



4

Paul's Journey to Rome

Key Theme

- God's plans are perfect.

Key Passages

- Acts 27:9–44, 28:16–31

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explain how God protected Paul on his journey to Rome.
- Explain how the gospel spread while Paul was under arrest in Rome.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, "What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility?"

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet and recite the verse together.



Studying God's Word

After a stormy and treacherous journey, Paul, now a prisoner, arrived in Rome, just as God had promised he would. Once there, Paul had the opportunity to do what he did best—proclaim the message of Jesus Christ. He did this while under house arrest, preaching to everyone who would come and listen.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Sovereignty and Responsibility

You will lead a discussion with the students that explores the relationship between God's sovereign direction of events and man's responsibility to act to bring those events to pass.

Student Guides

Pencils

Sovereignty and Responsibility Answer Key from the Resource DVD-ROM



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

Paul completed three long, arduous missionary journeys. He knew well that the message of the Cross was foolishness to those who were perishing, but to those who were being saved it was the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18). He was steadfast in his commitment to the Lord and the gospel throughout his three journeys. In spite of being run out of town, persecuted, imprisoned, stoned, left for dead, and beaten, he persevered. Nothing mattered to him but that he would finish his race with joy and continue in the ministry of the Lord Jesus to testify to the gospel (Acts 20:24).

The third missionary journey ended in Caesarea where Paul and his companions stayed with Philip, the evangelist (Acts 21:8). While with Philip a prophet named Agabus came from Judea to speak with Paul (Acts 21:10). Agabus took Paul's belt to tie up his own hands and feet. He then warned Paul that he would soon be tied up and bound in the same way by the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 21:11). It was clear that Paul was headed for more trouble as he returned to Jerusalem. His friends pleaded that he not go. But Paul was ready to be bound and to die for the name of Jesus (Acts 21:12–13).

Paul and his companions continued to Jerusalem. The entire city was disturbed by him. The people seized him, began beating him, and were seeking to kill him (Acts 21:30–31). At that point, Paul was rescued by the Roman soldiers who were concerned with keeping peace in the city of Jerusalem. The Roman commander took him and commanded him to be bound with two chains (Acts 21:31–33). The Jews continued to demand his life (Acts 22:22). But upon hearing that Paul was a Roman citizen, the Roman commander backed off, knowing it was illegal to treat any Roman citizen with such brutal methods (Acts 22:27–29).

Paul had desired to go to Rome for a long time (Acts 19:21). And by the amazing providence of God, he would soon be on his way. In fact, it was the Lord Himself who assured him that just as Paul had testified for Jesus in Jerusalem, he would also bear witness at Rome (Acts 23:11). So, in spite of further danger that included another plot to murder him in Jerusalem (Acts 23:12), Paul was taken by protective custody and escorted out of Jerusalem and back to Caesarea (Acts 23:31–33).

However, it would still be over two years before Paul made his way to Rome (Acts 24:27) during which time God allowed Paul to have liberty to see his friends and all who would come to visit him (Acts 24:23). Of course, Paul continued to boldly preach the gospel of Jesus Christ of which he was not ashamed! Even to the point that King Agrippa commented that Paul nearly persuaded him to become a Christian (Acts 26:28).

Finally, in God's perfect timing and according to His perfect plan, Paul set off by ship to Rome, Italy (Acts 27:1). The voyage to Rome did not go smoothly. And because of slow passage at the beginning, they found themselves in a situation where sailing further would be dangerous. But in spite of Paul's warnings to the contrary, the centurion was persuaded by the helmsman to proceed (Acts 27:10–11). It wasn't long before they found themselves in a tempestuous, violent storm (Acts 27:14). They looked for protection, secured the lifeboat, undergirded the ship, and dropped the sail. They then lightened the ship by tossing supplies and tackle overboard. In spite of all of this, danger and death looked imminent and all hope was lost (Acts 27:15–20).

But God had promised that Paul would reach Rome (Acts 23:11). And God keeps His promises! Paul and all the crew at last found safety on the island of Malta after a dramatic shipwreck that included all hands on deck jumping overboard (Acts 27:39–44).

God continued to protect his missionary and servant, Paul. The natives on Malta showed unusual kindness to the shipwrecked crew (Acts 28:2). And when Paul was not affected by a viper's bite while on the island, the natives were convinced he was some kind of god (Acts 28:6). Furthermore, God allowed Paul to do more signs and wonders in the name of Jesus Christ, and he healed many who were sick on the island (Acts 28:8–9).

