

PAUL'S JOURNEYS AND WRITINGS

by Laura Sweet

**Grades 3-4
Year 1
Quarter 4**

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INTRODUCTION -

PAUL'S JOURNEYS AND WRITINGS

How does one begin to measure the impact the apostle Paul has had upon the Church - or, yes, even the world? To say that we owe so much of our New Testament and so much of our theology to the apostle Paul's ministry even seems like an understatement. It is essential for all Christians to have an understanding of Paul's conversion, his early ministry, his three missionary journeys and his letters. This quarter will give your students both the background history of Paul's life and an introduction to some of the letters he wrote to the churches.

Mission Emphasis

Paul's life lends itself perfectly to a discussion on missions and missionaries, and this quarter we will have a special mission emphasis. Rather than discuss missions in an abstract way, however, we would like you to take this opportunity to acquaint your students with one of the missionaries or mission families that your church supports. This will require you to choose one particular missionary for your class to focus on and for you to become well-acquainted with his/her work. As you choose a missionary, keep the following ideas in mind:

- Is this missionary someone whom your students know - either because he or she came from your church or has recently visited? Choosing a familiar missionary will probably generate interest among your students right away.
- Is this missionary someone about whom you can obtain information? We'll be discussing the climate and political and cultural conditions of your chosen mission field as well as the specific work in which your missionary is engaged. If all you know is "Mr. Smith is a missionary to India," you're not going to get very far. Information from mission magazines and newsletters as well as current prayer letters from your missionary are good sources of information. And encyclopedias can provide background information on conditions in the mission field.

- Don't rule out "home missions" as a possibility for your class missionary. Many missionaries labor in this country as well - perhaps among Native North Americans or with recent immigrants. But be sure to choose someone whose job is one to which your students can relate; administrators and office workers are harder for third and fourth graders to appreciate than Bible translators, missionary doctors, or church planters.
- Use this opportunity to become interested and involved in missions yourself! Perhaps you are someone who has never written a missionary before. Both you and your students will have that opportunity this quarter!

Each week, after the Bible lesson, we will deal with a different aspect of your missionary's field, life and work. You will need to adapt these discussions to fit your own chosen missionary. For example, suppose you choose a church planter who is laboring in France; you may have very little to discuss about that nation's political climate. On the other hand, you will have much to say about the French people, their spiritual heritage, and their current spiritual state. So be flexible, and don't worry if you have much to say one week and little to say another.

Memory Work

This quarter we will be memorizing Acts 9:1-9, 17-20 - the passage that deals with the conversion of Saul.

As in past quarters, we will have worksheets that may be photocopied for your students' use. Whenever possible, related music will also be suggested for use with each lesson. Hymns cited are from the *Trinity Hymnal*, and other popular choruses may be suggested as well.

THE CONVERSION OF SAUL

Acts 9:1-19

Lesson Aim

To help students to consider God's sovereignty in salvation and His power to change lives for His purposes.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:1 - "Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples."

Lesson Background

Most Christians are aware that the Lord used Saul of Tarsus to turn the Gentiles "from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God" (Acts 26:18). But are you aware that the Lord used Saul to spread the Gospel even before He was saved? Acts 8:1-3 tells us that Saul led the Jewish persecution of the Church, causing the Christians to leave Jerusalem and take the Gospel throughout Judea and Samaria. The story of Saul's conversion clearly shows God's sovereignty in all matters, including salvation. As the enemy of God, Saul fulfilled the purposes of God by scattering the Church. On the road to Damascus, he was snatched in the very act of persecuting the Church and came face to face with the risen Savior. Was Saul seeking Christ? No, but Christ had chosen him to be His emissary to the Gentiles. His Spirit changed Saul, gave him physical and spiritual sight, and equipped him for his great life work. Saul, the enemy of Christ and persecutor of the Church, became Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles and the author of at least thirteen of the New Testament epistles. If God can do that with a man like Saul, is there anything He cannot do for us? Let's be certain in this lesson to emphasize two things to our students: the greatness of God's grace and the greatness of His power. Both were certainly demonstrated in the conversion of Saul.

Lesson Procedure

1. Saul, the Persecutor of the Church (Acts 7:57-8:8; 9:1-2)

As we begin this quarter on the life and journeys of Paul, it is important for us to put this material in its historical context for our students. Remind your students that when Jesus rose from the dead, He told His disciples to stay in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came and empowered them. After Jesus went back to heaven, His disciples and other believers gathered together in Jerusalem to pray and to wait for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit did come on the day of Pentecost, and thousands of Jews became believers in Jesus. For many years, the center of the Church remained in Jerusalem, and all the believers were Jews or converts to Judaism who came to believe in Jesus. But something happened to change all of that.

A. The Church in Jerusalem Faces Persecution (Acts 7:57-8:8)

The leaders of the Jewish High Court (the Sanhedrin) and the Pharisees - the same people who hated Christ's teachings - began to rise up against the Christian Church. They stoned to death a young man named Stephen because he preached about Jesus. They went from house to house and dragged off men and women to prison. Acts 8:3 states that Saul was leading this opposition. It was a vicious persecution, and the Christians began to leave Jerusalem. They scattered throughout the country of Judea and Samaria, and wherever they went, they preached the Gospel and many new believers were added to the Church.

Ask your students, "Could God have stopped the persecution in Jerusalem if He wanted to? Did anything good come out of the persecution?" This persecution, while painful and difficult for the Christians to bear, ultimately led to the spreading of the Gospel. This was the plan from the beginning, when Christ told His followers to preach the Gospel "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

B. Saul Goes to Damascus to Destroy the Church (Acts 9:1-2)

Some of the Christians who left Jerusalem fled to Damascus. Damascus was a very important city at this time - a trade center of the Roman world where Syrians, Mesopotamians, Anatolians, Persians and Arabians all came to do business. If Christianity were established in Damascus, it could quickly spread throughout the Roman world. This is probably the reason why Saul chose to chase the Christians who had settled there after he had wreaked havoc in Jerusalem. He started out with letters from the high priest to the synagogues in Damascus. His intention was to arrest both men and women who professed faith in Christ and take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

Ask your students, "What kind of a man do you think Saul was?" We see many of Saul's characteristics right from the beginning; he was a determined man, a man with great religious fervor, and a man with a logical mind who put his beliefs into action. But we also see Saul as a violent man without mercy. He wasn't out to convince the Christians of the error of their ways; in fact, he couldn't have cared less about the individuals involved. He was so adamantly against the Church that "murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" were constantly emanating from his mouth. Saul was the very picture of zeal without truth

and religion without a changed heart. And there is nothing more dangerous than a man without the Lord who thinks he's doing the Lord's will.

2. Saul, the Convicted and Chosen Man (Acts 9:1-9)

Since this passage makes up a large part of our memory work for this quarter, you should read it aloud in class. Afterwards, ask your students the following questions:

“Why do you think Jesus asked Saul, ‘Why are you persecuting me?’ Was Saul persecuting Jesus? How?” Jesus so identifies with His Church that when they are persecuted, He considers Himself persecuted.

“How do you think Saul felt when the voice told him He was Jesus?” Certainly, Saul felt surprise, guilt, and a great deal of fear.

“Why do you think Saul refused to eat or drink for three days? What do you think he was praying about?” Saul spent those three days fasting and praying; it's safe to say that he was repentant for his persecution of the Church, and surely he was seeking God's forgiveness for his wicked ways.

In Acts 26 we are given Paul's account of what happened as he gives his testimony before King Agrippa. In verses 15-18, we learn that Jesus told him on the Damascus road what his life work was to be. Saul, the Pharisee and persecutor of the Church, was called from the very act of persecution to be Christ's missionary to the Gentiles. Read Acts 26:15-18 as a class as well.

3. Saul, the Changed Man (Acts 9:10-19)

Saul was no longer the ruthless, dangerous man who left Jerusalem with authority to arrest the Christians of Damascus. Instead, he was a blind man led by hand to the city - a man who was fasting and humbling himself before God. The Lord called a Christian man named Ananias to establish contact with Saul and to restore Saul's vision. Ananias was aware of Saul of Tarsus; he had heard of Saul's persecution of the Church in Jerusalem and he knew that Saul was coming to Damascus to do the same there. He could not believe that he was being sent to help this man! But the Lord confirmed the call, telling Ananias that Saul was His chosen instrument to proclaim His name before the Gentiles, before kings, and before the people of Israel. “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (verse 16). Inform your students that this quarter we will be studying the fulfillment of this prophecy by looking at Saul's work among the Gentiles, his testimony before kings, and the sufferings he bore for the name of Christ.

Ananias went to the house of Judas on Straight Street and found Saul and - with all the faith he could muster, no doubt - called him “Brother Saul.” He placed his hands on Saul so that Saul would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. The account tells us that “immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again” (verse 18). What grace was shown to this former enemy of Christ! He was given spiritual life. He was given spiritual and physical sight. He was given a great work to do for the Kingdom of God. Saul showed his changed heart by being baptized, even before he took food after his three-day fast. Saul had been born again. He had a new heart, a new life, and a new purpose. He had a new family, in which Ananias and other Christians were his brothers and sisters. God's power had changed him forever!

Ask your students, “Do you think it would be easy for other Christians to trust Saul now that he had become a Christian? Or do you think that they would be afraid of him at first, like Ananias was?” Saul did have some problems being accepted at first, as we’ll see next week. But his changed heart and life eventually convinced both Christians and Jews that Saul was a follower of Christ. Only God has the grace and power to save such a man as Saul and change him into Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles and the writer of at least thirteen of the New Testament letters.

Mission Emphasis

This week you’ll want to introduce your students briefly to the missionary or mission family with whom you have chosen to familiarize them this quarter. Tell them the mission family’s background, where they are serving the Lord, and the nature of their work. If you are aware of how one of the missionaries came to know Christ, this would be a good week to share this information with your students. Even if the missionary grew up in a Christian home, it’s still a good contrast to the story of Saul. After all, few have as dramatic a conversion as Saul; most come to the Lord in quieter ways. Whet your students’ appetites to learn more about this missionary in the days ahead.

Worksheet

Have your students imagine that they are among Saul’s traveling companions on the road to Damascus. Have them write about the things they saw and heard when Saul came face to face with Jesus. Remind them that they saw the light and heard a noise, but didn’t understand what the voice was saying. Remind them also that they led Saul by hand to Damascus, because he couldn’t see.

Related Music

“Jesus Paid it All” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #308).

SAUL IN DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM

Acts 9:19-30

Lesson Aim

To show students that a new life in Christ will show evidence of change and growth.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:2 - “He went to the priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.”

Lesson Background

You may want to introduce your lesson with the following illustration. Have your students imagine they are living in the Old West. A man rides into their town, and they recognize him immediately as Jesse James, the notorious outlaw. What would they do? Would they run and hide or try to find the sheriff? What if Jesse James told them, “Yes, I’m Jesse James, and I used to rob and murder people, but I’m changed now. I don’t do that anymore. I’ve turned over a new leaf.” Would they trust him? Or would they still be afraid of him?

“It’s hard to trust someone who has a reputation for being a violent person. Even when you want to believe he has changed, it takes time and courage to truly be able to trust him. In today’s lesson, Saul is going to find that his reputation - before his friends and foes alike - is very hard for him to live down. But because his heart has been changed, he is eventually accepted for what he is: a believer in Jesus and a preacher of the Gospel.”

While most of the narrative of this lesson comes from Acts 9:19-30, you'll also want to read Galatians 1, which gives Paul's own account of many of the events at this time in his life. The Galatians passage is especially important as we consider Saul's three years in Arabia and his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem.

Lesson Procedure

1. Saul Gives Evidence of His New Life in Damascus (Acts 9:19-23)

You can almost feel Saul's enthusiasm and evangelistic zeal when you read, in verse 20, that "at once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." After Saul's conversion and baptism, he began immediately to share his new life in Christ. This is a normal response for a new convert; there is a desire to share the good news of salvation with everyone he knows. But Saul's amazing knowledge of the Scriptures and his powerful preaching made his testimony exceptional indeed.

A. Saul Preaches Convincingly About Jesus Christ (verses 19-22)

People immediately took notice of Saul's preaching for two reasons - his reputation and his reasoning. Saul's reputation was well known to the people of Damascus, as Ananias' words early in the chapter point out. When they heard Saul, the man who was supposed to be arresting Christians and hauling them away to Jerusalem, instead praising and preaching the name of Jesus, the Bible says they were "astonished." It soon became evident that something very remarkable had happened to this man to turn him so utterly around.

What was perhaps even more distressing for the Jews of Damascus was Saul's knowledge of the Scriptures and his reasoning ability. He was able to use the Scriptures (i.e., the Old Testament writings) to prove that Jesus was the Christ. As time passed, his preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews of Damascus were "baffled" by this man.

"Saul was a great student of the Scriptures before he was saved. He knew all about the Old Testament prophecies and what the Bible taught about the Messiah. But it wasn't until he was saved that he knew that those prophecies were talking about Jesus. Why did Saul understand now? Who was living within him?" The Holy Spirit was living within Saul now and had given him the understanding he needed to preach the Gospel with power. The Jews could not argue with the Power, which had changed Saul completely from being an enemy of Jesus to a convert. They could not argue with his reasoning, which proved that Jesus was truly the Messiah promised to Israel. No wonder Luke writes that they were "astonished" and "baffled!"

B. Saul's Mysterious Three Years in Arabia (verse 23 and Galatians 1:13-24)

Luke's account in Acts 9 states simply that "after many days" Saul was forced to leave Damascus. But Paul's own account of this time in Galatians 1 shows that this was a

three-year period in which much of his time was spent in Arabia. All we know of this period is that Saul felt the need, not to confer with any man, but to spend that time in Arabia, presumably to confer with God. Most Bible scholars believe that it was at this time that Saul developed some of the more complex points of New Testament theology. It is also felt that it was during this period that he became convinced of his calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ. As John R.W. Stott writes in his book, *The Message of Galatians*, “We believe that in this period of withdrawal, as he meditated on the Old Testament Scriptures, on the facts of the life and death of Jesus that he already knew and on his experience of conversion, the gospel of the grace of God was revealed to him in its fullness. . . . Now he had Jesus alone to himself, as it were, for three years of solitude in the wilderness” (page 34).

For the sake of your students, you should share the fact that it was during this time in Arabia that Saul studied the Scriptures and became convinced that he, too, was an apostle - even though he had not seen Jesus until after Jesus’ death. But God confirmed the calling to him, and Saul knew that he was “set apart from birth” by the grace of God to preach among the Gentiles (Galatians 1:15-16). The city of Damascus was located on what was the border of Arabia at this time in history, and this explains why Saul was frequently there.

2. Saul is Forced to Flee Damascus (Acts 9:23-25)

Saul’s changed life and forceful preaching soon gained him followers - and enemies. It became evident to the Jews living in Damascus that Saul’s reasoning from the Scriptures was irrefutable. Their only recourse was either to believe what he was teaching or seek to silence him by murder. Some believed the message, but others conspired to kill him.

