

UPHELD BY GOD

BIBLE BASIS: Acts 28:16-25a, 28-31

BIBLE TRUTH: God is committed and faithful to us; therefore, believers are challenged to commit our lives to God's care.

MEMORY VERSE: 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).

LESSON AIM: That your students will review the circumstances of Paul's imprisonment and his commitment and faithfulness to God while in his own hired house.

TEACHER PREPARATION

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources (charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools), paper, pens, pencils, Bibles

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

To observe how God upheld Paul while Paul was in a difficult situation.

BIBLE LEARNING

To begin to understand that God expects commitment and faithfulness to Him from all believers, and He will uphold us in our times of need.

BIBLE APPLICATION

To begin to understand that even in trying circumstances, we can be positive witnesses for God.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

Students will be reminded that they can find strength to hold to their commitment to God by

looking at Jesus as their example: God sustained Him through the pain and humiliation of the Cross. Jesus' death was for the salvation of the world.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

ACTS 28:16-25a, 28-31

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 aught 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 showed 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. 25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word,*

28:28. *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.*

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the believers, was converted and became a missionary for Christ (9: 1f). He made four missionary journeys for Christ across the ancient world. After his third missionary journey, he returned to Jerusalem even though he knew that he could be arrested (20:22—22:32). Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Antipatris, then on to Caesarea under Roman guard. Paul appealed his case to Caesar and began his 2,000 mile journey to Rome.

After storms, layovers in Crete, and shipwreck on the island of Malta, Paul arrived in Sicily and finally in Italy. He traveled by land, under guard, to Rome (27:1—28:16).

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will know that believers sometimes experience suffering for the Gospel's sake, but God is still a very present help in times of trouble.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's Trip to Rome

Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. Its population exceeded one million. The city was wealthy, literary, and artistic. The Romans

worshiped many pagan gods, and even worshiped some of the emperors.

Jews, who had come to faith, 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 the collection to Jerusalem for the poor Christians there, he desired to visit the Roman believers on his way to Spain (Romans 15:23-28). Some years later, Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner.

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will look to Jesus as their example of how to keep their commitments to a holy (set apart from sin) God.

I. PAUL ADDRESSES THE JEWISH LEADERS IN ROME (Acts 28:16-22)

Three months after his shipwreck, after which he encountered the barbarous people of Malta and through persuasion and example, caused them—his enemies—to be at peace with him, Paul and his crew set sail again (Acts 28:11). They landed "in or near Italy, reaching Syracuse in Sicily, next Rhegium, a city in Italy, and then a seaport town not far from Naples called 'Puteoli.' After Puteoli, where he and his companions spent a week with believers, they then reached Rome" (Matthew Henry, 1748-1749; Acts 28:12-13). Believers at Rome had heard much about Paul, but had not yet met him. Biblical scholars believe that these Roman believers accepted the Good News when it spread to Rome by various means, plus there were some Romans at Pentecost, who accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and took the message back to Rome (Acts 2:10). Thus, the Roman believers heard of Paul's

service for the kingdom of God as well as his suffering for that very same kingdom.

Ten years earlier, Paul had even written these Romans a letter and considering all that he had done for the Lord, they felt compelled when he came to Rome, even though he was a prisoner, to show him the utmost respect. In this manner, Paul was delivered into custody at Rome.

Paul Arrives at Rome and Ministers (verses 16-22)

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.

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 was due to a favorable report from a Roman official, Porcius Festus, and the good will of the centurion (Acts 24:23). This proves that God will grant us favor with our enemies.

Paul has come to his journey's end, but he was still a prisoner. Even though he longed to come to Rome and preach the Good News, he could see no more of this city than what the guard permitted him to see. Paul could dwell by himself (in his own house instead of with other prisoners), receive visitors, and still engage in ministry. The Scripture tells us that "the centurion delivered the prisoners [including Paul] to the captain of the guard." The word "centurion" in Greek is *hekatontarches* (*hekatontarkhace*), and

means "an officer in the Roman army, a captain of 50 to 100 men."

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.

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 addresses the leaders as "My brothers" to acknowledge the common Jewish blood he shared with them (28:17, NIV). Paul wanted the leaders to feel connected to him. In doing so, they may have compassion on him and try to understand the ordeal that created his unjust imprisonment. He expounded on the fact that he was bound because of the hope of Israel, which is the Messiah. He grasped their attention because they wanted to know more about Jesus. There was a great dispute about His claim as 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. His calling was to share the Gospel with the world, starting in Jerusalem (9:14, 28). God planned that, through the Jewish nation, the entire world would know of God (Genesis 12:3). Jesus would come from Israel and bring hope to the world. That is why Paul traveled on missionary journeys during his lifetime. He wanted everyone to have the opportunity to receive Jesus Christ.