After three months on Malta, Paul sailed again and finally arrived in Rome (Acts 28:11)! In Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier guarding him (Acts 28:16). God allowed Paul to continue in his ministry, boldly testifying to the kingdom of God concerning Jesus Christ. And just as in all the other cities of Paul's travels, some were persuaded to believe and some would not believe (Acts 28:23–24).

Paul stayed for two full years in Rome in his rented home where God continued to use him as he gladly received and taught all who came to him about the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 28:30–31).

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The Apostle Paul, without any doubt, is the most influential person in the history of the church. He was responsible for establishing and strengthening churches all around the Roman world of the first century. He wrote 13 letters of the New Testament. God used Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, to mightily to expand the church.

Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul summed up his own contribution to the faith perhaps better than anyone else could: “For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:9–10). Wherever Paul carried the gospel, despite the intense opposition he faced, the church put down deep roots.

Paul was ideally equipped for the role God gave Him. As a Roman citizen, Paul understood and had entry to the entire Roman world. Steeped in Greek culture, he could relate and communicate to these people throughout the area. And as a strict Pharisee, he was an expert in Mosaic law and, no doubt, had important contacts in the synagogues of the empire.

Paul began his career as a persecutor of the church. After meeting Christ in a dramatic vision on the road to Damascus, where he was traveling to arrest Christians, his life was transformed. He spent the remaining years of his life as a bold witness for the resurrected Christ. He worked tirelessly, enduring shame and persecution for the name of his Lord.

Paul’s fourth journey brought him to Rome as a prisoner at the beginning of AD 61. And since his confinement in Rome continued only two years (Acts 28:30), he must have been freed in the early part of AD 63. Nero had not yet instigated his memorable persecution of the Church; the burning of Rome took place in the summer of AD 64. Before that date, it does not appear that Christians had been singled out as the special objects of his brutality.

While we don’t know for sure what happened after his release from prison, it is probable that Paul accomplished his wish of visiting Spain (Romans 15:28). In all likelihood he again headed toward Jerusalem by way of Corinth, Philippi, and Troas, where he left his cloak with

Carpus (2 Timothy 4:13). Passing from there to Colosse, he may have visited Antioch in Pisidia and other cities of Asia Minor, where he had ministered previously. After some time in Jerusalem, Paul must have returned to Rome by sea, leaving Trophimus sick at Miletus in Crete (2 Timothy 4:20). Upon his return to Italy around the year AD 66, Paul seems to have been immediately imprisoned again.

Paul’s condition was now very different from what it had been during his first imprisonment. This time he was deserted by his friends and treated as a criminal. When he wrote his last epistle to Timothy, Paul had already been brought before the judgment seat, and had narrowly escaped martyrdom. “At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Timothy 4:16–17).

Despite this reprieve, Paul had no hope of ultimate escape. In anticipation of his condemnation, he wrote these words—words full of faith, hope, and heroism: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

According to church tradition, Paul was beheaded with a sword in Rome sometime between AD 65 and 68. We don’t know the exact date of his death, but we do know that this great apostle gave his life for the faith he had once persecuted.



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord Jesus, you promise to guide and protect your children. Help me and my class to demonstrate the same level of confidence in your ways that Paul showed as he suffered many trials in your name. Help us to know we can trust you in all circumstances—especially the difficult ones. Use this lesson to show my students how big and capable and personal you are as you work your good purpose in every detail.

Review

Over the last three weeks we have looked at the three missionary journeys that Paul took, accompanied by many others, as he sought to fulfill Jesus's command to preach the gospel to all nations. Over the course of a decade, Paul and his companions had made three circuits through portions of the northern Mediterranean region. As they went, they preached the message of the Cross and the kingdom of God, calling all to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are ever planning a trip to Rome, I can't recommend the Pauline Travel Agency—it is a rough way to get there. As background to Paul's trip, we last left Paul with the Ephesian elders on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. The opening verses of Acts 21 describe his route and an encounter with Agabus, a prophet who prophesied of Paul's certain imprisonment if he went to Jerusalem. Paul already knew this and had shared it with the Ephesian elders. From the time that Paul arrived in Jerusalem near the Day of Pentecost to the time he arrived in Rome was well over two years, and he would stay in Rome under a sort of house arrest for another two years after that.