Soon the believers realized that Saul’s life was in danger in Damascus. They were also aware that the city gates were being watched night and day to prevent Saul’s escape. In II Corinthians 11:32, we also learn that the governor gave orders for his arrest. The believers had to get Saul out of the city. But how? The believers planned a clever escape for Saul. Under the darkness of night they brought him to an opening in the city’s wall. This opening wasn’t guarded; most likely this was because the opening was too high in the wall for a man to jump. But the believers lowered Saul down through the opening in a basket, and Saul quietly landed outside of the city walls and headed back to Jerusalem.

3. Barnabas Brings Saul to Peter and James (Acts 9:26-31)

Saul now returned to Jerusalem for the first time since his conversion on the Damascus Road. The last time he was in Jerusalem, he was the enemy and persecutor of the Church. Now he sought to join the very disciples he had formerly persecuted. But three years’ time had not erased the believers’ bitter memories of Saul. They were all afraid of him, and no one was willing to take the chance of believing his testimony. Perhaps they thought Saul was only pretending to be a believer so he could arrest more followers of Jesus. Imagine Saul’s grief and frustration as he attempted to tell and show these people the change that Jesus has brought into his life.

But one believer, Barnabas, had the courage to accept Saul’s testimony. Barnabas was a believer who was highly regarded in Jerusalem. His name was given to him by the apostles and meant “Son of Consolation.” He personally brought Saul to the apostles in Jerusalem. From Paul’s own account in Galatians 1, we learn that Peter and James the Lord’s brother were the only two leaders of the Church in Jerusalem at the time. Barnabas explained to them that Saul was now a believer and described his experience on the Damascus road. Perhaps Barnabas had some personal

knowledge of Saul's activities in Damascus, for he also told them of Saul's subsequent testimony there. Saul was then accepted by the church in Jerusalem, and he went about the city preaching "boldly in the name of the Lord" (verse 28).

But Saul's preaching and debating with the Grecian Jews brought him enemies in Jerusalem as well. It was not long before his life was in danger again, so the believers in Jerusalem sent him away to his home city of Tarsus. Then, the account tells us, the church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a period of peaceful growth in the Lord.

Ask your students, "Why was it so hard for the believers to trust Saul? What kind of a man do you think Barnabas was?" Barnabas was certainly courageous for trusting Saul; his faith was obviously in the Lord and in His protection. Barnabas was also a man who appreciated the gifts and abilities of others. He was a "people person" - someone who was always willing to give someone else the benefit of the doubt and a second chance. We'll learn more about both Barnabas and Saul in the lessons ahead.

Conclusion

Explain to your students that a person who is born again always shows a changed heart and life. In Saul's case, the change was quite dramatic because he had previously been such a fierce enemy of Christ. But even people who trust the Lord as children will show change and growth. Let your students know that, if they belong to Christ, others should notice that their behavior is not like "everybody else's." There will be a desire to please God and to live for him. If there is no desire to please God, then they should search their hearts to make certain they've really trusted Christ for salvation. "At first, people didn't really believe Saul when he said he was a Christian. But after they watched his new life, they began to realize it was true. People who watch you will know, too, if you really believe what you say you do. Does your life show a desire to please God? I sure hope it does." Let your students know that you are available to talk with them if any of them are not certain if they are saved.

Missionary Emphasis

This week, describe the place where your class missionary is working. If it is a foreign country, you may wish to bring maps to show them where it is located. If it is in this country, they may also need to have the location pointed out to them. Describe the mission field's climate, what the landscape is like, what the people are like, and any other details you may feel are important. You can learn much of this information from most encyclopedias. If possible, show any pictures you might have of the location.

Worksheet

This week's worksheet consists of a poem that your students will finish by rhyming the words in italics. The correct answers are as follows: jail, sight, Lord, gate, wall.

Student Worksheet

Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem

Time to Rhyme! - The following poem describes Saul's conversion and escape from Damascus, but some of the words are missing. Fill in the blanks with correct words that rhyme with the words in bold letters. Then you will have a finished poem!

Saul went to Damascus with a plan -
A plan that would not **fail**.
He went to arrest the believers there
And haul them off to _____.

But Jesus stopped him along the road
With a brilliant, heavenly **light**.
Saul heard his voice and fell to the ground.
He got up without his _____.

Saul now believed; Ananias came -
His sight was soon **restored**.
Then Saul began to preach the Name.
He told everyone, "Jesus is _____."

He preached the truth; some folks believed,
But others were filled with **hate**.
They wanted to kill that preacher Saul!
They watched every city _____.

But God was able to keep him safe.
The believers took Brother **Saul**,
And lowered him in a basket
Through an opening in the _____!

Memory Verse

Acts 9:2 - "He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem."

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY -

PAUL ON CYPRUS

Acts 13:1-12

Lesson Aim

To help students know that God will empower his people to do any job that He gives them, just as He empowered Paul.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:3 - "As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him."

Lesson Background

As we take up this account of Paul's first missionary journey, we are skipping some years and some important events in Paul's story. As you'll recall from last week's lesson, Saul was sent to his hometown of Tarsus when it became apparent that his life was in danger in Jerusalem. But Barnabas, the courageous believer who trusted Saul and took him to the apostles, never forgot about Saul and his ability. When Barnabas was sent by the church in Jerusalem to look over a new work begun in Antioch (Acts 11:19-30), he saw evidence of the grace of God in the Antioch believers. But Barnabas also realized that the new church needed instruction - and he also knew just the man for the job!

Tarsus was just a short distance across the Mediterranean from Antioch, and Barnabas went there to fetch Saul to help with this teaching ministry. Perhaps Barnabas remembered that Saul was called specifically to be a "light to the Gentiles," and the church in Antioch was the first largely Gentile local church. Saul and Barnabas taught the believers in Antioch for a year, and the proof of their success lies in

the little sentence: “The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” These people so identified themselves with the Lord that they were literally called “Christ’s ones,” or “belonging to Christ.”

This was an important step in the history of the Church. Up until that time, Christianity had been identified with Judaism; it was considered to be a sect of the Jewish religion. By establishing a teaching center outside of Judaism, the Church gained credibility and identity as something completely new and different. As we join Saul and Barnabas in this lesson, we find them in Antioch, about to be called apart by the Holy Spirit for the first missionary journey.

Lesson Procedure

1. Barnabas and Saul are Set Apart for the Work (Acts 13:1-3)

This chapter begins with a list of the prominent teachers and prophets in the Antioch church. Barnabas and Saul are listed as well as three others. While these men are worshiping the Lord together and fasting, the Holy Spirit communicated with them (perhaps through one of the prophets present) to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special work that He had called them to do. Perhaps these men had been praying over the nature of their future work; perhaps they were praying over the souls of Gentiles who had never heard about Christ. Whatever the case, they were now aware that Barnabas and Saul were being called to take on a hazardous, extended missionary journey. So, after more fasting and prayer, the leaders of the church placed their hands on the two (signifying their separation for the work) and sent them off on the journey.

Remind your students that travel in the days of Barnabas and Saul was extremely slow and difficult. Much of the distance would be covered by foot, on roads where thieves were known to rob travelers - and worse. When they were required to sail across the sea, they did so in small boats that were easily damaged and capsized in storms. In II Corinthians 11:25, we learn that Paul was shipwrecked at least three times during his journeys and spent one night and a day in the open sea. There were other dangers as well, including being misunderstood by political authorities or hostile townspeople. But Barnabas and Saul knew that they were called specifically for this work, and they trusted that God would protect them through their journeys and would make their work profitable.

Ask your students, “Do you think the Holy Spirit would call Barnabas and Saul to this work, and then leave them to do the work in their own power? Or do you think His power and His presence would be with Barnabas and Saul as they preached the Gospel?” This calling was a huge task - an impossible task for mere men. But Barnabas and Saul had the assurance of the presence of the Holy Spirit and His power wherever they went.

2. Barnabas, Saul and John Mark Sail to Cyprus (Acts 13:4-5)

The first stop for the missionaries was the island of Cyprus. You may wish to use a world map or a globe to show your students where this is located. Barnabas and Saul took John Mark to be their helper; he was a young man at this time and a relative of Barnabas. (Eventually, he became the author of the Gospel of Mark.) We learn from Acts 11:19 that the Gospel had already been preached on Cyprus to some extent by Jews who had fled Jerusalem because of Saul’s persecution. It was also, interestingly enough, the birthplace of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). But the message had been preached only to the Jews on Cyprus; we know historically that there was a large Jewish population on the island at that time. No one had yet taken the message to the Gentiles on Cyprus.

Barnabas and Saul began at the eastern port of Salamis and preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogues. Then they crossed the entire island (about a hundred-mile journey) until they came to Paphos, on the western side of Cyprus.

3. Paul and Elymas the Sorcerer (Acts 13:6-12)

Cyprus was a Roman province, and Paphos was the headquarters for the proconsul of Cyprus, the chief official and representative of Roman rule on the island. We are told that this proconsul, named Sergius Paulus, was “an intelligent man” (verse 7) who heard about the message that Barnabas and Paul were preaching. He wanted to learn more about the word of God, and so he sent for Barnabas and Paul. Now the two missionaries had a chance to present the Gospel before the leader of the island. How excited they must have been to have such an opportunity!

But now we are introduced to a character named Elymas, which is Semitic for “sorcerer” or “wise man.” Elymas was not just a sorcerer; he was a Jewish sorcerer and a false prophet, all of which made him very antagonistic to Barnabas and Saul and to their message. This Elymas was an attendant to Sergius Paulus and was present in the court when Barnabas and Saul came to present the Gospel. As they preached, Elymas sought to undermine their message and turn the proconsul from the faith. His opposition was strong - from the pit of hell itself! The Holy Spirit filled Paul, and Paul gave Elymas a holy rebuke. “You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right!” Paul told Elymas. Read Acts 13:10-11 as a class. Remind your students that Paul, too, knew what it was to be the enemy of Christ and what it was like to be blinded for a period of time. The result in Paul’s life was eternal salvation; we do not know what the result was in Elymas’ life. However, we do know that Sergius Paulus was convinced by Paul’s words and the miracle, and he believed his message. The Holy Spirit empowered Paul and helped him to defeat the power of Satan, represented by Elymas.

“In verse nine, we see a change in Saul’s name. What is Saul now called?” Saul was now given the Gentile name Paul (which means “asked of God” or “little”), and this is the name that is used for him throughout the rest of his ministry. Perhaps this new name signified the beginning of his work among the Gentiles. There was another change that occurred at this time in the book of Acts. Up until this time, Barnabas had been given the “first billing”; his name had always preceded Saul’s. But after Paul became the chief spokesman in Sergius Paulus’ court, he became the central character of the missionary accounts. From this time forward, the two are known as “Paul and Barnabas.”

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit called out Paul and Barnabas for this missionary journey. But Paul and Barnabas were not sent out to labor in their own strength. Rather, the Holy Spirit was with them and empowered them to do the work He had called them to do. Whether Paul and Barnabas needed strength and protection to endure a hundred-mile journey by foot, or whether they needed special power to combat the forces of Satan, the Holy Spirit enabled them to accomplish His will.

This is true of us as well. Sometimes we are asked to do things that are very hard for us to do. Maybe we must speak the truth, even when we know we’ll be punished for what we say. Maybe we have to stand up to a bully at school, even though we may be afraid. Maybe we feel we must tell a friend about Jesus, even though we’re afraid that friend may laugh at us. But whatever we know God wants us to do, we also know that He can give us His strength and His courage to do it. Paul faced many scary situations - we’ll

learn about some of them in the weeks to come. But Paul also knew that Philippians 4:13 was true - in fact, he wrote these words: "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." Encourage your students to trust God to give them the power and the courage to do His will in all situations.

Mission Emphasis

This week, discuss the nature of the ministry of your chosen missionary. Is this missionary involved in church planting? If so, discuss the concept of church planting with your students - what it takes to begin a local church and the evangelism and teaching efforts involved. Or perhaps your missionary is involved with a missionary hospital or a radio ministry. Whatever the work, describe it for your students in terms they will understand and explain why the work is necessary and important.

Worksheet

This week's worksheet is very straightforward. Help your students to get beyond "pat answers" when they apply the lesson to their own lives. Encourage each one to think of a specific example or situation when they need God's help to confront a problem or to do the right thing. [Hint: A good way to encourage this is by sharing a similar example from your own life!]

Related Music

"He is Able"; "Take My Life, and Let It Be" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #585).

Student Worksheet

Paul on Cyprus

Travel in Paul’s day could be very difficult and dangerous. What were some of the problems that Paul and Barnabas had to face on the roads? _____

On the sea? _____

What did Elymas the sorcerer try to do when Paul was preaching? _____

Who helped Paul? _____

What happened to Elymas? _____

What kinds of problems do you sometimes face? _____

Is it ever hard for you to do what God wants you to do? _____

Who can help you, too? _____

Memory Verse

Acts 9:3 - “As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.”

THE FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY - PAUL MEETS WITH OPPOSITION

Acts 13:14-14:25

Lesson Aim

To help students realize that believers will face opposition, but that God is faithful to help them overcome the world.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:4 - "He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

Lesson Background

Fasten your seat belts - the first missionary journey is about to go on a bumpy ride! Opposition to the Gospel mounts as Paul and Barnabas continue their travels; they must endure jealous rabble-rousers, angry mobs, plots against their lives, and even a stoning! This sounds like the makings for a complete failure, but such is not the case. Over and over again, we see the triumph of truth over the world. "The disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:52); "A great number of Jews and Gentiles believed" (Acts 14:1); "They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples" (Acts 14:21). This is the fulfillment of Christ's promise to His disciples in John 16:33: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." This was a promise to Paul and Barnabas, and it is a promise to Christians today as well.

The cities mentioned in this lesson - Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe - form a cluster of cities within the Roman province of Galatia. Be aware that Pisidian Antioch is a different city from the Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were called apart for the missionary journey. There were many cities

named such at this time, in honor of Antiochus, the king of Syria after Alexander the Great. It is generally believed that the churches established in Galatia at this time were probably the ones that Paul addressed in his letter to the Galatians.

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul Preaches the Word in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14-52)

After preaching the Gospel in Sergius Paulus' court in Paphos, Paul, Barnabas and John Mark left the island of Cyprus and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia. It was there that John Mark left Paul and Barnabas and returned to Jerusalem. Mark's departure was later referred to as a "desertion" (Acts 15:38); perhaps the missionary life was too difficult for John Mark, or perhaps he was homesick. But by leaving Paul and Barnabas behind, he made things just that much more difficult for the missionaries.

Nevertheless, the two went on to Pisidian Antioch, a trading center with a large Jewish population. Paul and Barnabas went to preach the Gospel to the Jews and those Gentile God-fearers who attended the Sabbath services at the synagogue. The two visitors were given a chance to speak, and Paul delivered a tremendous sermon showing how Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of the promise of God to send a Savior. It was a long, detailed sermon, but you may wish to look at verses 38-41 with your students, in which Paul stated that forgiveness of sins can be found in Jesus, and he warned his listeners not to scoff at the message.

The message caused quite a stir in Pisidian Antioch. Many of the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles believed, and they spread the word about Paul and his message. The next Sabbath, almost everyone in town showed up to hear the word of God! What an opportunity to speak the truth before the people! But not everyone was pleased. We are told that, because of jealousy, some of the Jews began to deride the missionaries and their message. But Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: "Since you reject [the word] and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles" (verse 46). This thrilled the Gentiles present, and we see God's Spirit at work: "all who were appointed to eternal life believed" (verse 48).

