

## Lesson 8

### ST. PAUL ON MANY TRIALS The Acts of the Apostles 25-28

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At the beginning of Acts Chapter 25, Festus visited Jerusalem. While there, the officials and high priest of the Jews relayed stories to him regarding Paul. This Jewish pack was out to kill him. They asked for Festus' assistance in delivering Paul to them. Festus refused to be a party to this because he wanted to first go to Caesarea to allow Paul his chance to tell his own side of the story.

**Paul States His Case:** After his arrival in Caesarea, He called Paul before him to hear his case. Paul ardently defended his position and swore he had done nothing to offend Caesar or the Jews. He went on to proclaim that if he was guilty as charged, he had no problem with dying. He further stated that unless his accusers could prove their case, he had no time for their harsh words. Instead, Paul requested an opportunity to plead his case directly to Caesar.

**Festus Agrees with Paul:** Festus agreed with Paul regarding his right to stand directly before Caesar, but he said it would take some time to make it possible. In the meantime, Bernice and King Agrippa visited Caesarea to meet with Festus. Eventually, Festus related Paul's story to the king. The king was interested to hear Paul's faith in Jesus directly from him and asked Festus to summon him the next day.

**Festus Prepares the Meeting:** Festus ensured that all the important citizens of Caesarea would be present as well as all the town's commanders. He introduced Paul to this audience as the man the Jews wanted to kill. Festus fervently defended Paul, but stated that since Paul had requested a personal visit with Caesar, he would write to him on Paul's behalf. Acts Chapter 25 ends with Festus realizing that the meeting would be significant so he would have something to tell Caesar in letter he was going to write. He wanted Caesar to be aware of all the circumstances relating to Paul's case prior to sending the prisoner to appear before him.

**In Acts Chapter 26,** Paul, who is in the custody of the Roman Empire, pleaded his case before King Agrippa and Festus, the governor of Judaea. Agrippa told Paul to speak for himself. Paul stretched out his hand and told the king that he was happy to speak for himself as the Jews have accused him of blasphemy. He also told the king that he knew Agrippa was an expert in all the questions and customs of the Jews.

**Paul Tells of His Early Life:** Paul recounted his early life and how he was a Pharisee, or member of a very strict Jewish sect, as a younger man. Because of this, he said he persecuted the followers of Jesus and had them imprisoned and even executed. He even hounded people into other cities whom he considered blasphemers.

**Paul Discusses His Damascus Journey:** Paul told the story of when he and his companions were afflicted by a light that was brighter than the sun on the way to Damascus. This light was so unbearably bright that all of them fell to the ground. He told of how he heard a voice asking why Paul, then named Saul, persecuted Him. When Paul asked who the owner of the voice was, it claimed to be the voice of Jesus. Paul told Agrippa that the voice told him to get up and go minister to the Gentiles, which Paul immediately did with the same passion with which he persecuted the followers of Jesus. For this, Paul told the King, the Jews caught him in the temple and tried to destroy him. Still, this did not discourage him from preaching about Jesus Christ.

**Paul Speaks to the King:** At that point, Festus told Paul that he was foolish. Paul disagreed and reminded him that the king knew these things of which Paul was speaking. But Agrippa was so impressed that he told Paul that he almost made a convert out of him. Then Agrippa, his sister Bernice, and the governor sat privately with Paul awhile. The king told Festus that Paul could have been set free had he not appealed to Caesar.

**In chapter 27** Paul is taken prisoner and is being taken to Rome where he was going to face trial before Caesar. Acts Chapter 27 provides an overview of the journey. On the journey to Rome, a major storm occurs which takes the ship that Paul and other prisoners were on off its course. The sailors gave up on trying directing the ship and they let it go where the winds took it. Before long, the crew began throwing cargo overboard. They even threw some gear into the sea to lighten the ship's load.

**Paul Encourages the Crew:** When the winds died down several days later, Paul offered words of encouragement to those on the ship. He said that although the ship will go down, nobody will die. He told them that the Lord sent an angel to him in a vision and told him these things.

**Paul is shipwrecked:** After 14 days of the storm, Paul urged them to eat something. In their presence, he broke the bread and ate while encouraging them to do the same. Afterwards, the sailors saw land and ran the ship aground. They wanted to kill the

prisoners that were aboard the ship so they would not escape. However, the commanding officer did not want anyone to harm Paul. Some swam to shore while others held on to planks, but everybody made it safely to the land just as Paul had said.

**The final chapter of Acts – Chapter 28** – focuses on another one of Paul's experiences. It begins with Paul and a ship's crew being shipwrecked on the island of Malta. The chapter goes on to talk about the way the Maltese people treated Paul and the others following their shipwreck. One way they showed their kindness to them was by building a fire along the shore to keep them warm. Suddenly, out of the ashes a viper jumped out and latched onto Paul's hand. The people commented and said that he was a murderer because even though he managed to survive the shipwreck, he was still going to die from the snakebite. But when they saw that Paul was unharmed, they quickly changed their minds and said that he must be a god or else he would not have survived the snake attack.