To summarize Acts 21–28, Paul arrived in Jerusalem, took a vow in the Temple, was

arrested and taken into Roman custody, appeared before the Sanhedrin, and was taken to Caesarea where he appeared before Felix and the Jewish elders. Felix kept Paul in custody for two years until Festus took over as governor, and the Jewish elders appeared again to accuse Paul. It was at this hearing that Paul appealed to have his case heard before Caesar. Before departing for Rome, Paul also had the chance to appear before King Agrippa, recounting his life and declaring the gospel as he had so faithfully done many times.

Remind students that we sometimes miss the timing of events that are included in just a few short chapters.

We know that Paul was arrested at Pentecost (in May or June—Acts 20:16), he was under Felix's custody for two years, the ship left for Rome after the Fast (i.e., the Day of Atonement in September or October—Acts 27:9), and that they spent the winter on Malta and left three months after arriving there (Acts 28:11). So, from Paul's arrest to his arrival in Rome was about three years. Of course, we cannot cover all of that in one lesson, so our main goal today is to look at Paul's time on the ship headed toward Rome and his stay in Rome. Refer to Paul's Missionary Journeys Map to give the overview of Paul's travels on this journey.



► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.





Studying God's Word

➤ Write on the board, "What is the relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility?"

READ THE WORD

As we begin reading in Acts 27:9, the ship had sailed north around Cyprus, across to Cnidus, and down along the southern side of Crete. The journey had been difficult because winter was approaching. Let's read Acts 27:9–44 together. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

Acts 27:9–44

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What time marker is given in verse 9?** *It was after the Fast. This is a reference to the Day of Atonement and puts these events in at least October when sailing was dangerous.*
- ? **What did Paul warn the men of?** *He perceived that the voyage would end in disaster and loss of life if they continued on.*
- ? **Who did the centurion listen to?** *Rather than heeding Paul, the centurion listened to the advice of the pilot and owner of the ship, whom the majority agreed with.*
- ? **Where did they hope to take shelter for the winter?** *Phoenix, a harbor on Crete's southern coast.*
- ? **What blocked them from making it to Phoenix?** *A strong wind, called the Euroclydon/Euraquilon, blew them off course. This would be equivalent to a strong Nor'easter in the Atlantic region.*
- ? **Who caused this wind?** *God is the cause behind the storm.*
- ? **What did they do to secure the ship?** *They tied up the skiff, passed ropes under the ship, threw off some cargo, and threw the tackle over, allowing the wind to drive them where it would.*
- ? **How long did the storm last?** *"Many days" is used, but verse 27 says it was fourteen days.*
- ? **What does verse 20 indicate about their spirits during the storm?** *They had given up all hope of being saved.*
- ? **How had they been eating?** *They had a long abstinence from food.*
- ? **What promise did Paul offer his shipmates to give them hope in verse 22?** *He told them they would lose the ship, but none of them would die.*
- ? **On what authority did Paul make this claim?** *He said an angel told him.*
- ? **How did Paul relate himself to God?** *He said that he belongs to God and serves Him.*
- ? **What assurance did the angel offer to Paul?** *The angel told Paul he must appear before Caesar and that no one else would be lost.*
- ? **What does Acts 23:11 add to our understanding of this passage?** *Jesus had appeared to Paul while he was under arrest in Jerusalem nearly three years earlier, telling Paul he would testify of Jesus in Rome. The angel was affirming and clarifying that Paul would indeed appear before Caesar in Rome, testifying of Jesus.*

Acts 23:11

► The connection between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility will be discussed in the activity.

- ? **What conclusion can we draw from the way the angel spoke about God sparing the lives of the others on the ship?** *First, we can conclude that God is sovereign over the lives of men. Second, we can infer that Paul had been praying for their lives to be spared, presumably beginning when they left for Phoenix against his advice.*
- ? **Did Paul believe these things would happen?** *Yes, he believed God would bring them to pass just as He had said.*
- ? **How was the ship going to be lost?** *It was going to run aground on an island.*
- ? **What did the sailors do to prevent running aground?** *They put out anchors to slow them down, hoping for daylight.*
- ? **Who were the sailors praying to (v. 29)?** *While there is no object given, it is likely they were appealing to their personal deities (as the sailors accompanying Jonah had done). This word in Greek may also be understood as a hope or a wish and not necessarily a direct prayer. Some Bibles will explain this distinction in a footnote.*
- ? **How did some of the sailors hope to escape?** *They tried to escape in the skiff, pretending to be setting more anchors.*
- ? **How were they prevented from escaping?** *Paul directed the soldiers to stop them, cutting away the ropes holding the skiff.*
- ? **Why was it necessary for the sailors to stay on the ship?** *There are at least two reasonable explanations. If the men had left in the dark during a storm, they could have died. Or, without the whole crew, the ship could not be guided safely to shore and lives would be lost. In either case, God's intentions would not be fulfilled in keeping all alive. Discuss any other reasonable answers.*
- ? **As daylight approached, how did Paul encourage the men?** *He told them to eat and prepare for deliverance, assuring them that not a hair on their heads would be harmed. He blessed the bread, giving thanks to God, and they all ate.*
- ? **How many were on the ship?** *276 men in total; some sailors, soldiers, prisoners, and presumably some passengers.*
- ? **Why did they throw the rest of the grain overboard after they had eaten?** *This was to make the ship lighter so that it would ride as high as possible to make it ashore.*
- ? **How did they plan to get ashore?** *In the daylight, they saw a bay with a beach they hoped to run the ship onto.*
- ? **What prevented the ship from making it to the bay?** *They struck a place "where two seas meet" and were stuck. This is likely a reef or sandbar, as some translations relate, where there was a current running along the coast between the main sea and a channel, which they did not see.*
- ? **What was happening to the ship?** *It was being torn apart by the violent waves while it was stuck on the reef or sandbar.*