Now Paul had made some influential enemies, and they went to work to stir up trouble for him. With the help of women of high standing and the leading men of Pisidian Antioch, they had Paul and Barnabas expelled from the city. Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet to protest the rejection of the Jews, but the believers they were forced to leave behind were left "filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit" (verse 52).

2. Paul and Barnabas Travel to Iconium (Acts 14:1-7)

The next stop for Paul and Barnabas was the city of Iconium, where the message was well-received and "a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed" (verse 1). Opposition was also felt in Iconium, as some of the Jews who refused to believe tried to stir up the Gentiles and cause trouble for the missionaries. Evidently, Paul and Barnabas were able to ride out the initial opposition, because we are told they spent much time in Iconium preaching and confirming their message with miraculous signs and wonders. Eventually, the Gospel had a dividing effect upon Iconium; point out to your students that people are rarely "neutral" about the Gospel. "The Gospel says that either you believe and trust in Jesus for eternal life, or you will die in your sins and face

God's judgment. If you believe in Jesus you will love that message, but if you don't believe you will come to hate it." The Jews and Gentiles who opposed Paul began to form a plot to have Paul stoned. The plot was discovered, and Paul and Barnabas fled to the city of Lystra, where once again they began to preach the Word.

Ask your students, "Is this a new experience for Paul? Can you think of other times when he has had to 'run for his life'?" Remind your students that Paul also had to flee Damascus and Jerusalem when his enemies sought to have him killed. "But in the city of Lystra, Paul was not able to flee his enemies; he couldn't get out of the city in time. Let's find out what happened!"

3. Two Miracles Occur in Lystra (Acts 14:8-20)

Events took a very bizarre twist in Lystra, where Paul and Barnabas were first treated as gods and then Paul was stoned by a mob!

A. The Crowd Worships the Missionaries When Paul Heals a Lame Man (verses 8-18)

Unlike the last two cities where Paul and Barnabas have visited, we are not told that the two began preaching in the synagogue of Lystra. Perhaps there were not enough Jews in Lystra to form a synagogue (there had to be at least ten Jewish men to form one). It appears that Paul was speaking to a pagan crowd when he noticed a lame man listening intently to his message. Paul saw that this man had the faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet." The man responded by jumping up and walking; the crowd responded by proclaiming that Barnabas and Paul were gods in human form!

Explain to your students that the Greek god Zeus was the "patron god" of Lystra. The people thought Barnabas was Zeus in human form; perhaps his physical appearance was more impressive than Paul's. Since Paul was the spokesman, they decided he must be Hermes, the messenger of the gods. The crowd went so far as to fetch the priest of Zeus, who brought bulls to sacrifice to the missionaries! This mortified Paul and Barnabas; they tore their clothes in grief and tried to explain to the crowd that they were mere men. They also attempted to explain the nature of God, the creator of all things, who had shown His care for them in the bounty of His creation. But even their vehement denials barely kept the crowd from sacrificing to them.

B. Paul is Stoned, but is Restored to Life (verses 19-25)

Now the crowd was entirely confused; they became vulnerable to the tales of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who had followed Paul and Barnabas to destroy their work. Perhaps these Jews convinced the people of Lystra that Paul was a troublemaker; perhaps they told them that Paul wanted to destroy their gods and was an enemy of Zeus. Whatever they said, it was enough to turn the crowd around, and the result was that Paul was stoned and dragged outside of the city as a corpse.

The believers in Lystra gathered around Paul's body, and we are simply told that "he got up and went back into the city" (verse 20). Can you imagine the stir it must have caused in Lystra when they saw this sight? We are not given many details in Scripture about this event; some people believe the experience Paul recorded in II Corinthians 12 may have

occurred at this time. What we do know from Acts 16 is that a church was established in Lystra and Timothy was a part of that group. We also know that Paul and Barnabas' next stop, Derbe, was only about sixty miles from Lystra, and there were a great number of people saved there. Perhaps the success of the preaching in Lystra and Derbe is partly due to this miraculous restoration of Paul after his stoning in Lystra.

Ask your students, "After all the problems that Paul and Barnabas had, was this missionary trip a success? Why was it a success?" Paul and Barnabas were successful because the Lord helped them to overcome the world and the obstacles it placed in their path. Have your students look up II Corinthians 12:10. Discuss how Paul, in his weakness, was made strong. Remind your students that they can expect opposition when they do what is pleasing to God. Perhaps their friends will tease them or their teachers may mock them. But God has promised "overcoming power"; He will help us endure the problems that come our way and will strengthen us to do His will. As Paul wrote in Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Mission Emphasis

Describe the political climate of the mission field where your class missionary is laboring. Is the government friendly to missionaries? Is it less than friendly, or even hostile? Is the government stable, or is it a nation that regularly experiences political turmoil? Does your missionary have to be careful of some of the local laws as he works? Try to give your students a feel for the government of this particular mission field.

Worksheet

In Part I of the worksheet, the correct order should read: 2, 6, 1, 4, 7, 3 and 5. In Part II, remind your students that last week's lesson also covered part of the first missionary journey, so if they want to include problems that Paul and Barnabas faced last week, that would be fine. Obviously, we want the students to realize that, despite the obstacles, the first missionary journey was a success because people were saved and churches were planted.

Related Music

"Our God Reigns"; "God is our Refuge and Our Strength" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #40).

I. Come to Order, Please - Read the following sentences, then number them from one to seven to put them in the correct order.

- ___ Paul and Barnabas are expelled from Pisidian Antioch.
- ___ The crowd stones Paul and drags his body outside the city.
- ___ Most of the people of Pisidian Antioch come out to hear Paul preach.
- ___ Paul heals a lame man in Lystra.
- ___ Paul is restored to health and returns to the city.
- ___ Paul and Barnabas preach in Iconium, but flee the city because of a plot to stone them.
- ___ The crowd tries to worship Paul and Barnabas.

II. What kinds of problems did Paul and Barnabas face on the first missionary journey?

Was the journey still a success? _____ Why or why not?

Memory Verse

Acts 9:4 - "He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'"

THE COUNCIL AT JERUSALEM

Acts 15:1-35; Galatians

Lesson Aim

To help students understand that disagreements will arise, even among Christians, but God's Word must always be the final authority.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:5 - "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' He replied."

Lesson Background

Even very young children are aware that Christians don't always agree with other Christians. They know there are many different kinds of churches, and perhaps they wonder why they aren't attending the biggest or fanciest church in town or the church with all the exciting programs for children. This lesson gives us a good opportunity to explain that Christians sometimes have different ways of looking at things, and we don't always see eye to eye. But the Bible must be our final authority on all questions of doctrine and practice, just as it was for the Jerusalem Council. Let your students know that it is this kind of attention to and reverence for God's Word that makes your church unique - not in a way that will make your students proud and snobbish, but in a way that helps them understand that sometimes divisions are necessary in order to maintain the truth of the Gospel message.

This lesson brings up the subject of circumcision - a subject that few third and fourth graders will understand and one that no Sunday School teacher relishes. Unless you are a male teacher with all male students, you probably will not want to focus too much on the circumcision question. For purposes of this lesson, we will discuss the controversy in terms of following the laws of Moses: do the Gentiles have to

become Jewish first and obey all the laws of Moses before they can be saved? What does it mean to be saved by faith? These are some of the questions we will address in this lesson.

Lesson Procedure

1. Confusion is Brought to the Church in Antioch (Acts 15:1-3)

Paul and Barnabas have returned from the first missionary journey to their home church in Antioch. As you'll recall from past lessons, this church was the first largely Gentile church and the first place where believers were known as Christians. Explain to your students that the believers in Antioch were not Jewish. Many of them were Greeks and had probably worshiped idols before they became Christians. It is at this time that some men from Judea came to Antioch and told the believers there that they could not be saved unless they became Jewish. This meant they had to be circumcised in accordance with the laws of Moses. It meant they had to obey the Ten Commandments and all of the ceremonial cleansing and dietary laws. These men were known as "Judaizers"; in verse 5 we learn that some of them were "of the party of the Pharisees." Evidently some Pharisees who came to believe in Jesus also brought some of their legalistic beliefs with them. As Pharisees, these men would never have associated with Gentiles. As Christians, they still weren't willing to accept Gentile believers unless those believers became Jews first.

Explain to your students that, by saying that the Gentiles had to become Jewish before they could be saved, these men were adding "works" to salvation. "These men were saying that the Gentiles couldn't become Christians until they earned their salvation. The way they would earn it was by doing everything the way good Jews did. According to these men, faith just wasn't enough. Believing in Jesus wasn't enough. God would only save them if they lived in a way that was 'good enough' for Him."

Paul and Barnabas knew that this teaching was wrong; they understood that salvation is by faith, apart from works. They debated with these men sharply, but the words of the Judaizers brought confusion to the church. What if the Judaizers were right? What if they weren't really saved? What if God would only accept them if they became Jewish first? That would mean a lot of changes for these Greek believers. The church finally decided to send Paul and Barnabas, along with some other believers, to the church in Jerusalem to learn the opinion of the apostles and elders on this subject.

"Paul and Barnabas had taught these believers that their faith in Jesus would save their souls. But now these Judaizers were telling them they had to earn their salvation by becoming Jewish first. Do you think this frightened the believers in Antioch? Can anyone be good enough to get eternal life?" If our salvation depended on our good works, none of us would be saved because no one can be good all the time. The believers in Antioch were undoubtedly not only confused; they were worried as well.

2. Paul and Barnabas Travel to Jerusalem to Give Their Report to the Apostles and Elders (Acts 15:4-21)

Paul and Barnabas began their meeting with the Jerusalem church by reporting on their first missionary journey and "everything God had done through them" (verse 4). Their words were well-received by most of the people present; however, some of the believers who had been Pharisees

stood up and publicly challenged Paul and Barnabas, saying that the Gentiles could not be saved until they became Jewish and followed the laws of Moses.

The apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church wisely understood that this was a divisive issue, but one on which the Church had to make a decision once and for all. They met to consider the question, and the council at Jerusalem was convened.

A. Peter Speaks to the Council (verses 7-11)

We are told that there was much discussion at this meeting; it is likely that emotions were running high about such an important matter. Finally, after many had their say, Peter got up to address the council. Remind your students that Peter was one of the Lord's disciples, and he was held in great respect by all the believers as one of the leaders of the early church. Peter reminded the participants at the council in verses 6-11 that the Lord had personally called him to take the Gospel to the Gentiles. He argued from his own experience that, because God gave His Holy Spirit to the Gentile believers just as He gave Him to the Jewish believers, God was willing to accept both the Jew and the Gentile who believe in Him. After all, he reasoned, even good Jews can't obey the law well enough to earn their own salvation; why should the Gentiles be asked to do so?

For Peter, this was a question that had already been settled when Cornelius and his family were accepted as believers (see Acts 10:28-29). One of the reasons it is so important for Christians to learn church history is so we can build on foundations of past generations of Christians. For example, if every generation had to debate the doctrine of the Trinity, the church would never progress in its understanding of God's Word. Peter reminded the council of the past and gave Paul and Barnabas a chance to share how God had accepted other Gentiles as well.

B. Barnabas and Paul Address the Council (verse 12)

We are told that after Peter spoke to the council, the whole assembly became quiet and listened to Barnabas and Paul describe how God's power had been evident in their missionary work. (Note that, in Jerusalem, Barnabas' name was given precedence over Paul's; Barnabas was also held in high regard by the Jerusalem church and his words would carry some weight.) The two missionaries described the miracles and wonders God had done among the Gentiles. Surely this was proof that He was involved in the mission work and in saving the souls of the Gentiles who believed. If God accepted the Gentile believers and gave them the Holy Spirit, why should the church tell them they must become Jewish in order to be saved?

C. James Addresses the Council (verses 13-21)

James was the half-brother of Jesus and one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. He spoke after Paul and Barnabas and showed how Scripture agreed with what the two missionaries had been sharing. He quoted an Old Testament passage from Amos 9:11-12, which showed that it had always been God's intention to save the Gentiles. Have your students read Acts 15:16-18 aloud in class.

“James knew that the final word on the subject must be from God’s Word. He used the Scriptures to show that the Gentiles, too, had a part in God’s kingdom. Whenever there is a disagreement about what the church should do or believe, we must always go back to God’s Word. We can’t make a decision based on our own ‘feelings’ or opinions. It is God’s opinion that matters, and James understood this.”

James advised the Church not to make things difficult for the Gentile believers. He listed four areas in which Gentiles were the most offensive to Jews and said that they should abstain from sexual immorality, food offered to idols, meat that was strangled, and from blood.

3. The Jerusalem Council Sends Back Word to the Gentiles (Acts 15:22-35)

This seemed to please the council, and we are told that the whole church was involved in choosing men to take this information from Jerusalem to the Gentile churches. Judas and Silas were chosen, and a letter was written to the churches. You may wish to read the letter (verses 23-29) in class. The believers were pleased and encouraged by this affirming message from the Jerusalem church. Now they knew their salvation was by faith alone and that works did not need to be added for their salvation.

It was not just the church in Antioch that was troubled by the Judaizers. The churches in Galatia, where Paul and Barnabas had traveled during the first missionary journey, were also visited by Jewish believers who told the Gentile Christians that they had to become Jewish in order to be saved. This was the main reason why Paul wrote the book of Galatians, which was written to the Galatian churches to confirm their salvation and his apostolic ministry. In Galatians, Paul proves that salvation is by faith alone and that no one can be saved or sanctified by following the law of Moses. A key verse in Galatians is Galatians 2:16, in which Paul states three times that justification is by faith alone.

Conclusion

Explain to your students that there are many divisions among both true Christians and those who call themselves Christians in our world today. That’s one of the reasons why there are so many different churches and denominations. While we thank God for every church that preaches the Gospel, we worship in a church that we believe holds the truth in its purest form. The Bible must be our final authority as to what is true and right - not our feelings, not our opinions, not our traditions.

“There are churches today that preach that you must speak in tongues in order to be saved. But the Bible says we are saved by faith alone. There are churches that say you must be baptized to be saved. But that’s also adding works to our faith. We must be true to God’s Word like the council of Jerusalem. We must let God’s Word be the final judge in all matters.”

Missionary Emphasis

Describe the people of your class missionary's field. What is their ethnic background? What is their religious background? Are they generally literate and well-educated, or do they lack schooling? How do they fare economically? What are some of the challenges facing your missionary as he tries to reach these people for Christ? Try to give your students some good background information on the people of this mission field.

Worksheet

Students must select the correct word to make the statements true in order to solve the "mystery word." The five words are: Jewish, Paul, first, told, and Christians. The mystery word is faith, and will be used to complete the three verses on the second half of the page.

Related Music

"Thy Word is a Lamp unto My Feet"; "Holy Bible, Book Divine" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #137).

Student Worksheet

The Council at Jerusalem

Mystery Word! Select the words that will correctly fill in the blanks in the following sentences. Then arrange the numbered letters to discover the “mystery word.”

1. Some men were teaching that Gentiles had to become _____₃ in order to be saved.
2. _____₂ and Barnabas went to Jerusalem to settle the matter.
3. Peter reminded the church that he was the _____₁ to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles.
4. Paul and Barnabas _____₄ about their missionary journey.
5. James showed from Scripture that Gentiles could be _____₅, too.