18-20. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had aught to accuse my

nation of. 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.

According to Paul, the Roman government tried him and wanted to release him, but it was the Jewish leaders who protested freeing him. In fact, they wanted to put him to death (verse 18). He admitted that the only reason he was a prisoner in chains was because he believed in the hope of Israel—Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and that He had already come. In other words, it was Paul's commitment to Jesus Christ that caused him to be thrown in prison and to get in trouble with the Jewish leaders. The Jews were looking for an earthly, military messiah, a king to come and overthrow the Roman government and set them free from their enemies. However, the real hope for Israel—the real Messiah—was Jesus Christ, who is building a kingdom which would be consummated after the Second Coming. Therefore, Jesus Christ did not fit their persona of a true Messiah. When Paul chose to preach about Jesus Christ, then, he raised the religious leaders' ire. He made them so angry that they'd gotten him thrown in prison and sought to kill him. When their influence prevented his release, Paul had no other alternative but to appeal to Caesar; he was "constrained to appeal unto Caesar" (verse 19). Subsequently, Paul was delivered as prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

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

These Jewish leaders admitted to Paul that they had not received "letters out of Judaea" on his situation. Neither had any of the brothers, who

traveled to Rome, brought negative reports. Again this is ironic, because negative church news usually travels fast. Especially when leaders are in trouble, Satan seems to help carry the news almost like a wild fire so that other believers will be discouraged and even new believers will give up on Christ.

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

These Jewish leaders desired to hear Paul's thinking—what he believed. The word "desire" in Greek is *axioo* (*axeeOo*), and means "judge worthy, deem." These leaders also called the Christian movement a "sect." In the Greek, "sect" (*haireisis*, *HAHeeresis*), means "group of people following their own tenets, whose dissensions from another group arise from different opinions or aims." In essence, the Jewish leaders considered Christianity to be a heresy—a band of disorganized troublemakers. They admitted that Christianity was spoken against everywhere. This was due to the fact that the Roman government or establishment saw it as a threat. Whereas the Romans believed in many gods and even saw Caesar as a god, the Christians only believed in the One True God, and He was an authority higher than Emperor Caesar. In other words, He was over Caesar. His power was greater than Caesar's. Caesar would also have to bow to Almighty God, worship Him, and believe on Him to be saved (John 3:16).

QUESTION 1

Where was Paul imprisoned and who did he live with (Acts 28:16)?

(Answer) He was imprisoned in Rome and lived alone with a soldier that kept him.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul Shares the Gospel

On the agreed upon day, the Jewish leaders came back to the place 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). The book of Romans, written 10 years earlier, reveals Paul's ongoing dialogue with the Jews in Rome.

II. THE GOSPEL. AND THE JEWS

(Acts 28:23-25a)

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. Paul was imprisoned but did not complain. He used the opportunity to keep his commitment to spreading the Word.

Paul Testifies About the Kingdom of God (verses 23-25a)

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* (*ektITH aymee*), and means "to set forth, to declare." The word "testified" (Greek, *diamarturomai*, *deeamarTOOromahee*), means "witnessed, confirmed something by testimony." The Greek word for "kingdom" is *basileia* (*basillah*), and means "dominion, rule." Therefore, Paul declared and taught them, confirming the reign or rule 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.

24-25a. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word,

Some of the people "believed" (Greek, *peitho*, *PIEtho*), meaning "they were persuaded of something"—in this instance, it was God's Word—but some did not believe. The phrase "when they agreed not" in the Greek is *asumphonos* (*asOOMfonos*), and means "speaking to each other in disagreement, dissonant, inharmonious." Luke explained the importance and significance of believing God's Word in recording Jesus' parable of the sower. As Jesus told a crowd gathered: "A sower went out to sow his seed [the Word of God]: 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 other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold" (Luke 8:5-8). The apostle Paul sowed the seed

among his listeners, and some did fall on good ground—"some believed" (Acts 28:24). However, some did not have confidence in or trust in the Word of God. It fell on deaf ears and hardened hearts. These people chose not to yield to the Word of God.

QUESTION 2

Once Paul spoke the Word of God, did all believe (Acts 28:24-25a)?

(Answer) Some believed the Word that was spoken and some did not.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul Gives the Word of God to the Gentiles

Since the Jews rejected the message of salvation, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles. Isaiah prophesied that the Jews would not listen to the Gospel (Isaiah 6:9, 10). Paul knew the Gentiles would listen. 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.

III. THE GENTILES HEAR THE GOSPEL (Acts 28:28-31)

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" (Philippians 1:21). His faithfulness was rewarded through souls coming to Christ.

