

What Kind  
of Church?

A STUDY IN ACTS

7 Studies for Individuals, Groups or 1:1

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# Leader's Notes

## Paul's Testimony

Acts 21:37 - 22:29

### Key verses

22:14 *"Then he said: 'The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth. <sup>15</sup> You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard.*

22:21 *"Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'"*

### Points to note

Paul here recounts his conversion which is also described in Acts 9:1 - 19, and Acts 26:9 - 18. There are some additions here, such as the question "What shall I do, Lord?" in verse 10.

Paul's statement "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" is the final straw for the crowd, who refuse to hear any more from him and demand his execution.

## A Plot to Kill

Acts 22:30 - 23:35

### Key verse

23:11 *The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."*

### Points to note

God is sovereignly overruling through all these events, to ensure that Paul is able to fulfil the ministry God has prepared for him. Of course, God doesn't always dramatically intervene to allow his people to escape from suffering or opposition.

Some have suggested that Paul does not recognise the high priest (23:3), but perhaps Paul's comment is more ironic, stating that he didn't think someone who acted in this way during a trial could be called the high priest.

# Leader's Notes

## The Christian on Trial

Acts 24:1 - 21

### Key verses

24:14 - 15 *"... I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets, <sup>15</sup> and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have..."*

### Points to note

Observe how Paul describes the Christian faith as the faithful continuation and fulfilment of God's Old Testament revelation and covenant.

When Paul says that Christianity is "a sect" (v 5) this is the same word that was used to describe the Pharisees or the Sadducees. Paul is insisting that Christianity is no less Jewish than these other recognised groups.

Paul points out that he was ceremonially clean at the time his accusers found him (v 18) following on from the actions described in 21:23 - 24. His point seems to be that someone involved in such religious duty would hardly be likely to be simultaneously desecrating the temple!

## A Problem Prisoner?

Acts 24:22 - 25:27

### Key Verse

25:10 *Paul answered: "I am now standing before Caesar's court, where I ought to be tried. I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you yourself know very well."*

### Points to note

There are many hints throughout the section that both Felix and Festus believe Paul to be innocent. This however, doesn't mean they free him from his chains!

Note that the resurrection of Jesus once gain features prominently! This time in the summary of the accusation that Festus outlines to Agrippa.

# Leader's Notes

## Paul's Defence

Acts 26:1 - 32

### Key Verse

26:22 - 23 *"I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen — <sup>23</sup> that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."*

### Points to note

Yet again the resurrection features prominently in both Paul's defence and the opposition to his message! (v 8, v 23 - 24, etc).

This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> time Luke records the story of Paul's conversion.

Paul is earnest in his desire that everyone present hear the good news of Jesus and respond - even King Agrippa and those who accuse him!

## Castaway!

Acts 27:1 - 44

### Key Verse

27:24 *'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'*

### Points to note

Even though God has promised to save the lives of the people, they still have responsibility for their actions, and must decide whether to obey or not in order to be saved (30 - 32).

See the repeated "we" references throughout this section, and a great many eye-witness details, reminding us that Luke, the historian and author, was accompanying Paul on this journey.

# Leader's Notes

When in Rome ...

Acts 28:1 - 31

Key Verse

28:30 - 31 *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!*

Points to note

Paul takes the Jewish people to their own Scriptures, to explain that Jesus is God's promised king (v 23).

God's promise to Paul that he will preach the gospel in Rome (23:11) is fulfilled.

Jesus' command to the Apostles, to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth is continuing.

Notice that the gospel has already had some impact in and around Rome (v 14, 15 & 22) prior to Paul's arrival.

## Further Reading

Acts, Tyndale New Testament Commentary, I H Marshall.  
The Message of Acts, the Bible Speaks Today, John Stott

## Free Online Commentary

The IVP Acts Commentary, William Larkin.  
<http://mytmb.me/ivp-acts>

## Paul's Testimony

Acts 21:37 - 22:29

Have you ever been part of a really large crowd? How did it make you feel?

Can you recall a time when you tried very hard to convince someone about something you believed? How successful were you?

How do you tend to react when you see injustice prevailing over justice?

### Read Acts 21:37 - 22:29

Why do you think Paul begins his speech the way he does? And what do we learn about his earlier life in this speech?

