

Paul before King Agrippa

Bible Background • ACTS 25:23–26:32

Printed Text • ACTS 26:19–32 | Devotional Reading • ACTS 23:1–11

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** why Paul stood up for what he believed; **FEEL** confident in sharing our faith; and examine ways to **DEFEND** our faith, even in the face of rejection.

In Focus

Angie was an elementary school teacher at the local school. The parents of her students loved Angie, and her principal always complimented her on how well she controlled her classroom. Many of the teachers looked up to her and often asked her advice. Angie liked her coworkers but wasn't close to any of them. During lunch breaks, she often sat in the corner of the room rather than at the table with the other teachers. Angie, a Christian and a regular church attendee, was increasingly uncomfortable with the discussions that took place in the teachers' break room.

Off-color jokes were frequently told by some of her coworkers and lately, "the church" had been the favorite butt of the jokes. Christian beliefs and practices resulted in side-splitting laughter. Angie felt that she should say something, but she was afraid that the people, who thought so highly of her, might become resentful. How would the people who thought she was an amazing teacher react after finding out she was one of the people they made jokes about?

Taking a stand for what you believe is never easy. Christians are not exempt. In today's lesson, we will see that God understands that His people are the objects of persecution and that He can fortify us to take a stand in Jesus' name.

Keep in Mind

"But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus;
but speak forth the words of truth and soberness."
(Acts 26:25, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 26:19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

20 But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them:

31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

The People, Places, and Times

King Agrippa II. He was the son of King Agrippa I, the ruler who was responsible for beheading the apostle James and who had Peter arrested. He was the grandson of the ruler who'd had John the Baptist beheaded. He was also the great-grandson of Herod the Great, who, in his attempt to kill the baby Jesus, had killed all the male Jewish children two years old and younger in Bethlehem.

Agrippa II's power was limited to authority over Jewish affairs, Scriptures, and conflicts. Rome appointed him as the curator of the Temple, meaning he had authority over the Temple treasury and to appoint high priests. Agrippa II did not have any children, and when

he met the apostle Paul, he was living in an incestuous relationship with his younger sister Bernice. Agrippa's capitol was Caesarea Philippi, which he renamed Neronias in honor of Caesar Nero. Agrippa II called himself "Great King, pious Friend of Caesar and Friend of Rome." The last of the Herods, he died in A.D. 100 at age 73.

Background

When Jesus called Saul of Tarsus to be an apostle, he sent Ananias to Paul, to pray for him and to welcome him into the Christian family. The Lord prophesied, "[Saul] is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (from Acts 9:15). Following his conversion from persecutor

to Christian, the apostle Paul was a faithful and fervent disciple. He traveled broadly, spreading the Good News and winning souls to Christ. His zeal was not without trouble. Paul frequently found himself in personal danger. Opposition to Paul often came from the Jews, who believed he was a heretic. In Acts 24, an imprisoned Paul stands before the Jewish governor, Felix, facing false accusations that he incited Christians to riot against Jews, was the ringleader of a sect of zealots intent on overthrowing the Romans, and insulted the Temple, its priests and custodians. Although Paul successfully defended himself against these charges, the Jewish authorities pressured Felix to leave him in prison where he remained for two years.

Felix is succeeded by another governor, Porcius Festus. The Jewish authorities quickly met with Festus and urged him to transport Paul to Jerusalem. Unknown to the governor, they secretly planned to have Paul assassinated during the transport. This plan was thwarted, and under God's direction, Paul wisely appeals to Festus to be tried in Rome as a Roman citizen. Festus had no choice, and Paul was brought to Rome to appear before Caesar, thus fulfilling the Scripture.

is married to his full sister, Queen Bernice—Paul is aware that King Agrippa is Jewish and is considered an expert on Jewish laws and customs. Paul makes it clear that he, like all Jews, is aware that the Jews were a “special” population, and he asserts that he is living in full expectation of God's promises to the Jewish people. Paul does not sugarcoat the truth. He tells the whole truth, including the fact that he had formerly hated and ardently persecuted Christians. Paul explains to King Agrippa that it is only after his conversion, when he begins to be a witness to the Gentiles for Christ, that he becomes a target of the Jewish authorities. The political charges against Paul were bogus. He had never offended the sanctity of the Temple. His charges stemmed solely from his attempts to preach the Gospel, based on the Word of God. Paul freely and boldly admits preaching that Jesus had suffered; that Jesus had died and had been the first to rise from the dead, and that Jesus would one day proclaim light to the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul's assertion of Jesus' death, resurrection, and preaching to a world without particular respect to Jew or Gentile is why Jews had “tried to kill (him)” (v. 21, NLT).