Mystery Word: _____
 1 2 3 4 5

Use the Mystery Word to complete the following verses:

“Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by _____ in Jesus Christ.”

(Galatians 2:16)

“You are all sons of God through _____ in Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 3:26)

“For it is by grace you are saved through _____ - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:5 - “‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ He replied.”

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY - PAUL IN PHILIPPI

Acts 16; Philippians

Lesson Aim

To help students realize that we must place value and importance on each individual soul who comes to Christ.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:6 - "Now get up and get into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Lesson Background

Humanly speaking, Philippi was probably the last place where a missionary would think of going to begin a church. Unlike most of the cities where Paul visited, there wasn't even a synagogue, where Paul could at least encounter people who believed in a monotheistic God and a promised Messiah. In fact, we don't even see any God-fearing Gentile men in Philippi - just a small group of women who meet together on the Sabbath to pray by the river. Yet God had people in the city of Philippi, and He called Paul and his companions to go there specifically to preach the Word.

The account in Acts 16 of the establishment of the church in Philippi reminds us of the importance of individuals in the makeup of the local church. We are told two conversion stories - the conversion of Lydia and that of the Philippian jailer. These were two very different people, and God used very different means to save them. But in both cases the conversions led to the salvation of their households and the establishment of a church in Philippi. Be certain to emphasize this week the value that God places on each individual soul, which should cause us to value individuals highly, too.

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul and His Companions are Directed to Macedonia (Acts 16:1-10)

Paul took Silas as his traveling companion on this second missionary journey; they were joined by young Timothy in Lystra, and by the author of Acts, Luke the physician, in Troas (note that Luke began to use the pronoun “we” when the missionary party left Troas for Macedonia). The missionaries originally planned to preach the gospel in Asia, but somehow the Holy Spirit made it clear that this was not His will for them. Then one night Paul received the direction he was seeking. He saw a vision of a man in Macedonia who was begging him to “come to Macedonia and help us.” Point out to your students that there was no hesitation on Paul’s part; they got ready at once to leave for Macedonia because they realized God was calling them to preach there.

“Upon Whom did Paul and his companions rely for guidance and direction? How did they show their obedience to Him?” We really see the reliance of the missionaries upon the Holy Spirit. They realized that their work would be unprofitable unless it was done in obedience to God and with His direction. They did not attempt this missionary work in their own wisdom or in their own strength.

2. The Missionaries Arrive in Philippi and Lydia is Converted (Acts 16:11-15)

Once Paul and his companions arrived in Macedonia, they traveled to Philippi, which was one of the leading cities in the area. Philippi has been called “a Rome away from Rome”; it was the home of many retired legionnaires from the Roman army and it had a city government modeled after the government of Rome. But there were few Jews in Philippi, and no synagogue. Paul and the others began their ministry on the Sabbath by speaking to a group of God-fearing women who met together for prayer by a river bank. One of these women, named Lydia, was a well-to-do businesswoman who was a worshiper of God. We see here God’s electing grace, as Luke tells us that God “opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message” (verse 14). The result led not only to her baptism, but to the baptism of all the people in her household.

Read verse 15 together as a class. “How did Lydia show her gratitude to Paul and the others? How did she show her concern for their work?” Lydia proved the validity of her newfound faith by constraining Paul to stay at her home and by making it the “church headquarters” for the work in Philippi.

3. Paul and Silas are Beaten and Thrown into Prison (Acts 16:16-24)

A slave girl with a demonic spirit, who was used by her masters to tell fortunes, began to follow Paul and his companions around Philippi. She shouted, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.” Such outcries would be a distraction from the Gospel, and Paul certainly didn’t need his message confirmed by the powers of darkness. Besides, such confirmation would tend, more than anything, to keep people from taking his message seriously. Also, we are told that he was “troubled” by her presence, no doubt out of compassion for her lost condition. Finally, he rebuked the demon in the name of Christ, and the girl was freed from its power.

This event precipitated the first Gentile hostility against Paul and his friends. The girl's owners, angered at their loss of income now that her "power" was gone, seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace. They accused them before the authorities of "advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice" (verse 21). The crowd joined in the attack, and the magistrates ordered Paul and Silas to be stripped, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison.

Paul and Silas were severely flogged and thrown into the inner cell of the prison. Their feet were fastened in stocks, and the jailer was given strict orders to guard them carefully. Let your students know that what the magistrates did to Paul and Silas was illegal. Both of these men were Roman citizens, and it was illegal to beat a Roman. It was also illegal to beat someone without a trial. Paul and Silas were stripped of their clothes, stripped of their rights, and placed in a prison whose conditions we cannot even imagine. Ask your students how they think they would react to such treatment. Ask them how they think Paul and Silas reacted.

4. The Jailer is Converted (Acts 16:25-34)

Paul and Silas were in great physical pain, but they were not angry, bitter or hopeless. They knew that, as Christ's servants, they were called to bear persecution and even pain for His sake. Perhaps they wondered why God would allow them to be cast into prison and whether they would be allowed to go free again. But they were not fearful; at midnight they began to pray and sing hymns to God. The other prisoners listened to this strange "hymn sing." Why would these two prisoners, beaten by rods and cast into the innermost cell, be singing songs of praise to their God? How was it possible that they could have peace and joy in their hearts after all they had experienced that day?

Suddenly, God sent an earthquake that shook the prison's foundations and the prison doors opened miraculously. The chains fell off all the prisoners. The jailer woke with a start. He saw the open doors and feared the worst. If the prisoners escaped, he would have been killed in their place. The jailer decided to escape the public humiliation and pain of an execution and took his sword to end his own life.

Somehow Paul became aware of the jailer's intention. "Do yourself no harm!" he shouted from the inner cell. "We are all here!" The jailer took a light into the cell and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He had just had the scare of his life, and he knew he was not prepared to face God. He had heard them speak of salvation - either while they were preaching in Philippi or when they were praying and singing in the jail. He had also just witnessed the power of their God. "Sirs," he says with great respect, "what must I do to be saved?"

"Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved - you and your household," is the marvelous answer he received (verse 31). The jailer took Paul and Silas home, where he washed their wounds and heard the Gospel preached to his whole family. Later that night he and his entire family were baptized "because he had come to believe in God - he and his whole family."

"Do you think one of the reasons God allowed Paul and Silas to be beaten and arrested was so this jailer could hear the Gospel and be saved? What does that tell you about the importance of just one soul? Does God put value on the salvation of one lost man?" This man's soul was worth very much; it was worth the life and death of God's own Son, Jesus Christ. In His grace, God chose this man and his family to receive eternal life, and he brought Paul and Silas to them to show them the way.

5. Paul and Silas are Released from Prison and are Forced to Leave Philippi (Acts 16:35-40)

At daybreak, the jailer joyfully informed Paul that he and Silas were to be released by order of the magistrates. Instead of leaving quietly, Paul worked to give the new church some “breathing room” by demanding that the magistrates publicly escort them from prison. Paul knew that he and Silas could legally demand to have the magistrates stripped and beaten and thrown into prison as retaliation for their mistreatment of Roman citizens. The magistrates knew this as well, and quickly came to appease Paul and Silas and escort them from prison. This was a public demonstration that preaching the Gospel was not a punishable offense in Philippi and gave the church the opportunity to work in a less hostile environment.

Still, the magistrates asked Paul and Silas to leave the city, and so they returned to Lydia’s house to encourage the church and then left for Thessalonica. The narrative again shifts from “we” to “they” at this point, suggesting the possibility that Luke remained in Philippi to teach the believers there.

Conclusion

When your students think of a church, they probably think of a church’s building. Remind your students that a church is not a building, but a group of believers who meet together and work together and worship together. The church in Philippi was made up of individuals, each with a different story, each with a different purpose, each with different abilities. Some came to the Lord in a quiet way, like Lydia; some were brought to the Lord dramatically, like the jailer. But each one was called by the Lord individually for salvation.

Have your students turn to Philippians and read the first six verses together. Explain that this is the letter that Paul wrote to the church in Philippi. Ask them to point out from these verses the feelings that Paul had for this very special church (joy, thankfulness, etc.). Some of these believers Paul would know personally; others would have come to Christ after he and Silas had left the city. But he thanked God for each precious soul who had come to know Christ as his Savior.

Mission Emphasis

If possible, share a recent letter from your class missionary. Note any individuals whom the missionary names for specific prayer. Discuss any other needs that your class can be praying for as a group. Discuss also the importance of prayer support for the missionary. Paul says in Philippians 1 that he continued to pray for the Philippians long after he left them. Remind your students that they may pray for their class missionary at home as well as in Sunday School.

Worksheet

The worksheet is a very straightforward compare/contrast between the jailer and Lydia. Note that three of the sentences can apply to both.

Related Music

“Our God Reigns”; “I Love to Tell the Story” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #478).

Compare and Contrast - Some of the sentences below are true about Lydia. Some are true about the jailer. Some are true about both of them. Write the letter “L” by the sentences about Lydia, “J” by the ones about the jailer, and “L” and “J” when the sentence is true of both.

- _____ 1. “I was a worshiper of God, but I had never heard about Jesus.”

- _____ 2. “I asked Paul and Silas, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’”

- _____ 3. “I had a successful business and was well-to-do.”

- _____ 4. “I knew I would be killed if Paul and Silas escaped.”

- _____ 5. “I brought Paul and Silas home to my house.”

- _____ 6. “My entire family was baptized, including me.”

- _____ 7. “Jesus died for my sins.”

- _____ 8. “I almost killed myself, but Paul said something to stop me.”

- _____ 9. “Paul and the other missionaries lived at my home while they were in Philippi.”

Memory Verse

Acts 9:6 - “Now get up and get into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY - PAUL AND THE THESSALONIANS

Acts 17:1-15; I and II Thessalonians

Lesson Aim

To help students realize that missionaries do not "save" people; they share the Gospel, but it is God who does the saving work in people's lives.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:7 - "The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone."

Lesson Background

Most Christians are aware that it usually takes a great deal of time for a missionary to make a breakthrough in an unevangelized area. Contacts must be made, opportunities given to share the Gospel, and then new converts must be discipled and grounded in the Word. As the church becomes established, the missionary seeks to train local believers to take leadership positions and works with the people so that they may one day become a self-supporting local assembly.

But the apostle Paul was only able to spend a very brief time in Thessalonica before he and his companions were forced to leave town. In that time, many had professed faith in Christ - but who would be able to discipled them? Who would encourage and strengthen these new believers? Would they continue in the faith after Paul was gone?

How Paul's heart ached for these new converts whom he was forced to leave so abruptly. We will read of his concerns in I Thessalonians. But when Timothy brought him news of the Thessalonian church, he realized that God was faithful in keeping these believers for Himself. The Holy Spirit was with the Thessalonians and they had the Old Testament Scriptures, and Paul rejoiced because they were "standing firm in the Lord" (I Thessalonians 3:8). It was, after all, God who converted the Thessalonians; Paul was just the vehicle by which they heard of Jesus Christ. Like Paul, let us strive to be faithful and accurate "vehicles" as we speak to our class this week about the God who saves.

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul Preaches in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4)

Review last week's lesson and discuss the circumstances that caused Paul, Silas (and probably Timothy) to leave Philippi and head down the Egnatian Way to Thessalonica. Thessalonica was about a hundred miles from Philippi and was the capital and largest city of Macedonia. It was a busy seaport, and had enough Jews to establish a synagogue. Paul always began his evangelism of a city at the synagogue if it had one. This was because the message of salvation was for the Jews first, but it also made good sense to begin speaking about Christ to people who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and were looking for the promised Messiah.

Paul spent three Sabbaths at the synagogue in Thessalonica. We are told that he used the Scriptures to "reason," "explain" and "proclaim" that Jesus was the Christ. Some Jews believed him, but a great number of the God-fearing Greeks and the prominent women believed. It appears that the new church was off to a great start.

2. Trouble in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-15)

A large group of believers began to emerge in Thessalonica, and this made some of the unbelieving Jews jealous. They found some rabble-rousers in the marketplace and planned to storm Jason's house, where Paul was probably known to have been staying. But Paul and Silas were not found at Jason's home; it is quite likely that they were still recovering from their beating in Philippi, and God in His providence was sparing them from any more harsh physical treatment. The Jews were thwarted in their plans to grab Paul and Silas, but they quickly concocted another plan to cause trouble for the church.

A. Jason and Other Believers are Brought Before the City Officials (verses 6-9)

Since Paul and Silas were not available, the Jews dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials. They cleverly worded their accusation against Jason, saying that he was guilty of sheltering "these men who have caused trouble all over the world" (verse 6). They accused Paul and Silas of defying Caesar and promoting another king named Jesus. This threw the officials and the entire city into a turmoil. Finally, Jason and the others were forced to post bond; this meant that Jason was guaranteeing a peaceful community. In other words, if Jason's friends, Paul and Silas, continued to create havoc in the community, Jason would be forced to give up his property - and quite possibly his life. It became clear to Paul and his companions that they must not remain in Thessalonica, for

doing so would be a threat to Jason and to the church. They waited until it was night and then quietly left for Berea.

B. Paul's Reception in Berea (verses 10-15)

Paul and Silas arrived in Berea. Timothy was there with them as well (see verse 15); whether he came to Berea from Philippi or whether he had been traveling with Paul and Silas all along is somewhat unclear. Paul met with a different reception in Berea. His words were eagerly listened to, and the Bereans searched the Scriptures with joy to see if this good news really was true. Many people were saved, both Jews and Greeks.

But trouble followed Paul to Berea in the form of the Thessalonian Jews! They arrived and stirred up the crowds so that the brothers sent Paul off immediately to the coast. From there he went to Athens, and he sent back word for Silas and Timothy to join him there as soon as possible.

“How do you think Paul was feeling just then? Three times he had successfully started a promising new church, only to be forced to leave just as his work was being blessed. Do you think he may have been discouraged?” Paul was discouraged, as we'll see in our next section, but God sent him news that would cheer him up!

3. Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians (I and II Thessalonians)

Have your students look up I Thessalonians 2:17-3:13. Explain that Paul was terribly concerned about the church in Thessalonica. He felt as if he had been wrenched away from these new believers and he longed to see them, but did not dare to go to the city. When Timothy and Silas joined Paul in Athens, Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to help the church. Read I Thessalonians 2:17-3:5 aloud in class.

“Why did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonians (3:2 - ‘to strengthen and encourage them in the faith’)? What was he afraid might have happened to the believers (3:5 - he was afraid the tempter might have made their efforts useless)? Do you think it was hard for Paul to stay in Athens, instead of going himself?” Through such questions, help your students to understand the feelings and fears that Paul had for the Thessalonians.

Now read I Thessalonians 3:6-13. “What was the report that Timothy brought back? How did it make Paul feel? What is his prayer for the believers in Thessalonica?” Paul was overjoyed to hear that the Thessalonians were standing firm in the faith despite his abrupt departure. He wrote this letter from Corinth (his next stop after Athens) to express his joys, his concerns, and to address some specific questions concerning the end times about which the Thessalonians had asked. Both I and II Thessalonians are considered Paul's “eschatological letters,” since both deal with Christ's Second Coming. You might direct your students to some of the passages in these two letters (like I Thessalonians 4 and 5 and II Thessalonians 2) that deal with the end times if this is something they would like to read about on their own.

