16; see verse 30). His accommodations may have come by the recommendation of Julius.

Paul gathered the local Jewish leaders and told them about his arrest on false charges. He had been accused of speaking against the people of Israel, the Law, and the temple (verse 17; see 21:27–33). The Jews who had rallied against him in Jerusalem protested the Romans’ willingness to release him, and Paul felt his only recourse was to appeal to

Caesar (28:18–19, see 25:11). Paul wanted to clear his name, not bring charges against his fellow Jews.

Paul informed the Jews in Rome that he was in chains for believing things in line with Judaism—the coming of the Messiah, the kingdom He would inaugurate, and the resurrection of the dead (28:20).

Although they had not received any report about Paul, they desired to hear his views on this new movement in Judaism (verses 21–22; see Luke 2:34; Acts 24:5). Paul testified at length about the kingdom of God and used the Scriptures to point to Jesus (28:23; see Galatians 3:13–17; Isaiah 53). Some were convinced and others were not (Acts 28:24). Paul knew that not everyone would believe his message (2 Thessalonians 3:2).

As we attempt to reach unbelievers, we need to consider our audience as Paul did. What is their background? What do they expect our message to be? How have we lived in front of them? Do we understand that not everyone we speak to will be receptive? Paul was careful to not bring charges against the Jews and to not compromise the truth. In 1 Corinthians 9:22–23, Paul said, “Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings” (NLT).

Resource Packet Item 3: What Type of Soil?

Distribute the worksheet and have a volunteer read the Scripture passage aloud. Students may then read the outline and answer the questions.

Discuss

? Should a believer’s approach in witnessing vary depending on an unbeliever’s knowledge of Scripture? Why or why not?

? What attitude should Christians have toward those who have repeatedly shunned the gospel of Christ?

Salvation for the Gentiles

Acts 28:25–31

Say: After Paul shared his testimony, disputes arose among members of his audience. Spiritual darkness seemed to keep them from understanding Paul’s message. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9–10 from the Septuagint (a translation of the Old Testament into Greek dating from the third and second centuries BC) and then told the Jews in Rome that the salvation rejected by many of their own people had been extended to the Gentiles (Acts 28:28). Jesus himself had witnessed a violent reaction among the Jews of Nazareth when He referred to God’s grace toward the Gentiles (Luke 4:24–30). Paul experienced the same reaction from the Jews in Jerusalem (see Acts 22:21–22), but the Jews in Rome had no such reaction.

Paul spent two years in Rome boldly proclaiming God's kingdom and teaching about the ways Jesus Christ fulfilled that kingdom message. The Book of Acts begins—and ends—with God's people boldly proclaiming His truth! (Acts 28:30–31; see 1:8; 4:29–31).

Discuss

? What causes the hardness of heart Paul described?

? Why do you suppose the Jews in Rome reacted peacefully to the news of God's grace for the Gentiles, unlike the Jews in Jerusalem and Nazareth?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Storms will come in every believer's life—whether they literal storms with wind and driving rain or spiritual storms caused by human opposition or supernatural attack. On the way to his trial in Rome, Paul was battered by a storm and shipwrecked, but God used these circumstances to demonstrate Paul's commitment to Christ as well as God's care for His people. No matter the storm, Christians can depend on God's guidance, God's protection, and God's provision. Not only that, they can look for opportunities to share the gospel of Christ and pray for the people around them who have witnessed firsthand the goodness of God toward His children.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Trust God to be with you in all of your storms, both to protect you and to demonstrate His grace and power to those who do not yet know Him.
- Ask God to lead you to others who are going through a storm—whether believers or unbelievers.
- Build your faith by memorizing Scripture verses about God's love and care for His people.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Paul Committed to His Calling.
Romans 1:14–16

Tuesday:

Paul's Invitation to Follow His Example.
1 Corinthians 4:15–17

Wednesday:

Paul Prioritized the Gospel.
1 Corinthians 15:1–11

Thursday:

Paul Willingly Suffered for Christ.
2 Corinthians 11:24–33

Friday:

Paul's Commitment to the Gospel.
Philippians 1:19–30

Saturday:

Follow Paul's Godly Example.
2 Timothy 3:10–17