

Paul Evangelizes In Rome

Bible Background • Acts 28:16–31

Printed Text • Acts 28:23–31 | Devotional Reading • Deuteronomy 4:32–40

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: SUMMARIZE the points of Paul's Gospel message; BE CONFIDENT in our ability to use Scripture to bring others to knowledge of Christ; and IDENTIFY ways we can tell resistant listeners about Christ.

In Focus

During the past year, Monique started recognizing that her grandma Jean was becoming more and more forgetful. Jean started to forget where she placed items in the house. She would start teaching and get so confused the students could not understand what she was saying. She would get in her car to run an errand, but not remember where she was going. She also frequently put food on the stove and forgot about it. The house almost caught fire numerous times.

At Monique's urging, Jean went to the doctor, who examined her and ran some tests. A few weeks later, the results of the tests came back. Jean was in the early stages of dementia. He told her the condition would progressively get worse over time. Jean felt devastated by the news. How long could she continue teaching? She had served as the church's Sunday School Superintendent for more than 25 years. She was a faithful and committed worker. She wondered whether to stop now or wait until things got worse.

Sometimes challenging circumstances can make it difficult to carry out our commitments. At such times, we may need to persevere in faith in spite of the difficulties we experience. In today's lesson, Paul is imprisoned but keeps his commitment to share the Gospel, which leads to souls coming to Christ.

Keep In Mind

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." (Acts 28:28, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Expounded (Acts 28:23) ektithemi (Gk.) — Set forth (used in explaining the way of God).

B. Persuading (v. 23) peitho (Gk.) — Prevailing upon or winning over.

Say It Correctly

Esaias. eh-sah-EE-as

Expounded. ik-SPOUND-ed

KJV

Acts 28:23 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.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

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.

NLT

Acts 28:23 So a time was set, and on that day a large number of people came to Paul's lodging. He explained and testified about the Kingdom of God and tried to persuade them about Jesus from the Scriptures. Using the law of Moses and the books of the prophets, he spoke to them from morning until evening. 24 Some were persuaded by the things he said, but others did not believe.

25 And after they had argued back and forth among themselves, they left with this final word from Paul: "The Holy Spirit was right when he said to your ancestors through Isaiah the prophet,

26 'Go and say to this people:

When you hear what I say,
you will not understand.

When you see what I do,
you will not comprehend.

27 For the hearts of these people are hardened,
and their ears cannot hear,
and they have closed their eyes—

so their eyes cannot see,
and their ears cannot hear,
and their hearts cannot understand,

and they cannot turn to me
and let me heal them.'^[a]

28 So I want you to know that this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles, and they will accept it."^[b]

30 For the next two years, Paul lived in Rome at his own expense.^[c] He welcomed all who visited him, 31 boldly proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him.

The People, Places, and Times

Rome. Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. Its population exceeded one million people. The city was wealthy, literate, and artistic. The Romans worshiped many pagan gods and even some of the emperors.

Jews who had come to believe apparently started the Roman church during Pentecost (Acts 2:41–47). They spread the Gospel on their return to Rome and the church grew. While in Corinth, Paul wrote a letter to the Romans to encourage the believers. After taking money to Jerusalem for the poor Christians there, he desired to visit the Roman believers on his way to Spain (Romans 15:23–28), but his visit did not happen as he had planned. Years later, Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner.

Background

Finally, after a 2,000-mile journey that started in Caesarea, Paul arrived in Rome. He was permitted to live in his own quarters under house arrest or with a light chain. This fairly good treatment resulted from a favorable report from a Roman official, Porcius Festus, and the goodwill of the centurion (Acts 24:23). This proves God can grant us favor even with our enemies.

Paul called together Rome's Jewish leaders. The Jews were back; the decree of Claudius expelling them from the city had expired (18:2). Paul addressed the leaders as "my brothers" to acknowledge the common Jewish blood he shared with them (from 28:17, NIV). Paul wanted the leaders to feel connected to him. In doing so, they may have enough compassion toward him to try to understand the ordeal that created his unjust imprisonment. He explained to them that he was bound because of the hope of Israel, which is the Messiah. He grabbed their attention because they wanted to know more about Jesus. There was a great dispute about Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. They agreed to listen to Paul's presentation of the Gospel.

The Jewish leaders' agreement to hear the Gospel was in fulfillment of Paul's calling to share the Good News with the world, starting in Jerusalem (9:13, 28). God planned that through the seed of Abraham, He would send the Messiah into the world. Now that the Messiah had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ, the entire world needed to know about Him. That is why Paul traveled on missionary journeys during his lifetime. He wanted everyone to have the opportunity to receive Jesus Christ. In spite of the way he arrived in Rome, Paul knew God had a purpose for his imprisonment. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, KJV). Therefore, what was intended for evil, God worked it into good in Paul's life and ministry.