Conclusion

Most of us would acknowledge that Paul was the greatest missionary who ever lived. But the apostle Paul never saved a soul! It is God who elects men, who calls them, who convicts them and justifies them. It is God who keeps his own until the day they are glorified. Paul was uneasy about the Thessalonian church because he was forced to leave them so soon. But God was in control, both in Paul's coming and in his leaving. The Thessalonians belonged to Him and He was able to keep them, to enable them to stand firm in the faith. He is able to help your students to stand firm as well. Remind your students that it is not the pastor or the Sunday School teacher or any other Christian who has the power to save and to keep them. They must establish a personal relationship with God Himself. Encourage them to seek God and to make certain that they belong to Him.

Mission Emphasis

What a joy and encouragement it must have been for the Thessalonians to receive Paul's two letters! A letter can be a special way of reaching out to others - especially to missionaries, who are always hungry to hear news from home and to know that others are praying. This is a good week to write letters (or e-mails) to your class' missionary. You may have each student write a letter individually, or you may choose to do it as a class. Suggest the following things for your students to include in the letter:

- They should let the missionary know the things they have learned about their mission field and what impresses them about the work.
- They should include any questions they have that you haven't been able to answer.
- They should include any news that the missionary might find interesting (You'd be surprised how few people write their missionaries about what's happening back home. This is especially a good idea if your missionary is from your church!).
- If your class has chosen some specific prayer items to pray about, you should let the missionary know that, too.

When the letters are completed, send them together to the missionary - perhaps with a cover letter explaining what your class has been studying this past quarter. Your missionary should respond with a letter to your class (but be patient; it may take awhile, though with the availability of e-mail correspondence is often quite rapid). Be sure to share the reply when it comes.

Worksheet

This week's letter-writing takes the place of the usual worksheet.

Related Music

"He is Able"; "What Time I am Afraid" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #665).

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY - PAUL ON MARS' HILL

Acts 17:16-34

Lesson Aim

To help students realize that God's wisdom may appear foolish to men, but it is the power of God to those who are being saved (I Corinthians 1:18).

Memory Verse

Acts 9:8 - "Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus."

Lesson Background

The apostle Paul had been challenged by both jealous Jews and frenzied Gentiles on this missionary journey, but he was about to face his toughest challenge yet - the indifferent, self-satisfied, apathetic philosophers of Athens. The interest of the Athenians in Paul's message was merely an intellectual curiosity; few felt real conviction of sin or a need to know the God of the universe. Paul's words were but foolishness to these self-proclaimed "wise men," but they were the very words these men needed to hear in order to be saved.

Athens at this time in history was still a very important learning center, although the city and its culture were already on the decline. It was still the center of culture, art and philosophy, and was home to a leading university in Paul's day. One distinguishing characteristic of the Athenians was that they were a very superstitious and idolatrous group (Acts 17:16); it is said that there were more idols in Athens than in all the rest of Greece (reportedly about 30,000 idols!). Luke also notes that the Athenians "spent their time

doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas” (Acts 17:21). The Athenian intellectuals looked into all the new fads, not to discover truth so much as to keep themselves entertained. In short, the Athenians were people who needed the Gospel desperately and yet were totally unaware of that need. What a parallel to the situation we find in our own world and time today!

Your students are probably already aware, especially if they attend public school, that Christians in our society today are often viewed as uneducated, unenlightened and perhaps even unstable. Show them this week that this is the opinion that the sophisticated, cultured Athenians had of the apostle Paul as well! We are in good company when we stand upon the wisdom of God against the wisdom of men, which really is the foolishness of the age.

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul is Distressed by the Lost Condition of the Athenians (Acts 17:16-21)

From last week’s lesson, review the circumstances that brought Paul to the city of Athens. Paul had quickly fled the city of Berea, where Jews from Thessalonica had been stirring up the crowds against him. He was waiting in Athens for Silas and Timothy to join him, and he had a lot on his mind. We know from I Thessalonians that Paul was quite concerned about the state of the Thessalonian church, which he had been forced to leave after a brief period of evangelism. He was alone in this very pagan city, and he was in a position of waiting on God, which can sometimes be very difficult. But although Athens was not a scheduled “stop” on this second missionary journey, Paul soon addressed this city’s spiritual needs as well.

Luke tells us that Paul was “greatly distressed” by the many idols in Athens. Athens was one of those places where you couldn’t walk down the street without being confronted visually by the lost condition of the people. In a city with 30,000 idols, there was no place to turn without encountering the sight of one. Paul even saw an altar with the inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD (verse 23); the Athenians made an altar to serve any gods they may have unknowingly overlooked.

Paul was not able merely to sit on his hands in such a place, and soon he was speaking in the Athenian synagogue and in the marketplace about Jesus Christ. He was in the market on a daily basis and became acquainted with some of the Athenian philosophers, who began to debate him. Some of them asked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” The word “babblers” meant “seed picker”; by using this term, these philosophers were mocking Paul’s learning and theology, saying that he merely picked up “scraps” of learning in the marketplace. Clearly some were not willing to take Paul seriously, but others seemed to understand that Paul was talking about a different God and a different way.

2. Paul Presents the Gospel on Mars’ Hill (Acts 17:19-31)

The Athenians brought Paul to the Areopagus to hear more about what he was teaching. “Areopagus” means “hill of Ares,” or, as many Christians know it, “Mars’ Hill” (Mars was the Roman name for the Greek god Ares, the god of war). In the glory days of Greece, the Council of the Areopagus ruled this Greek city-state, but by Paul’s time it only had authority in matters of religion and morality. By bringing Paul to the Areopagus, the Athenians are giving him an “official” hearing. Have your students read verses 19-23 aloud in class; discuss Paul’s opportunity to present

the Gospel to this large group of city leaders and the city leaders' opportunity to hear the way of salvation explained to them.

A. Paul Declares that God is the Creator of the Universe (verses 24-28)

Explain to your students that, because the Athenians worshiped many gods, they did not have a concept of a single God who created all things. So Paul began his message by introducing the Athenians to his great God. He explained that God made all things and all people. He had decided the times and the places where each person was to live. Paul explained that his God was a good God who wanted all people to seek Him and to find Him.

B. Paul Declares that God is Gracious, but Will Someday Judge All Men (verses 29-31)

Paul then told the Athenians that God is not an idol made by hands - "an image made by man's design and skill" (verse 29). He explained to the Athenians that God had not yet judged them for worshiping idols in their ignorance, for He is a gracious God. But He was commanding all people to repent; the Athenians had to repent of their idol worship and come to God, for He was going to judge the entire world someday through "the man He has appointed" - Jesus Christ. And, Paul says, the proof that Jesus is going to judge all men is seen in the resurrection of Christ. By resurrecting Christ, God showed His approval of His Son, His Son's atoning work, and His message.

"The Athenians asked Paul to explain his teaching, and Paul told them that they were lost men who needed to be saved. Do you think the Athenians were interested in learning how to be saved? What do you think they were interested in?" The Athenians didn't ask Paul to explain the Gospel because they felt a deep need to be right with God. They were interested in Paul's message because it was new and different and it tickled their intellectual fancy. Because of this, they evaluated Paul's message as if it were simply another philosophy of life.

3. Most of the Athenians Reject the Gospel, but a Few Believe (Acts 17:32-34)

Have your students read these verses, and then ask the following questions:

- "What part of Paul's message did the Athenians find hard to accept?" (the resurrection of the dead)
- "What do you think it means when it says some of the Athenians 'sneered?'" (laughed, scoffed, mocked - made fun of Paul's ideas)
- "Did anyone believe Paul's message? What were the names of some who believed?" (Dionysus and a woman named Damaris)

Some of the Athenians did come to Christ, but the response in Athens to the Gospel was considerably cooler than the response in other cities. The Athenians considered themselves to be above the Gospel; they were too sophisticated to believe that dead bodies could come back to life. In their eyes, they were very wise men and Paul was just a babbler. But in God's eyes, they had rejected the very way of wisdom - the way that could have led to their own resurrection and eternal life. Have your students turn to Romans 1:22 - "Although they claimed to be wise, they became

fools!” Discuss how this statement was true about the Athenians to whom Paul preached on Mars’ Hill.

Conclusion

Have your students read I Corinthians 1:18-25 aloud in class. Explain that, ever since Paul’s time, people have thought that the Gospel was mere foolishness instead of recognizing it as the wisdom of God. This is still true today. Your students will encounter many people who believe Christians are foolish for believing in God or for taking a literal interpretation of the Bible. They will hear people in their neighborhoods, people in their schools, or people on television poke fun at Christians for their foolish beliefs. This should not surprise us, since people treated the apostle Paul in the same manner. We must not be afraid to look foolish before men, since we are standing on the wisdom of God. It takes courage to stand for the truth sometimes, but God will give us that courage if we ask Him for it. And we can stand for God’s Word confidently, knowing that someday all the truth of God’s Word will be revealed to all men.

Mission Emphasis

“Suppose I wanted to be a missionary to Japan. Could I just buy a ticket, fly to Japan, and start witnessing to people? Or are there some things I should know beforehand?” Obviously, a missionary to Japan should know some Japanese! He should also know something about the Japanese culture - how they do things, what is considered polite or rude, etc. And a missionary had better have a good understanding of God’s Word or he has no business going anywhere. Discuss with your students the different kinds of training that missionaries often undergo. Besides Bible and language study, missionaries sometimes must take specialized training for their particular field. A missionary doctor, for example, will spend many years in school before he or she heads for the mission field. A Bible translator must also learn the complicated discipline of linguistics. If your class missionary had to take special language classes or other training, be sure to use that as an example. For the most part, missionaries are well-educated, skilled believers who use those skills to reach people for Christ.

Worksheet

Make copies of the worksheet for each student in your class, and then assign three students to read the parts of Carol, Steve and Jason. Discuss the dialogue, asking your students if any of them have ever been in a situation like Jason’s. Ask them if they think Jason would have gotten anywhere if he had become angry with Carol and Steve. Ask them what they think of Jason’s answer. Is it a good answer? What if Jason didn’t think of such a good answer - would it be enough just to say he believed in the Bible? Help your students to answer these questions and the questions on the worksheet.

Related Music

“How Shall the Young Direct Their Way?” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #148); “Holy Bible, Book Divine” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #137).

“The Artist”

Carol, Steve, and Jason are in art class together. They are each trying to paint a picture of a bird.

CAROL: You sure are a good artist, Jason. I wish I could paint like that.

STEVE: Yeah - my painting looks like brown blob with legs, but yours looks like a real robin!

JASON: I like to paint. My Mom's an artist, and she says God's given me the same kind of talent.

CAROL: God gave you that talent? C'mon - you don't really believe that, do you?

JASON: Sure I do.

CAROL: My parents told me that God didn't make anyone.

STEVE: Yeah, that's what we learned in science class. People just evolved.

JASON: I know that a lot people don't believe that God made us. But the Bible says He did, and that's what I believe.

CAROL: (laughing) I bet you still believe in the tooth fairy, too!

JASON: You know, Carol, you said I was a good artist. I can paint a picture of a bird, but no matter how hard I try, I could never make a bird. And you believe that birds, and people, and everything else were made by accident? That would be like having this paint brush get up, and paint a picture all by itself!

CAROL: Well . . .

STEVE: I never thought of it that way.

JASON: Every time you see a painting, you know someone had to paint it. Every time you see a house, or a car, or a bridge, you know someone had to make it. When I look at the world, I know Someone had to make that, too.

CAROL: That's just what you think. But my parents say that science proves there is no God.

STEVE: But how can everything be just an accident? I think Jason may be right.

Now answer the following questions about the skit:

1. Who told Carol that God didn't make anyone? _____

2. What was one of the reasons that Jason gave for believing that God created Him?

3. Who was trusting in human wisdom? _____
4. Who was trusting in God's wisdom? _____
5. Do you think Steve might like to hear more about God and the Bible? _____

Memory Verse

Acts 9:8 - "Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus."

THE SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY - PAUL IN CORINTH

Acts 18:1-17; I and II Corinthians

Lesson Aim

To help students to see God's protection of Paul, even in a very wicked environment, and to know that He is able to protect us as well.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:9 - "For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything."

Lesson Background

This stop on the second missionary journey brought Paul to the beautiful, yet corrupt city of Corinth. Corinth was a major trade center and one of the chief cities of Greece. It had two harbors, and it was possible to transport a small boat, fully loaded, across the isthmus from one harbor to the other. In Paul's day, almost two-thirds of the city's population were slaves. Corinth was the center for the worship of Aphrodite, and the city was filled with religious prostitutes. Corinth was so well-known as a city of immorality that the term "corinthianize" was used in Paul's day to mean "to engage in sexual immorality." Corinth was a city filled with much sin, but it was filled with something else as well - in Acts 17:10, the Lord tells Paul that He has "many people in this city." From Paul's letters to the Corinthians we learn that the church there was a gifted church, a church that still struggled with some fleshly sins, but most of all a church "sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy" (I Corinthians 1:2). It should give us comfort in our own sensual culture to realize that God is able to transform lives and sanctify even those caught up in an immoral lifestyle.

While it is not necessary to go into detail about the gross sins of the Corinthians, be sure to emphasize to your students that Corinth was a wicked city. There were at least twelve temples in Corinth dedicated to the Greek gods. Paul was certainly in “enemy territory” when he arrived at Corinth, but the Lord protected him and blessed his ministry with the establishment of the Corinthian church.

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul Brings the Gospel to Corinth (Acts 18:1-8)

Review last week’s lesson, reminding your students of Paul’s visit to Athens and the Athenians’ cool response to the Gospel. After leaving Athens, Paul traveled to the city of Corinth, where he met Aquila and Priscilla - two Jews who, like Paul, were tentmakers. Paul stayed and worked with them in their business and explained the Gospel to them. Aquila and Priscilla became believers. Paul also spent his Sabbaths speaking in the synagogue about Jesus.

Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth, and we know from I Thessalonians that Timothy brought Paul the good news that the church in Thessalonica was “standing firm” (I Thessalonians 3:6-10). This must have been a great encouragement to Paul. Once they arrived, Paul spent all of his time preaching and testifying to the Jews of Corinth that Jesus was the promised Messiah. When the Jews rejected his message, he took the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Many of the Gentile Corinthians believed Paul and were baptized. And we are told that Crispus, who was actually the synagogue ruler, eventually came to Christ along with his entire household. This could hardly have set well with the Jews of Corinth.

“What had happened in the other cities where Paul preached the Gospel? Who usually caused Paul trouble once the church began to be established?” Paul was chased out of Thessalonica and Berea by unbelieving Jews, and he may have been worried that the same thing would happen in Corinth. We do know he had some concerns because the Lord sent a vision to comfort and reassure him.

2. Paul’s Vision in Corinth (Acts 18:9-11)

Read these verses aloud in class and discuss God’s commands, God’s promise to Paul, and God’s statement concerning His elect in Corinth. This vision helped Paul to ignore the gathering opposition and concentrate on preaching the Gospel. We are told that he stayed for a year and a half, teaching the Corinthians the Word of God and laying a good foundation for the church in Corinth.