At-A-Glance

1. Paul Declares His Apostleship (Acts 26:19–23)
2. Paul Declares the Truth (vv. 27–29)
3. Paul Declared Innocent (vv. 30–32)

In Depth

1. Paul Declares His Apostleship (Acts 26:19–23)

Paul begins by stating his credentials as a faithful Jew, who before his conversion had lived as a Pharisee. In spite of the fact that Agrippa was living in an incestuous relationship—he

2. Paul Declares the Truth (vv. 27–29)

This declaration proves to be too much to the governor, Festus, who shouts that Paul's Gospel will make people believe he is crazy. Modern-day Christians would do well to remember that when properly presented, some people will think the same thing of them. Paul taught the Corinthians, “the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing” (from 1 Corinthians 1:18, NIV). We must not allow such allegations to stop us from preaching to a dying world that there is a Savior in Jesus, the Christ. Our Gospel is characterized by truth and based on historical events: the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Paul tells Festus that the things he has preached were based on truths and were probably known

to King Agrippa. Paul now presses the challenge and asks King Agrippa whether he believes the prophets. In Acts 26:28 (NKJV), Agrippa's response is curious. He says in part, "You almost persuade me." One way to understand Agrippa's response is to mean that in a short time, Paul could persuade him to believe. We want to remember that there were obvious barriers to Agrippa's acceptance of the Gospel. One, seated next to him was his wife, who was also his sister. One of the hallmarks of Christianity is the willingness to turn away from sin and darkness in our lives. Here, Agrippa is openly living in an incestuous relationship. He may have been unwilling to give her up and other immoral areas in his life to embrace Christianity. Another possibility is that King Agrippa feared that others, like Festus, would believe that he too was crazy if he embraced Christianity.

3. Paul Declared Innocent (vv. 30–32)

Paul has stated his case and now King Agrippa, his wife, and Festus go off to discuss what they have heard. It is obvious to all that Paul has done nothing wrong and is not guilty of any of the charges. As far as they are concerned, Paul is innocent. However, it appears that there is a legal problem with setting him free. Paul's initial appeal, as a Roman citizen, was to have his case heard by the "Roman" emperor. Agrippa's response seems to imply that once an appeal was made, it could not be retracted. Rather than read this as a mistake, Christians should recognize Paul's continued imprisonment as a fulfillment of God's plan. Paul will get to witness to the emperor in the same way he had just witnessed to King Agrippa and the governor. He will also fulfill a long-standing desire of Paul's to visit the Christian community already present in Rome (Acts 19:21).

Search the Scriptures

1. What were Paul's main three points of preaching (Acts 25:23)?

2. When Festus accuses Paul of being insane, what two qualities does Paul insist his testimony possesses (v. 25)?

Discuss the Meaning

Why is the resurrection of Christ from the dead so essential to the Gospel?

Liberating Lesson

This lesson clarifies that God has a plan for each of us. In it we are able to see that God knows best and that He will protect us from all things. The only things that can happen to us are what God wills. When God asks us to take a stand, we must believe He has already prepared the way. The same God that rescued Paul from the Jewish authorities promises protection to us all.

Application for Activation

Have you been guilty of remaining quiet when you hear others say negative and insulting things about Christians? Pray and ask God to give you some "holy boldness" this week and provide opportunities for you to declare your Christianity, appropriately, articulately, and with love.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Agrippa. uh-**GRIP**-uh.
Bernice. bur-**NEES**.
Damascus. duh-**MAS**-kuhs.
Festus. **FES**-tus.
Jerusalem. jeh-**ROO**-suh-luhm.
Judea. joo-**DEE**-uh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Appeasing Those Zealous for the Law
(Acts 21:17–26)

TUESDAY

A Stirred-Up Mob
(Acts 21:27–36)

WEDNESDAY

Taken into Custody
(Acts 22:17–24)