► The prow is the bow, or front, of a ship while the stern is the rear section.

- ? **What did the Roman soldiers plan to do?** *They intended to kill all of the prisoners.*
- ? **Why did the soldiers make this plan?** *They feared some of the prisoners would escape, and they would be punished for this loss, likely with their own execution.*
- ? **Who stopped them?** *The centurion, Julius.*
- ? **Why did he stop them?** *He wanted to spare Paul. Apparently, Paul was respected by Julius as he had let him go ashore to visit friends as they docked in Sidon (27:3).*
- ? **How did the people onboard get ashore?** *They either swam or floated on pieces of the ship to safety on the island.*

Discover the Truth

As we read on, we see that they had landed on the small island of Malta and were received with great hospitality by the locals. You may remember that this is where the viper bites Paul, and he is mistaken for a murderer—and then a god—by the locals, ultimately finding himself healing many people on the island as he continued to proclaim the gospel. They wintered on Malta for three months, and the bay where Paul and the others crashed is still called St. Paul’s Bay to this day. It lies on the northern coast of Malta’s large island. *(Encourage the students to find its location on a map on their own time.)*

The Christian heritage is evident in Malta today, though Roman Catholicism is the state religion, and nearly 98% of the population calls themselves Roman Catholic. In fact, February 10 is a national holiday to commemorate Paul’s shipwreck. All of these can be seen as clear evidences of the historicity of the New Testament.

- ? **How would you describe God’s actions toward all aboard the ship?** *He was merciful in sparing their lives and gracious in providing a safe landing and hospitality on Malta.*
- ? **In what ways is God’s sovereignty on display in this passage?** *God is in control of the wind and the waves. He used those things to take the ship where He intended Paul to go in order to share the gospel with the people of Malta and offer supernatural healing to many.*

While we can clearly see God’s direction to Paul through the appearance of Jesus and the angel, it was still necessary for Paul to act in order for the men to be saved as God had promised. In God’s wisdom, He worked all of these circumstances together to bring about the end that He intended—Paul arriving in Rome to continue to spread the gospel message in that key city.



MERCIFUL

GRACIOUS

SOVEREIGN

WISE



Sovereignty and Responsibility

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils
- Sovereignty and Responsibility Answer Key

INSTRUCTIONS

If you like, you may choose to lead this as a discussion rather than an independent activity. The relationship between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is a doctrine that is understood differently by those within orthodox Christianity. You may want to teach your church's position on this doctrine or look at both sides of the issue, especially with regard to the decrees of God and how they come to pass with respect to the will of man.

Have you ever thought about what would have happened if Adam had not sinned or if Noah would have refused to build the Ark? Those are the kinds of thought experiments we can do to help us explore some tough theological ideas, but those kinds of questions can't really be answered since they didn't happen.

In your Student Guide you will find the Sovereignty and Responsibility activity. Look over the questions and passages

there to wrestle with the idea of God's sovereign plans coming to pass and man's responsibility to act within those plans.

After students have completed the activity, use the Sovereignty and Responsibility Answer Key on the Resource DVD-ROM to discuss the answers.

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

It is important for us to remember that there is a degree of tension as we seek to understand the mind of God. His thoughts and ways are higher than ours. The plans and decrees of God generally come to fruition through the actions of people who acknowledge their responsibility to act to bring about those plans. In reality, it should humble us to think that the all-powerful God chooses to use weak creatures to bring His plans to pass. And, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:7, the fact that God works through earthen vessels shows that the power is of God and not of ourselves.