3. Paul is Brought to Gallio, the Proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12-17)

Sometime during Paul’s stay in Corinth, the Jews formed a plan - an organized “united attack” to deal with the apostle. They decided that legal action was their best recourse to rid themselves of Paul, and they brought him before Gallio, charging Paul with “persuading people to worship God in ways contrary to the law” (verse 13). This Gallio was a man known in history as being an open-minded, fair and just individual. Yet, despite his legal expertise, he seemed to have no spiritual interest whatsoever. He did not even listen to Paul’s defense; he was totally disinterested. He refused to try the case, saying that it did not fall under the jurisdiction of his court. “This is a matter of your religion,” he tells the Jews. “Settle it among yourselves.” Gallio literally

had the case “thrown out of court” as he ejected the Jews and Paul from the premises. [This was actually an important legal decision. Today, if the Supreme Court refuses to hear a case, the ruling of the lower court stands. At this time in the Roman Empire, Christianity was viewed as a sect of Judaism, which was a legal religion. Gallio’s ruling confirmed this legal status, thus protecting Christians from official persecution by the Roman government until the reign of Nero, who cared nothing for laws and precedents.]

After this incident, the crowd apparently went wild; whether it was the Greeks who beat up Sosthenes, the new synagogue ruler, or whether it was the Jews who turned on him for presenting an unsuccessful case, is somewhat unclear. It is important to note that, while Gallio did nothing to protect Sosthenes from this beating, Paul was protected by the Lord from the violence of the crowd. (It is also interesting to turn to I Corinthians 1:1 and see that this letter was sent from Paul and “our brother Sosthenes”; perhaps Sosthenes was the second synagogue ruler in Corinth to turn to Christ!)

4. Paul and the Corinthian Church (I and II Corinthians)

Paul spent more time in Corinth than he did in some of the other cities where he brought the Gospel. The Corinthian church was established in the midst of a very wicked culture. Read I Corinthians 6:9-11 aloud to your students and discuss some of the sins that the Corinthians had engaged in before their conversions. Emphasize verse 11, where Paul states that the Corinthians used to be these kinds of sinners, but have since been washed, sanctified and justified through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

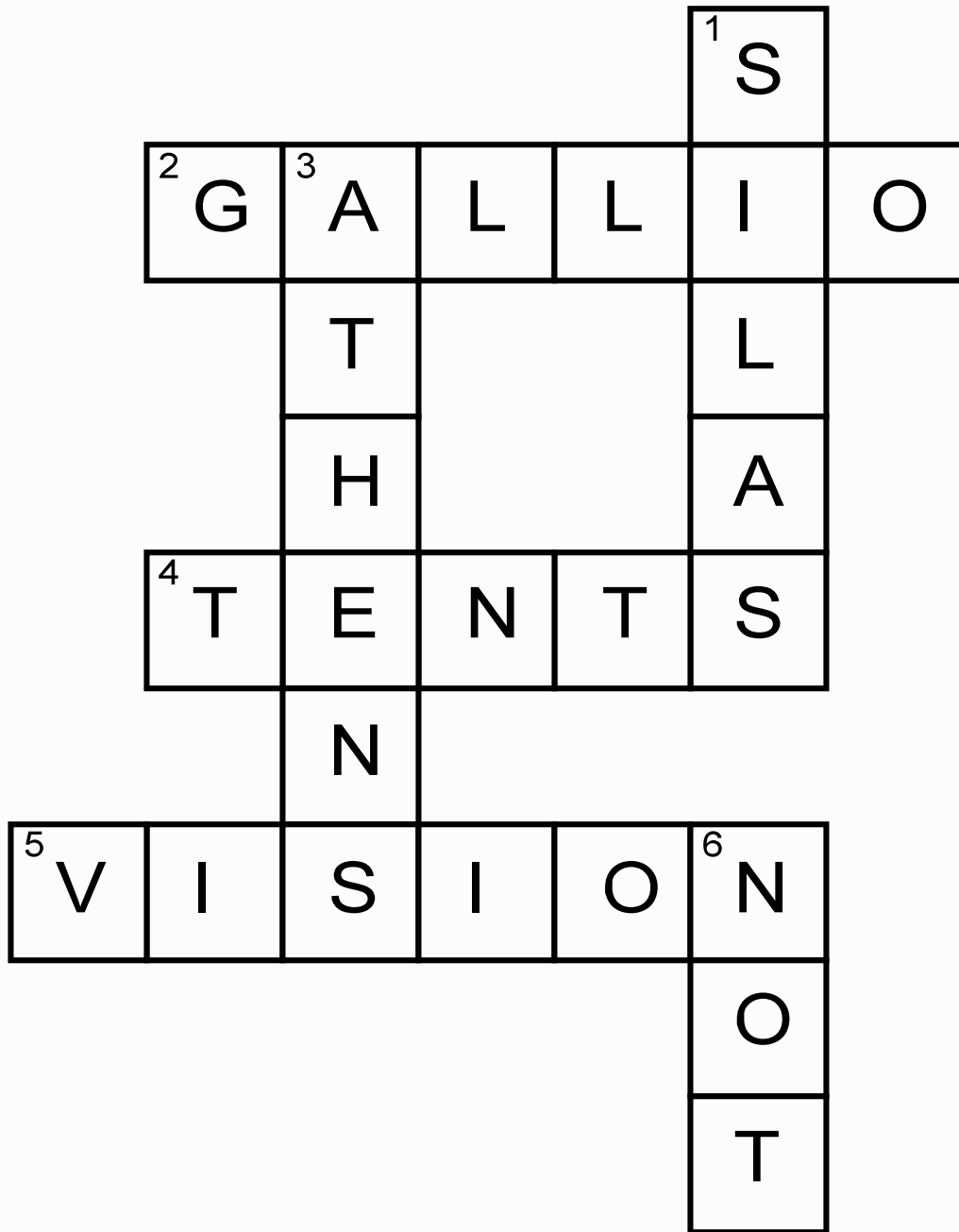
God’s power kept Paul safe in the midst of the wicked city of Corinth. God’s power also kept the Corinthians from turning back to their old sinful lifestyles. Even though the Corinthians were surrounded by sin everywhere in their city, the true believers never left the faith to return to their former way of life. The Corinthian church did have its problems, and I and II Corinthians were written by Paul to the church to correct some of those problems. Perhaps the Corinthians faced greater temptations because of the wicked atmosphere around them. But Paul was confident of God’s power to keep the Corinthians to the end. Conclude by reading I Corinthians 1:8-9, and remind your students that God will protect and keep them, too, as He kept Paul and the Corinthians, because “God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (I Corinthians 1:9).

Mission Emphasis

Ask your students, “What did Paul do to support himself while he lived in Corinth? What was his job?” Paul, of course, was a tentmaker, and the term “tentmaker” is used to this day to describe a missionary who supports himself on the mission field by working at a job. But most missionaries are sent to the mission field by getting financial support from a number of churches. Each church promises to send the missionary a certain amount of money on a regular basis. This way, the missionary can spend his time reaching people for Christ instead of having to use some of his time to make a living. Be sure to let your students know what type of support your class missionary receives.

Worksheet

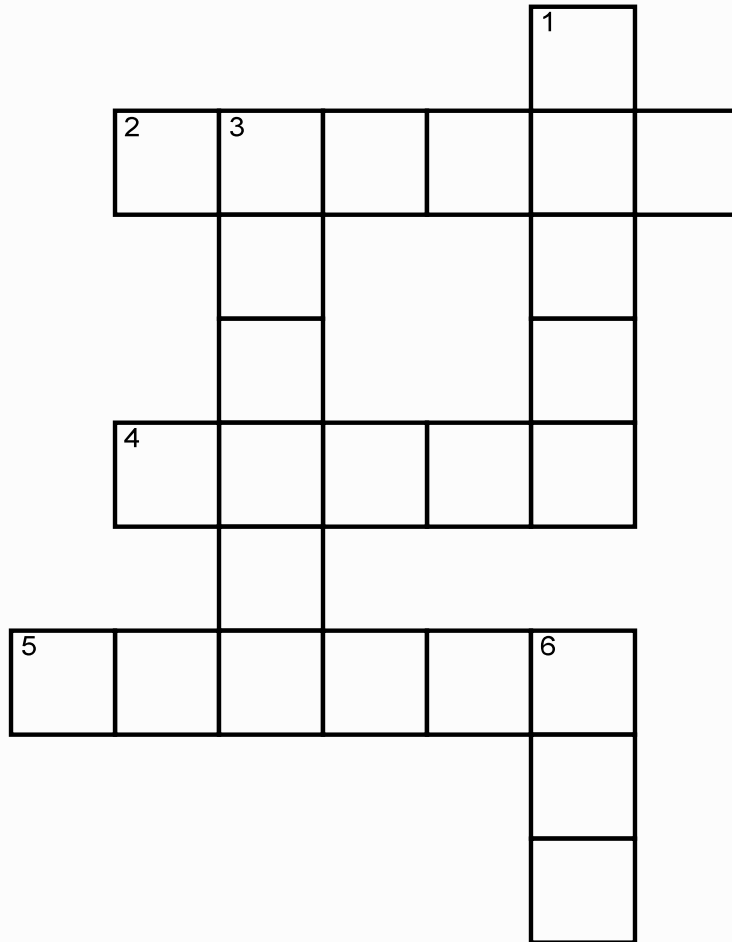
The solution to this week's crossword puzzle is printed below.



Related Music

“A Shield About Me”; “Safely Through Another Week” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #391).

What’s the Good Word? Answer the crossword clues to complete this puzzle about Paul’s visit to the Corinthians.



ACROSS:

- 2. Paul’s judge in Corinth.
- 4. What Paul made for a living.
- 5. God spoke to Paul in a _____.

DOWN:

- 1. Paul was joined by Timothy and _____.
- 3. This city felt it was too “wise” for Paul.
- 6. The Lord told Paul, “Do _____ be afraid.”

Memory Verse

Acts 9:9 - “For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.”

THE THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY -

PAUL IN EPHESUS

Acts 18:18-19:41; Ephesians; Colossians

Lesson Aim

To encourage students to desire, like the Ephesians, to live fully for Christ despite the cost.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:17 - "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me so that you may see again, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

Lesson Background

The city of Ephesus was the most important city of western Asia Minor (now Turkey). During Paul's two years and three months in Ephesus, he not only evangelized this city but the surrounding area as well, so that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10). The city of Colosse was one of the surrounding cities evangelized by converts from Paul's work in Ephesus. It appears that Epaphras, mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians, was probably converted in Ephesus, and that he brought the Gospel to his native city of Colosse. Paul writes that "you learned [the Gospel] from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit" (Colossians 1:7; see also Colossians 1:6; 4:12-13). Other converts from Paul's ministry in Ephesus took the gospel to Laodicea and Hierapolis.

The letters to the Ephesians and Colossians - as well as the letter to Philemon, a believer in the Colossian church - were written at about the same time during Paul's imprisonment in Rome. Both letters address similar themes, including the supremacy of Christ and rules for Christian households.

Both the historical account of the Ephesian believers in Acts 19 and Paul's letter to the Ephesians show that these believers were well-grounded in the truth and that they lived what they believed. The church flourished for a while, but eventually needed the warning of Revelation 2:1-7: "Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love . . . Repent, and do the things you did at first" (verses 4-5). It was love that distinguished the service of the Ephesian church and caused those early believers to live fully for Christ despite the cost.

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul Brings Priscilla and Aquila to Ephesus (Acts 18:18-28)

Review last week's lesson, reminding your students of Paul's stay in Corinth and God's protection of him there. When Paul left Corinth, he took his dear friends Priscilla and Aquila with him to the city of Ephesus. Paul spent some time in the synagogue in Ephesus, reasoning with the Jews, but he was determined to go on. He left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus so that they could begin to evangelize the city.

Paul himself enjoyed a brief time of rest in his home church in Antioch, then visited some of the churches begun on the first missionary journey - in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. Meanwhile, Priscilla and Aquila made contact in Ephesus with a Jew named Apollos, an educated, eloquent man who was preaching about Jesus but knew only about the baptism of John the Baptist. Priscilla and Aquila took him home with them and instructed him about the Gospel. As a result, Apollos became a powerful and effective proclaimer of the truth in Corinth.

Paul was by then on his way to Ephesus from his home church in Antioch, but the effects of his ministry were already being felt in Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila were establishing contacts, becoming acquainted with the city, and laying the groundwork for Paul's arrival.

"Why do you think Paul chose Priscilla and Aquila to begin the work in Ephesus? Do you think they were helpful to him in Corinth? Do you think he trusted their judgment and lifestyle?" Priscilla and Aquila had proven their worth in Corinth and quickly became just as valuable in the city of Ephesus.

2. Paul Preaches and Teaches in Ephesus for More Than Two Years (Acts 19:1-17)

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he began preaching in the synagogue, reasoning with the Jews for about three months. When some of the Jews became "obstinate" (verse 9), Paul took his preaching/teaching ministry to the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Paul probably would have used this hall from about 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. - the hot period of the day, when businesses closed and people would generally be available to hear Paul speak. As Paul taught in Ephesus for the next two years, a number of effects from his ministry were seen.

A. All the Greeks and Jews Who Live in the Province Hear the Word of the Lord (verse 10)

The hall in Ephesus became a learning center for the entire province, and many came from the neighboring cities to hear Paul. Once converted, they then returned to their own cities to spread the good news of the Gospel. Ephesus thus became the focal point from which the Gospel was spread throughout Asia Minor.

B. God Does Extraordinary Miracles Through Paul (verses 11-16)

The Gospel came to Ephesus and the surrounding area with great power; even handkerchiefs and aprons touched by Paul were used to cure the sick and cast out demons. God authenticated Paul's message with these miracles, which caused even unbelievers to take notice. Read Acts 19:13-16 and discuss the folly of the seven sons of Sceva. Your students should be able to see that these fellows did not have Christ's power to cast out demons because they did not know Christ, as Paul did. God's power is only available to those who belong to Him.

C. Christ's Name is Held in Honor and Fear, Even by Unbelievers in Ephesus (verse 17)

Due largely to the public nature of the humiliation of the sons of Sceva, the people of Ephesus became aware that there was power in the name of Jesus Christ. They were "seized with fear" and held the Name in high honor.

Ask your students, "Do you remember the people of Athens, who couldn't care less about Paul's message or about the Lord Jesus? Do you think there were many people like that in Ephesus?" Ephesus was a city where the power of God was demonstrated openly and dramatically. Even unbelievers in Ephesus knew something unusual was happening in the city. In the absence of indifference, there will always be two kinds of responses to the Gospel; either the Gospel will be accepted and embraced or it will be rejected and opposed. The city of Ephesus was no exception; Luke's account describes these two reactions by looking at the actions of two groups of people.

3. The Ephesian Believers Demonstrate Their Faith (Acts 19:18-22)

Another result of the incident involving the sons of Sceva was that the believers of Ephesus were confronted with the magnitude of the evil associated with demonic forces. Ephesus was a center for magical incantations; its citizens would buy and sell scrolls containing spells and supposedly magical information. These scrolls were believed to bring luck and power to their owners. The Kingdom of Light can have no fellowship with the Kingdom of Darkness, and the Ephesian believers made their break from their former occult practices. Many publicly confessed their evil deeds, and some who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls for a public burning. These scrolls were quite valuable, but the believers were not concerned about the cost - even though it totaled the sum of fifty thousand days' wages (a drachma was the amount of money paid the average worker for a day's labor)! These believers were willing to leave their old way of life behind. They were willing to lose earthly possessions and wealth. They wanted to live fully for Christ,

whatever the cost. Because of this, the power of God became even more evident in Ephesus, and “the word of the Lord spread widely” (verse 20).