At-A-Glance

1. Paul Shares the Gospel with the Jews (Acts 28:23–25a)
 2. The Jews Turn Away (vv. 25b–27)
 3. Paul Preaches to the Gentiles (vv. 28–31)

In Depth

1. Paul Shares the Gospel with the Jews (Acts 28:23–25a)

On the agreed-upon day, the Jewish leaders came back to the place where Paul resided with an even larger group than expected. Paul testified and taught them about the kingdom of God all day into the evening. He tried to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament (Acts 28:23). Romans, written some years earlier, reveals Paul's ongoing dialogue with the Jews in Rome.

Some of the Jews were persuaded while others were not. Everyone has to make a choice to either accept or reject the Gospel. The most important fact is that we share the Gospel with people no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves. God was faithful in preserving Paul's life so he could share the Gospel in Rome. He was imprisoned but did not complain. He used the opportunity to keep his commitment to spreading the Word.

2. The Jews Turn Away (vv. 25b–27)

Verses 26 and 27 are quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10. They are also quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13:14, 15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:40. We can picture in these verses people covering their eyes and ears so they can't perceive or hear because they are so adamantly against the message and will do what they think will stop the message from getting through. It was predicted that the majority of the Jews would not accept their Messiah, but they are also responsible because they are refusing to look and listen. But don't forget the significant number of Jews who believe, including Paul and the apostles.

3. Paul Preaches to the Gentiles (vv. 28–31)

Because the Jews rejected the message of salvation, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles. He knew the Gentiles would listen, so he spent two years teaching, preaching, counseling, and receiving visitors (Luke, Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, and Mark) while confined. During his imprisonment, Paul wrote many of his epistles: Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Paul did not let his imprisonment hinder him from proclaiming the Gospel. He did not worry about the outcome of his upcoming trial. Instead, he committed his life into the hands of God. For Paul, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (from Philippians 1:21). His faithfulness was rewarded through souls coming to Christ.

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Paul preach the Gospel to the Jews (Acts 28:23)?
2. What prophet foretold the Jews not listening to God's message (v. 25)?
3. How did Paul spend his time while in prison (vv. 30–31)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How was God's favor shown toward Paul in Rome?
2. How did Paul keep his commitment to God while imprisoned?
3. How was his faithfulness rewarded?

Liberating Lesson

Commitment to ministry is sometimes hard. We have so many distractions and hindrances that can cause us to lapse in our responsibilities. Jesus also had a lot of adversity to deal with as He walked the Earth. However, He never allowed anything or anyone to stop Him from reaching the place He was destined to go, the Cross. If Jesus can remain faithful in spite of all He had to endure, surely we can,

too. We must not allow family drama, workplace stress, or personal issues to hinder us from keeping our commitment to minister to others. The world may not understand how we can remain faithful, but we know God can and will sustain us.

Application for Activation

This week, pray God will give you the strength to keep your commitments. Always remember, God is present and in control over your circumstances. Testify to others of the faithfulness of God and how He helped you keep your commitments.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Acts 28:23–31

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.

Paul finally received his opportunity to declare the Good News in Rome. At a set time, a huge number of people gathered at Paul's house of confinement and listened as he "expounded and testified the kingdom of God" from morning until night. The word "expounded" in the Greek is *ektithemi* (ek-TITH-ay-mee), and means "to set forth" or "to declare." The word "testified" (Gk. *diamarturomai*, dee-am-arTOO-rom-ahee) means "witnessed, confirmed something by testimony." The Greek word for "kingdom" is *basileia* (bas-il-l-ah), which means "dominion" or "rule." Paul declared and taught them, confirming the reign of God and Jesus, as set forth in the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and from the Old Testament books of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and others).

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

Some of the people "believed" (Gk. *peitho*, PIE-tho), meaning "they were persuaded of something." In this instance, they believed in God's Word; however, others did not. The phrase "some believed not" in the Greek is *asumphonos* (as-OOM-fo-nos), and it means they spoke to one another in disagreement.

Jesus explained the importance and significance of receiving and then believing God's Word in the parable of the sower. As Jesus told a crowd: "A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And others fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold" (from Luke 8:5-8). The apostle Paul sowed the seed, the Word of God, amid his listeners. Some seeds did fall on good ground—"some believed" (Acts 28:24). However, some did not have confidence in the Word of God. It fell on deaf ears and hardened hearts. These people chose not to yield to the Word of God.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

Paul preached first to the Jewish people, then to Gentiles. And almost without fail, he was persecuted by them in a variety of terrible ways. But Paul loved his people and always went to them first. This is a great example of God's love for the Jews. A remnant would always believe, so Paul did not give up for all those years. Paul realized that in God's infinite wisdom, the rejection of Jesus by the majority of the Jewish religious leaders opened the door for the Gentiles to believe. So although this final word from Paul seems very harsh, we know it really isn't.