READ THE WORD

Acts 28:16–31

Let's turn our attention to what happened once Paul arrived in Italy. We'll read Acts 28:16–31. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **What happened to the prisoners?** *They were delivered by the centurion to the captain of the guard in Rome.*
- ? **How was Paul's treatment different?** *He was not taken to prison, but lived by himself with a soldier to guard him.*

- ? **What would we call this type of treatment today?** *He was under some form of guarded house arrest.*
- ? **What does verse 30 add to our understanding of this house arrest?** *Paul was dwelling in a rented house and was allowed to have visitors.*
- ? **Whom did Paul summon to his house after three days in Rome?** *The Jewish leaders.*
- ? **As he talked to the Jews, what reason did Paul give for being in chains?** *He said that it was for proclaiming “the hope of Israel” to the Jews in Jerusalem.*
- ? **Had the Jews in Rome been warned about Paul?** *No, they had not received any letters from Jerusalem about him nor received any reports from those traveling there.*
- ? **How did the Jewish leaders respond to Paul’s message?** *They arranged to hear more about the “sect,” and they arranged a day for many to come and hear his case.*
- ? **What did Paul testify of to the Jews?** *The kingdom of God.*
- ? **What did Paul refer to as his authority in his persuasive speech about Jesus?** *He referred to the Law of Moses and the Prophets as the Jews would have relied on these as authoritative sources.*
- ? **How long did he speak?** *From morning till evening.*
- ? **How did the Jews initially respond?** *Some were persuaded, and some did not believe him. There was disagreement within the group.*
- ? **Where did Paul quote from?** *This is a quote from Isaiah 6:9–10.*
- ? **What does Paul tell us about how Isaiah penned the words he quoted?** *The words were actually from the Holy Spirit through Isaiah.*
- ? **What was the general idea Paul was trying to communicate to the Jews after they disputed his message of Jesus as Messiah?** *He was trying to get them to recognize that their denial of Jesus as the Messiah was a fulfillment of the prophecy as they had heard the truth but rejected it. Jesus used this passage in the same manner in Matthew 13:14–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; John 12:40.*
- ? **Whom did Paul say the message of salvation had been sent to rather than the Jews?** *To the Gentiles.*
- ? **How did Paul say the Gentiles will respond?** *He said that they will hear it rather than reject it. We should not understand this as an absolute statement, but as a general statement that they would respond positively.*
- ? **How would the Jews have responded to hearing such a claim?** *They would likely have been indignant at the idea that the Gentiles would receive the salvation of God when the Jews were God’s chosen people. This was clearly an inflammatory statement by Paul.*
- ? **How does this fit with Paul’s pattern of ministry?** *He typically went to the synagogue in a city first and then spread the message to the Gentiles, so this is a common pattern for Paul.*
- ? **What do you notice about the transition from verse 29 to 30?** *It is a very big shift from recounting an event to a statement that wraps up the entire book in a few words.*

- ? **How long was Paul in Rome?** *Two whole years.*
- ? **Where did he live?** *In his own rented house.*
- ? **Was he able to have visitors?** *Yes, he received all who came to him.*
- ? **What two activities was Paul doing?** *He was preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.*
- ? **How was he doing these activities?** *He did these things with all confidence and there was nobody forbidding his work.*

Matthew 28:18–20

- ? **How does this description of what Paul was doing relate to the Great Commission?** *Jesus commanded the disciples to go and make disciples (preaching the kingdom of God) and to teach them to observe all things He had commanded them (teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ). While baptism is not mentioned, we can assume Paul was directing the new converts to that end.*

Philippians 1:12–14

- ? **In Philippians 1:12–14, what does Paul relate to the church in Philippi about his imprisonment?** *He tells them that his chains (Acts 28:21) have actually turned out to advance the gospel proclamation and embolden the other Christians to speak the gospel without fear.*
- ? **What does the “palace guard” refer to?** *This is referring to the guards of Caesar’s court who had been with Paul and had believed in Christ. Paul had faithfully proclaimed the gospel, and even the Roman soldiers found salvation in Christ. Additionally, Paul closes the epistle with a greeting from the saints who are “of Caesar’s household,” indicating that many more came to faith within the palace.*
- ? **Did Paul ever speak directly to Caesar?** *Though Luke does not record this, it is necessary to fulfill the words of the angel (27:24) and the appeal he had made as a Roman citizen.*
- ? **What happened to Paul after the two years?** *Though it is not recorded, Paul was released. 2 Timothy 4:9–13 and other references indicate Paul had been freed, done more ministry, and was later arrested again under Nero’s persecution of Christians. It is during this time and his second imprisonment that he wrote to Timothy and Titus. Traditionally it is believed that Paul was beheaded by Nero around AD 67.*