4. Demetrius Demonstrates His Concern for Worldly Wealth (Acts 19:23-41)

In contrast to the believers, who showed no concern for the cost of following Christ, the main concern of the unbelievers in the city seemed to have been “the bottom line.” Demetrius was a silversmith, and he and the other silversmiths of Ephesus made a good part of their income by making and selling miniature silver reproductions of the shrine of Artemis - the principal pagan temple in Ephesus and one of the seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This business began to suffer as a result of Paul’s teaching and the ensuing conversions of worshipers of the goddess. Demetrius called the silversmith guild together and worked his fellow craftsmen into an uproar when he accused Paul of ruining the market for miniature temples by “leading astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia” (verse 26). He even invoked the “civic pride” of the craftsmen by stating that the goddess herself was being discredited and would “be robbed of her divine majesty” (verse 27). Read the account of the resulting riot in Acts 19:28-41. Discuss with your students how the riot began, why Paul was begged by his friends not to enter the amphitheater, and how God protected Gaius, Aristarchus, and the other Ephesian Christians.

Law and order prevailed in Ephesus for the moment, but the proconsul left the door open for Demetrius and the others to bring formal charges against Paul in a legal assembly. Once again, Paul was forced to leave for the safety of the church. He had made good use of his time in Ephesus, however, and left a church that was well-grounded in the truth.

Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and Colossians were written to the believers of this area while Paul was in prison in Rome. Because of the lack of personal greetings in Ephesians, it was probably a “circular letter,” written to be read by the church in Ephesus and then passed on to the other churches in the area. Ephesians, unlike some of the other letters Paul wrote, does not address any particular error or problem; instead, it broadens the readers’ understanding of God’s purposes in the world and in the church. Colossians, on the other hand, does correct some heresies that had arisen in the Colossian church (such as angel worship and asceticism, considered by many scholars to be early forms of a heresy later known as Gnosticism), but it also addresses some of the same themes dealt with in the book of Ephesians. Paul wrote these letters to help ensure that the Ephesians and Colossians would continue to live fully for Christ, forsaking their former lifestyles and the temptations of the world for the joy of knowing Him.

Mission Emphasis

In this lesson, we saw Paul taking a brief “furlough” in his home church of Antioch before starting out on the third missionary journey. Similar furloughs are still taken by modern missionaries - usually about every five to seven years. These furloughs give the missionary a needed break, and (hopefully!) the opportunity to rest. If he has been laboring in a foreign field, it gives him the chance to see friends and family back home again. It also gives the missionary a chance to bring his supporting churches up to date on the work he has been doing. If your class missionary has recently visited your church (in the past year or so), or if he’s due to visit soon, be sure to mention this to your class.

Worksheet

The three verses that your students will look up this week will remind them not to love money, their families, or the world more than they love Jesus. In Part II, your students will need crayons to draw pictures to fill in the blanks in Matthew 6:20-21. [HINT: For the word “thieves,” they might draw a man’s masked face or a figure of a man in a striped prison suit.]

Related Music

“My Jesus, I Love Thee” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #648); “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #707).

I. Loves Me, Loves Me Not - The Ephesian believers were known for their love for Christ and their willingness to live fully for Him. The Bible reminds us to love Christ more than anything else. Look up the following verses, and write down what we are warned not to love more than Jesus.

Matthew 6:24 - "I must love Jesus more than _____."

Matthew 10:37 - "I must love Jesus more than _____."

I John 2:15 - "I must love Jesus more than _____."

II. Let Us Rebus - Look up Matthew 6:20-21 and draw pictures of the missing words to fill the blank spaces.

"But store up for yourselves _____ in heaven,

where _____ and rust do not destroy, and where

_____ do not break in and steal. For where your

_____ is, there your _____ will be also."

Memory Verse

Acts 9:17 - "Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord - Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here - has sent me to you so that you may see again, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.'"

ARREST IN JERUSALEM

Acts 21:15-23:22

Lesson Aim

To encourage students to be ready, like Paul, to be identified with Jesus Christ, and to help them understand that God will always be with us in such circumstances.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:18 - “Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again.”

Lesson Background

Paul arrived in Jerusalem with an offering taken by the Gentile churches to help the poor believers in there. He came to Jerusalem knowing that the Spirit had warned of his arrest and imprisonment there. He also came in a storm of controversy; once again he had to deal with charges that he had taught the Jews who live among the Gentiles to scorn the law of Moses and to refuse to circumcise their children. At the request of the brothers in Jerusalem, Paul sponsored the purification rites of four men who had taken a Nazirite vow. This was a very “Jewish” thing to do and would help Paul’s reputation among the Jewish believers.

Paul has received some criticism for going along with this plan. Others defend Paul’s action, saying it was characteristic of his resolve to live as a Jew among the Jews and as a Gentile among the Gentiles (see I Corinthians 9:19-23). As F.F. Bruce writes in his book, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, “It is certain that in Jerusalem, of all places, he would live as a practicing Jew, if only out of consistency with his declared policy, to ‘give no offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God’ and to ‘try to please all men in

everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of the many, that they may be saved' (I Corinthians 10:32f.)." Whether or not we agree with Paul's decision, which led to his vulnerability in the temple, we will see in it an act of humility and love. While Paul himself did not feel bound by the ceremonies of the law, he was willing to subject himself to that law for the sake of fellow believers.

In this lesson we will see God's special protection and comfort given to His servant who had carried His name before the Gentiles and their kings and who had suffered and would suffer great things for His name (Acts 9:15-16).

Lesson Procedure

1. Paul is Arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-22:30)

While it is important for you to know why Paul was in the Temple in Jerusalem, the circumstances surrounding his presence there are complicated and would be confusing to your students. For the lesson's purposes, we will begin with Acts 21:27. Explain that Paul had come to Jerusalem with a special offering that the Gentile churches had taken for the poor believers in Jerusalem (Acts 24:17). He was in the temple with four other Jewish believers when the trouble started. Some Jews from the province of Asia recognized him, and stirred up the crowd by saying that Paul was teaching "all men everywhere" to have no regard for the Jews and the law and the Temple. They also claimed that Paul had brought a Gentile into the Temple area, which was expressly forbidden (any Gentile who entered this area would be put to death). Neither charge was true. Paul did not teach Jewish believers to disregard the law - he taught Gentile believers that following the law was not necessary for salvation. As to the second charge, Luke tells us that these Jews had seen Paul with a Greek named Trophimus in the city and had jumped to the conclusion that he had brought him into the Temple area. It seems very unlikely that Paul, who was so careful not to give offense to the Jews, would do something as outrageous as that. But it didn't matter if the rumors were true; the crowd was stirred up, Paul was seized and the mob was in the process of trying to kill him when the authorities intervened.

A. Paul is Rescued from the Violent Crowd (verses 31-36)

The commander of the Roman troops stationed in Jerusalem heard that the city was in an uproar and came with some soldiers into the riot area. The crowd stopped beating Paul, who was arrested and chained on the spot. The commander asked who Paul was and what he had done and received several different answers, indicating the confusion of the mob. The crowd only knew one thing for certain - they wanted to get rid of Paul! The violence was so great that Paul had to be literally carried by the soldiers to the barracks to protect him from the rioters!

B. Paul Addresses the Angry Crowd (Acts 21:37-22:22)

Paul received permission from the commander to speak to the crowd. He began by giving them his personal testimony of how Jesus Christ had changed his life. He told them that he used to be a Pharisee and a persecutor of the Christians until his experience on the Damascus road. You may wish to read Acts 22:6-21 aloud in class - this is Paul's own version of what happened to him on the day he met Jesus Christ.

When Paul stated that God had called him to preach the truth to the Gentiles, the Jews refused to hear any more. “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!” they cried (verse 22). They literally shouted down the rest of his message, and the commander had Paul brought into the barracks.

“Can you think of Someone else to whom the Jews refused to listen; Someone else whom they thought ‘wasn’t worthy to live?’” Like his Lord before him, Paul was condemned by the Jewish people and given into the hands of the Roman authorities for torture and perhaps even execution. But this was not God’s sovereign purpose for Paul at this point, and he protected Paul in the hands of his enemies.

C. Paul Escapes a Beating (verses 23-30)

By this time the crowd was wild again, and the commander believed the only way he could get at the truth was to have Paul tortured and questioned. He ordered Paul to be flogged with a scourge, which was a whip of leather thongs, with metal or pieces of bone attached on the ends of the thongs. According to Roman law, such an instrument could be used on a slave, but not on a Roman citizen. As Paul was being tied to the whipping post, he informed the centurion of his Roman citizenship: “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?” (verse 25).

This was alarming news to the centurion, who reported it to the commander. The commander questioned Paul about this and the scene changed dramatically. Paul’s interrogators left, and he was no longer threatened with a beating. The commander decided that the only way to discover what the charges were against Paul was to bring him before the Sanhedrin. He called for the chief priests and Sanhedrin to assemble and brought Paul before them.

3. Paul Before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10)

This group of the Jewish ruling class could hardly be expected to be sympathetic to Paul. After his very first statement, the high priest commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth for daring to say he had a good conscience before God. Paul lashed out in anger, but later apologized for insulting the high priest; the office deserved respect, even if the man didn’t.

Apparently Paul felt that his only hope of escaping condemnation from this group was to turn them against one another. He appealed to the Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection of the dead, by saying that it was his own belief in the resurrection that had caused him to be brought to trial. Suddenly the attention was taken off Paul, and a dispute arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees, who didn’t believe in the resurrection. Eventually, however, Paul became the focus of the ruckus once again, and the commander feared he was about to be torn in pieces by the two groups. He had troops enter the assembly to take Paul out by force and brought him back safely to the barracks.

4. Paul’s Vision in the Night (Acts 23:11)

Paul had been saved from a rioting crowd, a beating from the Romans, and being torn to pieces by the Sanhedrin. The Lord had protected him thus far, but the future must have looked bleak to Paul as he considered what might come in the days ahead. Paul needed reassurance and comfort

in this time of crisis, and the Lord sent this comfort in the form of a vision. Read verse 11 aloud in class, and discuss the mental picture of the Lord standing near Paul and His words about Paul's future ministry in Rome.

Paul had courageously proclaimed his faith in the Lord Jesus before an angry mob and the hostile Sanhedrin. He would also have opportunity to speak of his faith before governors and kings. Jesus spoke of this very thing happening in Luke 21 when he said, "They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name" (Luke 21:12). Have your students look up and read aloud Luke 21:12-19. Discuss the promise given in verses 17-19: "All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life." Remind your students that God is able to protect them in all situations - even in scary situations, when they stand up for their faith in a time or place where it is not popular. Even those who ultimately die for their faith - as even some children have had to do - have the wonderful promise of eternal life awaiting them in heaven.

5. Paul is Again Protected from a Murderous Plot (Acts 23:12-23)

We see God's protection of Paul one last time in this lesson, and it happened the morning after Paul's vision in the night. Realizing that they are running out of legal options to deal with Paul, more than forty Jewish men bind themselves with an oath: they would not eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul. They made an arrangement with the Sanhedrin, promising to murder Paul if the assembly would have him summoned to appear before them again.

God providentially allowed Paul's nephew to hear of the plot, and Paul sent the young man to inform the commander. By this time the commander must have been sick to death of Paul; this entire situation was getting entirely too complex and difficult. He decided for Paul's safety to send Paul to Governor Felix and let him deal with the problem. Paul was sent with two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to Caesarea by night. Once again the Lord protected his servant as he continued to testify of Jesus Christ, even in chains.

"Do you think Paul was ever scared during the time he was a prisoner? Who do you think gave him the courage he needed?" The Holy Spirit gave Paul the courage he needed and the words he would say as he appeared before governors and kings. He can give us courage, too, as we stand up for our faith and let the world around us know that we are Christians.

Mission Emphasis

Paul came to Jerusalem to bring a special offering to the poor believers in Jerusalem. The New Testament churches believed in giving and caring for each other's needs. Perhaps your class is aware of some need that your class missionary has, and you would like to start a special missions fund to help meet that need. Or perhaps your class would like to buy a gift for the missionary's child or wife, or for the missionary himself. You might make a special bank for a missionary gift fund and suggest ways that your students might be able to earn money to contribute toward this gift.

Worksheet

Have one of your best readers read the story “Courage for Natasha” aloud in class. This is a true story, and took place when Natasha Vins was only seven years old. Explain that, in the old Soviet Union, the official religion was atheism. Discuss the story and answer the questions that follow it during class.

Related Music

John 16:33 (“These Things I Have Spoken Unto You”); “More Love to Thee, O Christ” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #649).

“Courage for Natasha”

Natasha’s heart was pounding as she stood with the other first graders in the school assembly hall. Today was a special holiday in the Soviet Union, and each of the first graders would receive a little red-star pin. In the middle of the pin was a picture of Lenin, who was a Soviet national hero. Each first grader had to promise today to love Lenin much more than their parents or anyone else in the world.

Natasha was very frightened, but she knew she couldn’t promise such a thing. She knew she couldn’t wear the little red pin. She told her teacher, “I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is in my heart. That is why I can’t wear this pin, and I cannot promise that Lenin will be the most important person to me - more important than God or more important than my parents.”

Natasha’s teacher was shocked. In the Soviet Union, children were not supposed to be taught about God. They were not supposed to learn about Jesus. Natasha’s own father, Georgi Vins, spent many years in prison for preaching the Gospel, for this was against the law in the Soviet Union. From that day on, Natasha’s teachers made things difficult for Natasha. They tried to convince her that there was no God.

Now Natasha is a grown woman, and many things have changed in the old Soviet Union since she was a girl. It is no longer illegal to preach the Gospel or to teach children about God. Now Natasha and her father go to many places in Russia to speak about the Lord Jesus. Sometimes they even go to schools, where Natasha can tell the children about the One she truly does love with all her heart - the Lord Jesus Christ!

Answer the following questions about the story of Natasha:

1. Why did Natasha say it would be wrong for her to wear the little star pin?

2. How would you feel if you had to tell your teacher you couldn't do something because you are a Christian? _____

3. Have you ever had to do that? _____

4. Do you think God even wants children to be brave and stand up for what they believe? Why or why not? _____

5. Who can give you the courage you need to stand up for your faith? _____

Have you ever had to ask Him for help to do this? _____

Memory Verse

Acts 9:18 - "Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes and he could see again."

PAUL'S JOURNEY TO ROME

Acts 27

Lesson Aim

To help students understand that children of God can have peace and security through all the storms of life.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:19 - "He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus."

Lesson Background

Paul spent about two years imprisoned in Caesarea, and during that time he presented his case before Felix, Porcius Festus and King Herod Agrippa II. At one point, Paul feared that Festus would send him back to Jerusalem to stand before a Jewish religious court. As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to refuse a trial in a local provincial court, and he claimed his right to be heard by Caesar himself. Therefore, Festus and King Agrippa decided to send him to Rome, where he could await his trial before Caesar.