How would you describe Paul's account of his conversion?

Why do you think Jesus describes Paul's persecution of Christians as persecuting "me"?

Why does Jesus warn Paul that “the people here will not accept your testimony about me” (22:18)?

The charge which Paul is defending himself against is raised in 21:28 – 29. How is Paul’s speech a defence against this accusation?

Are there particular elements of the speech that you imagine would strike a chord with the Jewish crowd?

Which part of Paul’s speech causes the crowd respond the way they do in 22:22?

Why are they not willing to hear any more after this point?

What are some of the ways in which the crowd have misunderstood the gospel or misunderstood Paul’s ministry.

What in this speech is common to any Christian person's testimony of coming to faith in Jesus?  
What is unique and exceptional?

Paul invokes the protections afforded him by his Roman citizenship. Should Christian people seek to avoid suffering or opposition for the gospel of Jesus in this manner?

How does this speech, its precursors and its aftermath, help prepare us for facing opposition to our Christian faith?

## A Plot to Kill

Acts 22:30 - 23:35

Have you ever been a fan of stories of dramatic rescues or escapes? What draws you in to those kinds of stories?

In your family, are there particular topics that, if mentioned, are sure to start an argument?

What reasons are you aware of, for why Christian people sometimes suffer for their faith in Jesus?

### Read Acts 22:30 - 23:35

What new information is added to our picture of the opposition to Paul and the Christian message?

Why has the Roman commander been unable to determine “why Paul was being accused by the Jews” (22:30)?

How would you describe the opposition or hostility that Paul faces in this section?

How is it true that Paul is on trial “because of the hope of the resurrection of the dead” (23:6)?

What are the different ways we see God’s hand preserving Paul in order that he might fulfil his ministry?

How is the message from Jesus in verse 11 an encouragement to Paul?

How should Christian people today persevere in the face of hardship without this same kind of appearance from Jesus?

How does Jesus’ language of testifying “about me” (23:11) shape our understanding of what Paul has been doing in this chapter and the preceding one, as well as what is in store for Paul in the future?

When Christians face opposition, do you think we tend to maintain our testimony about Jesus, or do we fall back to a more personal, individualistic defence?

Is there encouragement in this section as to how we can maintain our testimony about Jesus no matter what the circumstances or opposition?

At the end of this episode, how far has the Roman commander progressed in determining the reason for the Jews' accusation against Paul?

## The Christian on Trial

Acts 24:1 - 21

Have you ever sat in the public gallery of a court room?  
What do you remember about the events of the trial?

Has anyone ever made unfounded accusations about you?  
How did you feel?  
How did you react?

### Read Acts 24:1 - 21

What is the accusation levelled against Paul in this section?

How does this compare to the recent charges brought  
against Paul?

How does Paul go about making his defence?

How does Paul describe the Christian faith in verses 14 - 16?

As has happened previously in Acts, the Christian faith is called “the Way.” Why is this a particularly apt description for Christianity?

Does any of Paul’s description in those verses surprise you?

What points of similarity does he draw between the Christian faith and the religion of his accusers?

What differences does he highlight?

How does Paul explain that his faith is actually that of a faithful, obedient Jewish person?

What might have been the reason that Felix adjourned proceedings at the point he did?

What can we learn from Paul's example about how to respond when people make false accusations about us?

Paul states "I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (v 16). How can this be part of a Christian's response to unjust opposition?

## A Problem Prisoner?

Acts 24:22 - 25:27

When you were a child, did you ever respond to information or instructions you didn't want to hear by placing your hands over your ears and refusing to listen? How did that work for you?

Do you ever wish you could act like that now?

Is there an aspect of the Christian faith that you puzzled over for a long time before you came to understand it?

## Read Acts 24:22 - 25:27

How does Paul conduct himself while a prisoner of Felix?

Once again, Felix breaks off his interaction with Paul quite abruptly. What is it about "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come" that might have made Felix afraid (24:25)?

What do you see in Felix's reaction to Paul's claims that is common to many people's response to the Christian message?

Paul makes another defense, this time before the new procurator (governor) Festus. How does he state his innocence?

How does Luke the historian convince us the reader of Paul's innocence?

Why does Paul make his appeal to Caesar (25:11)?