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

When God first ordained Isaiah to go and preach to His people, this warning was given to him (Isaiah 6:9-10). Imagine how a young preacher would feel if the Lord God spoke to them at the beginning of their ministry and told them no one would listen to their message. That is just what happened to Isaiah, and some days he got pretty discouraged. Maybe you are in a difficult ministry and are finding very little response. Well, Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus all had this very same experience. This same Scripture was quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13:14-15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:39-40. Jesus had the same experience as Isaiah and Paul— all three of them had their message rejected by their own people.

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

God brought His great "salvation" (Gk. soterion, so-TAY-ree-on), which means "rescue, safety, deliverance," first to His chosen people, the Jews. However, when many of them did not choose to accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah, His salvation then went to the Gentiles. Paul said in the affirmative that the Gentiles "will hear it." In other words, they will accept their salvation and be "grafted in" (Romans 11:17, KJV).

The apostle Paul explained the concept of the Gentiles being "grafted" into this great salvation with this metaphor: "But some of these branches from Abraham's tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree." (Romans 11:17-20, NLT).

In the verses following the above passage from Romans, Paul explained to Gentile Christians that they should not feel superior to the Jews because some of the Jews were rejected. Their unbelief caused them to be rejected. He explained that Abraham's faith was like the roots of a productive tree, and the Jewish people, are the natural branches of that tree. Because of their unbelief, some of the Jews have been broken off from this fruitful tree. Gentile believers, whom he compared to branches from a wild olive tree, were "grafted in." These Gentiles were added to the family of believers based on their faith in God, and therefore they could share in the faith community's spiritual nourishment. Both the Jews and the Gentiles, then, are saved according to their faith and not because of their culture or heritage. The only way to be saved is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

Thus, when Paul gave the Word to local Jewish leaders in Rome and some chose not to believe, they chose damnation. Those who believe become recipients of salvation— eternal life.

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

After Paul spoke in Acts 28:28 of the salvation of the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered to be "dogs" or "heathens," they "departed, and had great reasoning among themselves" (v. 29). In the Greek, the word "reasoning" (Gk. *suzetesis*, sood-ZAY-tay-sis), means "mutual questioning, discussion." In essence, they left to ponder, consider, or think over among themselves the things that the apostle Paul had told them.

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 preached the Good News of the Gospel in his own "hired house" (Gk. *misthoma*, MISTho-mah), which means "rented building," under house arrest for two years. However, he did not spend these years in idleness. He kept on freely preaching the kingdom of God and teaching God's Word with all "confidence" (Gk. *parrhesia*, par-rhay-SEE-ah), which means "freedom in speaking, outspoken, frankness, or bluntness." He spoke with authority, under the power of the Holy Spirit, bluntly telling lost humanity what they must do to be saved from damnation.

Some biblical scholars tell us that after being released from house arrest in Rome, Paul set off on a fourth missionary journey. They support this assertion with the following facts: "(1) Luke, who was such a meticulous chronicler, did not give details of Paul's trial before the Emperor Caesar; (2) the prosecutors had two years to bring Paul's case to trial and time may have just expired; (3) Paul implied in his letter to the Philippians, which was written while he was in prison in Rome, that he would soon be released and would do further travels; (4) Paul gave further information on his intended travels—places that he had not mentioned during his first three missionary journeys; and (5) early Christian literature informs of other travels of Paul" (Life Application Study Bible, 2211).

Paul was indeed committed to the cause of Christ, his Lord and Savior. He even used his imprisonment to bring glory to his God and to serve that cause. Because even his negative circumstances proved to be a positive witness of his faithfulness to Christ in the midst of struggles, his life was truly an example of successful Christian living.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Will They Listen to Me?
(Exodus 6:6–13)

TUESDAY

I Told You So!
(Deuteronomy 1:41–45)

WEDNESDAY

Charged to Teach
(Deuteronomy 4:5–14)

THURSDAY

The Voice of Discipline
(Deuteronomy 4:32–40)

FRIDAY

The Word Is Very Near
(Deuteronomy 30:6–14)

SATURDAY

We Would Like to Hear
(Acts 28:16–22)

SUNDAY

Teaching Boldly and without Hindrance
(Acts 28:23–31)