God Sends His Word to the Gentiles (verses 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.*

In 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 root of a productive tree and the Jewish people, God's chosen 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, who he compared to being branches from a wild olive tree, were "grafted in"—they took the place of the faithless Jews. These Gentiles were added to the family of believers based on their faith in God and therefore they could share 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 the local Jewish leaders in Rome and some chose not to believe, they chose damnation. Those who chose to believe chose salvation—eternal life.

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

After Paul spoke of the salvation of the Gentiles, whom the Jews considered to be "dogs" or "heathens," they departed and "had great reasoning among themselves." In the Greek, the word "reasoning" (suzetesis, soodZAYtay sis), means "mutual questioning, discussion."

In essence, they got alone to ponder, consider, or think over amongst themselves the things that the apostle Paul had told them.

30-31. *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.*

Paul preached the Good News of the Gospel in his own "hired house" (Greek, misthoma, MISThomah), 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" (Greek, parrhesia, parrhaySEeah), which means "freedom in speaking, outspoken, frankness, or bluntness." He spoke with authority, under the power of the Holy Spirit—bluntly telling eternally lost humanity what they must do to be saved from never-ending damnation.

QUESTION 3

How did Paul spend his time while in prison (Acts 28:30-31)?

(Answer) He spent his time "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 31).

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Paul's Commitment to the Lord

Paul was indeed committed to the cause of Christ, his Lord and Saviour. 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.

BIBLE APPLICATION

AIM: That your students will be able to engage in successful Christian living as demonstrated by Apostle Paul and more so by Jesus Christ, Himself.

A Story of Commitment

During the past year Ruth's daughter, Hope, started recognizing her mother was becoming more and more forgetful. At first, Ruth would forget where she placed items in the house. But her memory seemed to be deteriorating rapidly. She would start teaching and get so confused the students could not understand what she was saying. Then, Ruth would get in her car to run an errand but not remember where she was headed. She also frequently put food on the stove and forgot about it. The house almost caught fire numerous times. Hope convinced her to visit the doctor to rule out anything serious. Ruth thought it was just old age catching up with her.

She visited a neurologist who took some tests. A few weeks later, the results of the tests came back. Ruth had "dementia." The doctor told her the dementia would progressively get worse over time. He gave her a prescription to start taking to help her memory. Ruth felt devastated over the news. How would she continue teaching? She had served as her church's Sunday School Superintendent for more than 25 years. She was a faithful, committed worker. Ruth knew God had called her to teach children.

Ruth and Hope talked with her pastor, Reverend Jordan, about her diagnosis. She desired to continue ministering to the children, but her condition might cause problems.

Reverend Jordan told Ruth she could still act as the superintendent and teach. Reverend Jordan assigned another member who was a schoolteacher to be her assistant. Her assistant, Alberta, helped her with administrative work, called her with reminders about important dates and meetings, and helped out as needed in class. The students began to grow spiritually and attendance increased.

Ruth was grateful to be able to continue ministering in her church until her condition progressed. However unless God healed her, she would eventually have to stop ministering through teaching. What would you do if you were Ruth, Hope, or the pastor about a long term plan of action?

Circumstances often make it difficult to keep commitments. In today's lesson, Paul is imprisoned but keeps his commitment to share the Gospel, which leads to souls coming to Christ.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will discern that God calls for total commitment and obedience to Him and for us to be doers of His Word.

As believers, we are to keep our commitments. However, sometimes we struggle to do so. How can we hold to our commitments? We can do so by recognizing God's commitment and faithfulness to us. We are challenged to commit our lives to His tender care. If we yield our lives to Him, by His Holy Spirit, He will direct and guide us.

PRAYER

Father in heaven, help us to always be committed to Your will and Your way. Help us to be faithful in all we do and say and be a positive

witness to a lost and dying world. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

HOW TO SAY IT:

Antipatris. Antip'atris.

Caesarea. Caesare'a.

Epaphroditus. Epaphrodi'tus.

Puteoli. Pute'oli.

Rhegium. Rhe'gium.

Tarsus. Tar'sus.

Tychicus. Tych'icus.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read Exodus 3:16, 13:15, and study "God's Revelation to Moses."

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

An Encouraging Advocate (Acts 9:23-30)

TUESDAY

Our Refuge and Strength (Psalm 46)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord Is Your Keeper (Psalm 121)

THURSDAY

God's Promise and Protection (Psalm 119:114-117)

FRIDAY

Protected on the Journey (Acts 28:11-15)

SATURDAY

God Will Satisfy Every Need (Philippians 4:15-20)

SUNDAY

The Unhindered Gospel (Acts 28:16-31)