**Paul Heals on Malta:** A wealthy man of Malta at that time was Publius, who was also very kind to Paul and the others. During their stay, Publius' father was feverish. Paul went to see him and healed him. He also healed several others from various diseases while preaching the Gospel. When Paul and the others left the island, people gave them all the supplies and resources they needed for the trip because of their gratitude.

**Paul Returns to Rome:** After spending three months in Malta, Paul returned to Rome. He made an impassioned speech to a crowd of Jews that he had called together. Much of his speech focused on their need to listen with their hearts so they could be healed and converted. He also told them that he believed the Messiah had already come in the form of Jesus Christ and salvation was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Paul preached freely in Rome for the next two years without any troubles.

**Why does the book of Acts end here so abruptly?** The book is not about the life of Paul but about the spread of the gospel. From the tradition, we learn that while Paul was in Rome under house arrest, he wrote letters to the churches he established prior to his coming to Rome from Jerusalem. He wrote prison letters: Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians and Philemon. Tradition further says that Paul was released after two years of house arrest in Rome and then set off on a fourth missionary journey as we read in Philippians that he would soon be released and would do further travelling

**How did the apostle Paul die?** The Bible does not say how the apostle Paul died. Writing in 2 Timothy 4:6–8, Paul seems to be anticipating his soon demise: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.”

Second Timothy was written during Paul’s second Roman imprisonment in AD 64–67. There are a few different Christian traditions in regards to how Paul died, but the most commonly accepted one comes from the writings of Eusebius, an early church historian. Eusebius claimed that Paul was beheaded at the order of the Roman emperor Nero or one of his subordinates. Paul’s martyrdom occurred shortly after much of Rome burned in a fire—an event that Nero blamed on the Christians.

It is possible that the apostle Peter was martyred around the same time, during this period of early persecution of Christians. The tradition is that Peter was crucified upside down and that Paul was beheaded due to the fact that Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28), and Roman citizens were normally exempt from crucifixion.

St. Paul died for his faith. We know he was ready to die for Christ (Acts 21:13), and Jesus had predicted that Paul would suffer much for the name of Christ (Acts 9:16). Based on what the Book of Acts records of Paul’s life, we can assume he died declaring the gospel of Christ, spending his last breath as a witness to the truth that sets men free (John 8:32).

**What do we learn from the life of St. Paul?** There is much we can learn from the life of the apostle Paul. Far from ordinary, Paul was given the opportunity to do extraordinary things for the kingdom of God. The story of Paul is a story of redemption in Jesus Christ and a testimony that no one is beyond the saving grace of the Lord. He is known as “the Apostle of Grace.” Paul’s early life was marked by religious zeal, brutal violence, and the relentless persecution of the early church. Fortunately, the later years of Paul’s life show a marked difference as he lived his life for Christ and for the advancement of His kingdom.

Paul was actually born as Saul in Tarsus in Cilicia around AD 1–5 in a province in the southeastern corner of modern-day Turkey. He was of Benjamite lineage and Hebrew ancestry (Philippians 3:5–6). His parents were Pharisees—fervent Jewish nationalists who

adhered strictly to the Law of Moses—who sought to protect their children from “contamination” from the Gentiles. Anything Greek would have been despised in Saul’s household, yet he could speak Greek and possibly Latin. His household would have spoken Aramaic (a derivative of Hebrew) the official language of Judea. Saul’s family were Roman citizens but viewed Jerusalem as a truly sacred and holy city (Acts 22:22-29).

At age thirteen Saul was sent to Palestine to learn from a rabbi named Gamaliel, under whom Saul mastered Jewish history, the Psalms, and the works of the prophets. His education would continue for five or six years as Saul learned such things as dissecting Scripture (Acts 22:3). It was during this time that he developed a question-and-answer style of teaching known in ancient times as “diatribe.” This method of articulation helped rabbis debate the finer points of Jewish law to either defend or prosecute those who broke the law. Saul went on to become a lawyer, and all signs pointed to his becoming a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of 71 men who ruled over Jewish life and religion. The pivotal passage in Paul’s story is Acts 9:1–22, which recounts Paul’s meeting with Jesus Christ on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, a journey of about 150 miles. From that moment on, Saul’s life was turned upside down. Saul spent time in Arabia, Damascus, Jerusalem, Syria, and his native Cilicia, and Barnabas enlisted his help to teach those in the church in Antioch (Acts 11:25).