What is at the heart of Festus' understanding of the accusation against Paul according to 25:17 - 19?

How would you describe the impact that Paul has on those who hear him?

How do you think Christians today can commend themselves and the good news of Jesus to those they encounter?

How can Christians today commend the good news of Jesus specifically to those who witness them facing unjust opposition?

Often Christian people feel that their witness is having no discernible impact on those we speak to. What encouragement can we take from Luke's narration of Paul's interactions in this chapter?

What does Luke tell us in this section that can serve to encourage us when we face opposition for our faith in Jesus?

How can we see God driving forward the spread of the gospel of Jesus "to the ends of the earth" (1:8)?

## Paul's Defence

Acts 26:1 - 32

What traditions or patterns from your life as a child were formative in shaping your life now?

In what situation or relationship do you find it hardest to speak of what you believe about Jesus?  
Why?

### Read Acts 26:1 - 32

If you had to break Paul's defence down into its component parts, what would you say are the major movements?

Why do you think Paul presents his defence the way he does?

Which points of Paul's belief does he say have changed since he was a child?

Which aspects of his faith have changed as a result of encountering Jesus?

How is it true that Paul is on trial “because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors” (v 6)?

In what ways have we seen Jesus’ words as recorded in verses 16 – 18 be fulfilled already in the story of Acts?

If this record of Paul’s speech was all you knew of the Christian message, what would you say is the content of the gospel?

Why do you think Paul challenges Agrippa the way he does in verses 26 – 29?

What does Paul’s challenge teach us about how he sees his accusers and those who sit in judgment over him?

Are there lessons we can learn from Paul's challenge to Agrippa?

Agrippa avoids giving Paul a straight answer to his question. Why do you think this might be?

In this chapter and previous chapters, how have we seen Luke the historian building up the evidence of Paul's innocence?

Considering everything we have seen so far in Acts, do you think that this chapter finishes on a hopeful note, or an unhappy note?

## Castaway!

Acts 27:1 - 44

Has there ever been a time when you have feared for your life? What made that experience so frightening?

When is it difficult for you to follow the advice of other people?

In a crisis, do you tend to be cool, calm, and collected, or panicked and out of control?

## Read Acts 27:1 - 44

What information does Luke present in his introduction to this story in verses 1 - 12?

What evidence is there that the centurion changes his mind about taking Paul's advice?

At what points in this account do we see God's sovereign hand working towards his purposes?

In what different ways does God encourage Paul and his companions throughout this episode?

How might Paul's words during the storm be an encouragement to the other passengers and crew?

What is the content of the angel's message to Paul?

This is one of five times in Acts when God speaks directly to Paul. What makes this such a significant event and worthy of a direct message from God?

Why does the angel say to Paul that God has "given you" the lives of all on board the ship?

How do we see the interplay of God's sovereignty and human responsibility in the fulfilment of God's promises in this section?

How does this episode contribute to the overall message of the book of Acts?

Are there lessons for us in this episode about how to respond when in a crisis?

How ought we respond to a crisis, even without the direct word from God that Paul receives?

What are the promises from God that you depend on when faced with minor or major crises?

## When in Rome ...

Acts 28:1 - 31

Is there a place in Australia or a city in the world that you longed to visit? What did you (or would you) do on your arrival?

Can you think of occasions when people have closed their ear and eyes to the good news of Jesus?

What aspects of the Christian message do you know people sometimes find hard to accept?

## Read Acts 28:1 - 31

How does God continue to drive his purposes forward in the first 10 verses of this chapter?

Knowing that God planned for Paul to arrive make it to Rome, why does he still allow all the dramatic and dangerous events to take place along the way?

Why do you think Paul meets with the local Jewish leaders on his arrival in Rome?

How is the response of the Jewish leaders in Rome different to that of their counterparts in Jerusalem?

What is the message that Paul wants the Jewish people to hear and understand?

Notice Paul's evangelistic approach: "from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus." (v 23)

What does this teach us about how we engage people with the good news of Jesus?

What is it in Paul's message that they object to so much that they begin to leave?

How does the quote from Isaiah explain much of what we have seen in Acts so far?

Bearing in mind what we have understood of Luke's purpose in writing the book of Acts, why do you think he finishes the book the way he does in 30 - 31?





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