Acts 27 is a detailed account of Paul's journey to Rome, the perilous storm, and his shipwreck on the island of Malta. *Eerdmans' Family Encyclopedia of the Bible* states that Luke's account of this voyage "reads like a ship's log, with details about weather conditions, seamanship, and even a passenger list. It is one of the most vivid descriptions of a voyage in the whole of ancient literature." Luke's eyewitness account not only gives us insight into sea travel; it also shows us Paul's character and courage in a dramatic way.

For this lesson, it would be helpful to have a map to show the course that Paul took on his journey to Rome. The NIV Study Bible has a nice map, which shows just how far off-course the storm blew Paul's

ship. The seamen were only planning to sail from one harbor on Crete to another to winter there, but the storm sent them to Malta, which is just south of Sicily. If you don't have a Bible map, you should be able to locate these two islands on another map instead.

Lesson Procedure

Ask your students if any of them have ever been caught in a violent storm - perhaps a thunderstorm, a tornado, or a blinding snowstorm. You will probably get several accounts from the children; allow each to have his or her say, but don't dwell too long on any one story. Explain that today's lesson is about a "doozy" of a storm that lasted for over two weeks! Paul and Luke were caught in this storm in a small ship on the open sea, but God preserved their lives and the lives of the men sailing with them.

1. Paul Sets Sail for Rome (Acts 27:1-8)

It had been determined by Festus, the governor of Caesarea, and King Agrippa that Paul had to go as a prisoner to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. Paul, along with several other prisoners, was put in the custody of a centurion named Julius, who was responsible for delivering Paul for trial. We know that Luke was allowed to travel to Rome with Paul because the narrative again shifts to "we"; perhaps Luke had been staying near Paul in his captivity, waiting for this chance to accompany him. Julius took his prisoners on a ship that hugged the coastline with the intention of booking passage on a ship that was bound for Rome.

Rome controlled the Mediterranean Sea, and state-run grain ships, some as long as 200 feet, brought corn from Egypt to Italy. In the summer, these ships would make a straight journey from Alexandria to Rome, but out of season the ships would hug the coast and go from port to port because this was safer. In Bible times, the Mediterranean was safe only for sailing in the summer, and ships would only sail between November and March in an emergency.

Julius found an Alexandrian ship taking the safe route to Rome in the port of Myra. It was now late September or early October, and sailing was already becoming treacherous. The grain ship had difficulty moving along the coast and making it to the port of Fair Havens, on the island of Crete.

2. Paul Warns Against Sailing to the Next Port (Acts 27:9-12)

The ship had lost time on the voyage to Fair Havens and it was now late in the season. The pilot and the owner of the ship did not want to winter in this port; the port in Phoenix was a better place to winter, with a harbor that would shelter the ship from storms. If you have a map that shows these two ports, you can see that they are fairly close together. However, during a meeting to decide the next course of action, Paul warned them against sailing to the next port. Read verse 10 aloud to the class. It is unclear whether Paul received some kind of warning or message from God about this; he did not mention any divine direction at this point. But Paul was a seasoned traveler; we know from II Corinthians 6 that he had survived three shipwrecks before this occurrence took place! Despite Julius' apparent esteem for Paul, he took the advice of the majority of the seamen and stayed with the vessel as it sailed for Phoenix.

3. The Ship Gets Caught in a Terrible Storm (Acts 27:13-26)

You'll want to read all of these verses aloud in your class, as they describe the storm that blows Paul's ship off course and halfway across the Mediterranean. The ship was pulling its lifeboat behind it, and when the storm became violent, it interfered with the steering. The sailors decided to bring the lifeboat on board and were barely able to do so. The sailors then threw all of the cargo overboard (except the precious grain - see verse 38), and then they threw over the ship's tackle. But the storm continued, and day after day passed without a break in the clouds. Many on board lost hope of ever surviving the storm.

I can't help but think that this was Paul's idea of a perfect Mediterranean cruise - after all, here he was with about 270 men, all of whom are thinking about their imminent demise and the future of their souls. What a perfect place for preaching the Gospel! Paul and Luke knew that God was in control, and they were able to have peace even in this terrible storm. Paul also knew that it was the Lord's will for him to appear before Caesar, so he had no fears about his own safety. But Paul was concerned about the lives of the men traveling with him, and the Lord sent His angel to reassure Paul that, although the ship would be lost, he and all the men on board would be saved. Paul reported this message to the ship's company, encouraging them to keep up their courage.

"Do you think the sailors felt better after Paul told them what the angel had said? Do you think Paul and Luke felt better?" Now that they had been assured that the people on board would be spared, Paul and Luke at least were comforted and encouraged. As for the other men on board, they would soon see that the Lord's word can be trusted.

4. The Shipwreck (Acts 27:27-44)

We are told in verse 27 that the storm continued for fourteen days. The sailors took soundings and discovered that the water was getting shallower, and they feared that the ship would be smashed against the rocks. They planned to abandon ship, but Paul foiled their plan, alerting Julius of their escape so that the Roman soldiers cut the ropes from the lifeboat and let it fall away.

The next morning, just before dawn, Paul encouraged his shipmates to eat some food and to take heart. He reassured them that none of them would perish, and his words had a good effect on the crew. When the sun rose, they saw land and made an attempt to run the ship aground on its beach, but the ship got caught on a sandbar and the surf began to tear it to pieces. At this point, it looked like "every man for himself," and the soldiers were afraid that some of the prisoners might escape. If a prisoner escaped, the life of his guard could be taken in his place, and so the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to prevent this from happening. But Julius did not want Paul killed, and so he stopped their plan. All those who could swim jumped overboard, and those who could not swim made it to shore on planks and pieces of the ship. In this way, Paul's prophecy that all 276 of the ship's passengers would survive the storm came to pass. They were shipwrecked off the shore of the island of Malta, and next week we will continue the story from there.

Conclusion

Paul was a prisoner on a small ship caught in a terrible storm, in danger from the soldiers and from the storm itself. Yet we see him in every scene as a man at peace. He had confidence in the word of the Lord, confidence in the Lord's power, and in his sovereignty over every situation. Sometimes we get caught in "storms," too. It maybe an actual storm, when we need God's protection, or perhaps we're in a storm of life, when bad things are happening around us and we don't know what will happen next. We may not always know what will happen next, but we do know where we can turn. We can look to the Lord for help, knowing He has power and control over every situation. We can ask Him for the peace that "transcends all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Like Paul, we can be at peace in the midst of the storms of life.

Mission Emphasis

This week we will begin a two-part mission emphasis on our own missionary responsibility. Remind your students that God has called each of us to be His witnesses. If we belong to Christ, then we can tell our friends and our families about Him and what He means to us. Have your students look up I Peter 3:15 and discuss what it means to be prepared to give the reason for the hope within them. Remind them that they can ask God for the courage to stand for Him, and that He will always be with them in such circumstances. Be aware that some of your students may not be Christians, and challenge them to respond to the Gospel that Jesus told His followers to share.

Worksheet

Ask each of your students to imagine that he or she is the captain of the ship on which Paul was traveling. Have them choose one incident from Acts 27 to write about in the "Captain's Log," or diary. For example, they may choose to write about the first day that the ship was caught in the storm, or the day Paul told them about the angel's message, or the day the crew almost abandoned ship. Remind them to include not only the facts, but the things they think the captain might have been thinking or feeling. Have them write their "log entry" in the first person.

Related Music

"My Peace I Give Unto You"; "He is Able"; "It is Well With My Soul" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #691); "My Anchor Holds" (*Trinity Hymnal*, #617).

Just Imagine - Imagine you are the captain of Paul's ship. What do you think this journey would have been like for you? Choose one of the things that happened in today's lesson and write about it in your "ship's log."

CAPTAIN'S LOG

Memory Verse

Acts 9:19 - "He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus."

PAUL ON MALTA AND IN ROME

Acts 28

Lesson Aim

To help students understand that God requires His people to be willing and obedient servants.

Memory Verse

Acts 9:20 - "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God."

Lesson Background

The book of Acts concludes with Paul in captivity in Rome, awaiting his trial before Caesar. But many Bible scholars believe that Paul was eventually released from this imprisonment in about 62 A.D., and that his martyrdom did not take place until 67/68 A.D., after a second imprisonment. There is much evidence to support this idea, including the fact that the book of Acts ends here rather abruptly; this probably wouldn't be the case if Paul had been martyred after this imprisonment. Also, there are references in several of the latter epistles to places and cities that seem to indicate that Paul took another missionary journey (see, for example, I Timothy 1:3 and II Timothy 4:20). Another indication of a second imprisonment is that Paul's description of his living conditions in II Timothy sound quite different from the house imprisonment that he endured in Acts 28. Then he was chained, cold, and his friends had difficulty finding him (see II Timothy 1:16-17). This suggests a cold, damp dungeon for Paul during his last days on earth. Finally, there is a tradition that Paul took a fourth missionary journey to Spain after his first captivity, but we have no reference to this in the New Testament.

Whether Paul survived this imprisonment or not, it is important to note Paul's overcoming spirit and his willing service to God in this last chapter of Acts. His ministry continues on almost uninterrupted - only now his base of operations is the rented house in which he is imprisoned. How true he is to the words he wrote in II Corinthians 12:15: "I will very gladly spend for you everything I have, and expend myself as well!" May we encourage our students this week to be willing servants of God, and may we model for them that kind of willing obedience.

Lesson Procedure

Have your class review last week's lesson on Paul's perilous voyage by asking the following questions:

- Why was Paul sailing to Rome?
- Why did he advise against sailing to the other port on Crete?
- What happened when the seamen ignored his advice?
- How long did the storm last?
- What did God send to Paul to reassure him of the passengers' safety?
- What happened to the ship?

After your class has satisfactorily answered these questions, remind them that the ship was destroyed just off the coast of Malta and that all 276 of the men on board were able to make it to shore.

1. Paul on Malta (Acts 28:1-10)

Banish all thoughts of native tribesmen greeting these castaways on their island. The islanders of Malta, while referred to as "barbarians" in some translations, were descendants of the seafaring Phoenicians, but were at this time entirely Romanized (the Greeks referred to all non-Greeks as "barbarians"). Luke remarks on their unusual kindness as they take in Paul and the other men. They built a fire to help the men recover from their experience in the cold sea. Paul worked with them to get the fire going and was bitten by a viper hiding in some brushwood. The islanders recognized this particular type of viper as being highly poisonous. They concluded that Paul must be marked for death by the gods for some murder he had committed. Paul merely shook the reptile off into the fire without any signs of being affected by the poison. It is amusing to think of these islanders, watching Paul closely, looking for the grim signs of his impending death. It must have been something of a disappointment to them when nothing unusual happened. The islanders were right when they suspected something supernatural had occurred, but they were wrong to think that Paul was the source of the power, concluding that he had to be a god to survive such a bite. It was likely, however, that Paul was able to explain to them what the source of his power was as he lived among these people for several months.

The castaways were brought into the home of Publius, the chief official of Malta, and Paul healed his father of fever and dysentery. After that, the sick of the island were brought to Paul and he healed them as well. It is little wonder that Paul and his companions were held in honor by the islanders. When it was possible for them to put out to sea again, three months later, the islanders graciously provided them with all the supplies they needed.

"Paul was a prisoner, headed for Rome to stand trial before Caesar, when this unexpected 'stop' along the way occurred. But Paul, as always, was the willing, obedient servant. How did he make good use of his time on Malta?" Paul's presence on the island was certainly a blessing to these

people as he healed the sick among them. While Luke doesn't mention Paul preaching to them, we can hardly imagine that he would not share the Gospel with these people. As John Calvin writes in his commentary on Acts, "Neither need we doubt but that Paul sought as well to cure their souls as their bodies." Perhaps it is for this very reason that God had brought him to Malta - so that these people, too, might hear the Gospel.

2. Paul Arrives in Rome (Acts 28:11-31)

The sailing season resumed in late February or early March, and once again Paul and Luke set sail in an Alexandrian boat to Rome. This time there were no mishaps; after stopping at a couple of ports, the ship arrived at Puteoli on the Italian mainland, and from there the company traveled by land to Rome. Some of the Christians from Rome heard that they were coming, and they traveled to the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet Paul. Seeing these brothers greatly encouraged Paul, and he thanked God for their presence.

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was put under house arrest; although he was allowed to live in his own rented home, there was a soldier posted to guard him at all times. It is interesting to see how quickly Paul adapted to his new situation; within three days he called together the Jewish leaders of Rome to explain to them the Gospel of Jesus Christ! There was no bitterness or resentment on Paul's part toward God or his Jewish brothers. Instead, we are told in verse 23 that Paul preached to them from morning to evening about the kingdom of God. Some were convinced by Paul's reasoning from the Scriptures, while others did not believe. But the work of God continued through His willing and obedient servant. This situation in Rome continued for two years, and Luke writes that Paul was able to preach the Gospel "boldly and without hindrance" (verse 31). Have your students look up Romans 1:10-13 and read it aloud in class.

"Paul writes to the Romans that he wants to come and visit them so that he can benefit them spiritually and so that he and the Roman Christians could encourage each other. How did his prayer request come true?" Finally, Paul's desire to visit the church in Rome was fulfilled. Even though he came to the city as a prisoner, he was able to teach and preach and "impart a spiritual gift" to the Roman believers. His prayer that he might "have a harvest among [them], just as I have had among the other Gentiles" (Romans 1:13) was answered by God in Paul's sufferings and imprisonments.

Conclusion

Paul could have felt sorry for himself and he could have become bitter about his imprisonment. Or he could have spent all of his time praying to be released from this situation. Instead, he used his time, even as a prisoner, to work as God's obedient and willing servant among the Romans, just as he had used his time on Malta to help the people there. "Sometimes God puts His people in difficult situations because that is where we can do the most for His kingdom. For example, maybe you are the only Christian in your class at school. It is not wrong to pray for another Christian friend, but realize at the same time that God wants you to be His willing servant in that place. That means you should live in a way that's pleasing to Him. Whatever our situation, let's look for opportunities to love and serve our God."

Mission Emphasis

Last week we discussed the importance of being missionaries in our own homes and schools and neighborhoods. This week, let's talk about the fact that God may call one or more of your students to the mission field when they become adults. Explain that all Christians need to be obedient to God's calling, and sometimes God chooses someone for the very special work of becoming a missionary. It is important for your students to be obedient to God now, even as children, so that they might begin the lifelong habit of obeying God's voice. Encourage your students to pray even now for direction and guidance from God, and for a willing heart that will follow God all the years of their lives.

Worksheet

This week's worksheet is very straightforward, designed to help your students review the life of Paul. If you like, you may wish to give each student some drawing paper so that they can draw a picture of their favorite story from Paul's life.

Related Music

“Make Me a Servant”; “O Jesus, I Have Promised” (*Trinity Hymnal*, #654).

Answer the following questions to help you review the lessons from this quarter:

1. What is your favorite story from the life of Paul? _____

2. Why is it your favorite? _____

3. What do you admire the most about the apostle Paul? _____

4. Paul wrote, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13).

Is there anything that you would like God's strength to do? If so, what is it?

Memory Verse

Acts 9:20 - "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God."