**So, what can we learn from the life of the apostle Paul?** First, we learn that God can save anyone. The remarkable story of Paul repeats itself every day as sinful, broken people all over the world are transformed by God’s saving grace in Jesus Christ. Some of these people have done despicable things to other human beings, while some just try to live a moral life thinking that God will smile upon them on the Day of Judgment. When we read the story of Paul, we are amazed that God would allow into heaven a religious extremist who murdered innocent women and children. Today, we might see terrorists or other criminals as unworthy of redemption because their crimes against humanity are just too great. The story of Paul is a story that can be told today—he isn’t worthy in our eyes of a second chance, yet God granted him mercy. The truth is that every person matters to God, from the “good, decent,” average person to the “wicked, evil,” degenerate one. Only God can save a soul from hell.

Second, we learn from the life of Paul that anyone can be a humble, powerful witness for Jesus Christ. Arguably, no other human figure in the Bible demonstrated more humility while sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ as Paul. Acts 20:19 tells us that he

“served the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to [him] through the plots of the Jews.” In Acts 28:31, Paul shares the good news of Jesus Christ: “Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul was not afraid to tell others what the Lord had done for him. Paul spent all his days, from conversion to martyrdom, working tirelessly for the kingdom of God.

Finally, we learn that anyone can surrender completely to God. Paul was fully committed to God. Through his hardships and suffering, Paul knew the outcome of a life well lived for Christ. He had surrendered his life fully, trusting God for everything. He wrote, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Can we make the same claim?

### **The summary of the book of the Acts of the Apostles**

- The book of Acts was written to provide the birth, growth, expansion and the history of the early church after the Great Commission of Jesus before his ascension and after the Pentecostal event in the upper room where they received the Holy Spirit. The gospel reached far and wide places from Jerusalem, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Malta, Italy,
- The leadership of St. Peter is very evident in his preaching and teaching. We also see the mighty miracles and testimonies of the heroes and martyrs of the early church Peter, Stephen, James and Paul.
- It records the apostles being Christ’s witnesses in Jerusalem (Acts 1-8:3), Judea and Samaria (8:4-12:25) and the ends of the earth (13:1 -28:31).
- The witnessing life of the early Christian community as Prayer, Eucharist, reading of the word of God and listening to the apostles’ teaching (2:42-46) is another stroke of the book.
- It sheds light on the gift of the Holy Spirit, who empowers, guides, teaches, and serves as our Counselor.
- It records the mounting opposition from the Jews against the Jewish Christians and the new converts.
- The famous Jerusalem council and the pronouncement of the doctrinal position of the early church in accepting the gentiles without ritual practice of circumcision is one of the most important pieces of the book.

- Although many faithful servants were used to preach and teach the gospel of Jesus Christ, Saul, also called Paul, was the most influential. Before he was converted, Paul zealously persecuted Christians. Paul's dramatic conversion on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1–31) is a highlight of the book of Acts. After his conversion he went to the opposite extreme of loving God and preaching His Word with power. His three main missionary journeys occupy the later part of the book

**The book of the Acts in Gist:** It is a biblical book containing a theological history of the first 30 years of Christianity. It records a personal history of the early Christian community. It shows a clear travel story recounting how and why Christianity moved from Jerusalem to Rome. It is a companion volume to the third gospel by the historian Luke. It is the gospel of the Holy Spirit.

**Why study the Acts?** We study to get in touch with our Christian roots and to be inspired by the faith and commitment of the early Christians. Studying the Acts helps us to have a better understanding of our present church.

**Practical Application:** God can do amazing things through ordinary people when He empowers them through His Spirit. The book of Acts shows how God essentially took a group of fisherman and commoners and used them to turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6). God took a Christian-hating murderer and transformed him into history's greatest Christian evangelist, the author of almost half the books of the New Testament. God used the persecution the Christians endured to help stimulate the incredibly rapid expansion of the fledgling church. God can and does do the same through us—changing our hearts, empowering us by the Holy Spirit, and giving us a passion to spread the good news of salvation through Christ. If we try to accomplish God's work in the world in our own power, we will fail. Like the disciples in Acts 2, we must faithfully proclaim the gospel, trust God for the results, and devote ourselves "to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Reading the book of Acts, we are enlightened and encouraged by the power of the gospel as it spread throughout the world and transformed lives. Many miracles were performed during this time by the apostles to validate their message. The entire ministry was prompted and held together by the Holy Spirit working in the lives of ordinary people – merchants, travelers, slaves, jailers, church leaders, males, and females, Gentiles, Jews, rich and poor. Many unsung heroes of the faith continued the work, through the Holy

Spirit, in succeeding generations, changing the world with a changeless message – That Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord for all who call on him. Today we can be the unsung heroes in the continuing story of the spread of the gospel. It is that same message that we Christians are to take to our world so that many more may hear and believe and be saved.

**THE MAP OF ST. PAUL’S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS**



**Missionary Journeys of St. Paul**

- Acts 13:4 - 14:26** First Journey to Cyprus and Asia Minor
- Acts 15:40 - 18:22** Second Journey to Syria, Asia Minor, and Europe
- Acts 18:23 - 21:15** Third to Ephesus, Macedonia, and Greece
- Acts 27:1 - 28:16** Fourth Journey to Malta and Rome