Discover the Truth

Having escaped the perils of a dangerous journey across the sea, Paul finally arrived in Rome to fulfill the prophecies about his imprisonment according to the plans Jesus had established for him. Even though he was in chains, he did not let that stop him from carrying out the Great Commission. Paul invited many to hear the good news of salvation and the kingdom of God. They came to him, and he proclaimed the good news to them. Paul preached and taught the things of Jesus and His commands as the Messiah. In response to Paul’s boldness, many influential people in Caesar’s palace came to faith in Christ, and the other saints were emboldened to follow Paul’s example.

During his time in Rome, we believe Paul wrote the “prison epistles” of Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. There were also many

people coming to Paul and going back with messages and encouragement to their local churches. There were many “fellow laborers” (Philemon 23–24) there with Paul, and the truth of the gospel continued to spread through Paul’s ministry as an ambassador in chains. Mark, Timothy, Aristarchus, Luke, Demas, Epaphras, Tychicus, and others all supported the work as the Holy Spirit empowered them and worked in the hearts of those who heard the message.



Applying God’s Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

In spite of the various hardships Paul faced, he continued to faithfully proclaim the gospel message to Jews and Gentiles. Though chains and bars bound him, his tongue and his pen were free to teach of the salvation of God in Jesus Christ the Messiah. He spoke to soldiers, governors, kings, and the emperor. Assuredly, there were many fellow prisoners and others who also heard him telling of the Savior and calling them to turn to Jesus for salvation.

In all of these events through approximately five years, we see that God’s plans are perfect. While God had ordained certain things to happen, Paul and others still had to act based on their own responsibilities. It is through the intimate dance of the decrees of God and the responsibility of man to act in accord with God’s will that God normally works in the world. In his prison cell, on the ships, and under house arrest, Paul was protected by God so that Paul could fulfill the responsibility he had to proclaim the glories of Christ to everyone he could.

In all of this, we should find great encouragement and confidence in carrying out the Great Commission. Paul told the Corinthians to “imitate me just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Empowered by the same Holy Spirit that guided Paul, we can also proclaim the gospel and live in a way that testifies to the work of Christ in our lives. Few of us will ever find ourselves in chains, but even if we do, we can still proclaim the gospel to all who will listen.

GOD’S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? As we have studied this passage, what have you found encouraging? *Discuss various answers.*
- ? How does your confidence in the plans of God compare to Paul’s confidence even in the midst of a violent storm at sea? Why is there a difference? *Discuss various answers, acknowledging that Paul had received direct revelation*

from Jesus and an angel about his safe arrival in Rome. We also have many promises written in Scripture, and these are the words breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16), and we should trust them and act on them in the same way we would if indeed God did give us direct revelation. Our confidence is in the perfect character of God.

- ? **How can you use the geographic details in the passages we looked at today as a positive apologetic for the truthfulness of the New Testament?** *The many details in the account lend support to the fact that these events actually took place and that we can trust the Bible as an accurate historical record. The modern existence of St. Paul's Bay on Malta confirms what we know to be true about Paul's shipwreck on the island. With these details affirmed, we can have greater confidence in the historicity of the Bible, calling others to trust it as well.*
- ? **Have you ever heard someone say something like, "We better proclaim the gospel while we still have the freedom to do so"? How might we respond to such a claim in light of Paul's example for us?** *We always have freedom to proclaim the gospel because our right to do so has nothing to do with the statutes or commands of men, but the responsibility we have been given by God to proclaim His truths. There may be man-made consequences for proclaiming the gospel, but we can never be stopped from proclaiming the gospel unless those persecuting us cut out our tongues and lop off our fingers. Even if we are imprisoned, beaten, and tortured, we can still proclaim the truth in chains.*
- ? **We have moved quickly through a five-year period in Paul's life. How can you draw more important truths out of this section of Scripture?** *Encourage the students to read back through the text using the observe, interpret, apply format of the lessons to study the Bible on their own.*



MEMORY VERSE

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His perfect plans for mankind.
- Praise God for His wisdom and sovereignty in the affairs of men.
- Ask God for wisdom and boldness to act in accord with His revealed will.