THURSDAY

You Must Bear Witness in Rome
(Acts 22:30–23:11)

FRIDAY

Paul's Background as a Pharisee
(Acts 26:1–8)

SATURDAY

Paul's Encounter with Christ
(Acts 26:9–18)

SUNDAY

Paul's Testimony before Roman
Authorities
(Acts 26:19–32)

Notes

Paul Sails for Rome

Bible Background • ACTS 27

Printed Text • ACTS 27:1–2, 33–44 | Devotional Reading • ROMANS 1:13–17

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW how Paul's faith in God enabled him to remain calm in the midst of a storm; APPRECIATE how our relationship with God helps us cope in a crisis; and WITNESS to others about relying on God's strength when facing crises.

In Focus

Lamar and Joyce stood on their porch, eagerly awaiting the ambulance that would bring their son, Drew, home from the military rehabilitation center. He had been there four months as he recovered from an injury suffered during military maneuvers overseas. Once strong and athletic, Drew was now paralyzed from the waist down, but they were grateful their son was alive.

Initially, Lamar and Joyce resented the situation, but Drew's response to his disability had changed that. Over time, they came to appreciate how Drew's faith in Jesus Christ enabled him to respond to this life storm with cheerfulness instead of bitterness, and they were learning to do the same. Lately, they were attending church, hoping to experience some of the peace Drew had. The many friends, neighbors, and strangers who had donated time and resources to renovate the home in time for Drew's homecoming awed them. They knew adjusting to home life might be difficult for them, but they were ready to accept the challenge.

How we weather life's storms reflects whether we truly have confidence in God's faithfulness. Today's lesson shows how Paul's calm response to a storm helped bring others to safety.

Keep in Mind

"And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship.
And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land."
(Acts 27:44, KJV)

Focal Verses

KJV Acts 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

The People, Places, and Times

Book of Acts. The second of two books written by Luke, Acts highlights “the acts of the apostles.” It shares accounts of how the early church fulfilled its mission to “be witnesses [of Jesus Christ] . . . in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8, KJV). As such, it offers a historical view of the growth of the church and the unity—or sometimes disunity—of its members. Furthermore, Luke shares the encouraging message that the Gospel is available to all people, regardless of race, class, or ethnicity.

Ships. In biblical times, ships were functional, not recreational, and used by

merchants and traders in normal business dealings from spring through fall. Winter made sailing more hazardous. Soldiers, meanwhile, used ships to protect the seas from pirates and during war.

Background

Arrested after preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and requested a trial before Caesar. Within days of traveling there, the stormy weather made the trip dangerous. Paul warned Julius, the centurion guarding the prisoners, that, “I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also” (from Acts

27:10, NIV). Julius ignored the warning, and the ship continued until it encountered a hurricane-like storm.

When they had given up hope and feared dying, Paul first encouraged them by sharing a vision he had in which an angel told him that no one on board would die. However, Paul warned that despite the encouraging news, they would be shipwrecked. Throughout the entire ordeal, Paul's confidence in God's faithfulness enabled him to act calmly. He believed the word of the Lord, delivered by the angel, and trusted God to fulfill His promise.

At-A-Glance

1. Calm before the Storm (Acts 27:1–2)
2. Calm in the Storm vv. 33–38
3. Shipwrecked, But Saved (vv. 39–44)

In Depth

1. Calm before the Storm (Acts 27:1–2)

On the surface, Paul's request for a trial before Caesar seemed easy to accomplish: Board a ship, travel to Rome, and speak with Caesar. But an unexpected hurricane-strength storm made the journey arduous and life-threatening. Before the storm hit, Paul—and everyone else on board—was seemingly unaware of its approach. The ship's crew comprised experienced seamen familiar with navigating seas in different weather conditions. Yet, their experience was no match for the storm.

Paul's experience with the possible cyclone or hurricane-force wind mirrors how Christians often unknowingly encounter storms. One day all may be well, and on the next a catastrophic storm rages. That storm could be a spouse's plea for a divorce, a life-threatening car accident, a medical diagnosis that seems impossible to beat, or an assault by a stranger that causes

great physical or emotional harm. Whatever the case, like Paul, we are not aware of what is approaching, but God knows.

2. Calm in the Storm (vv. 33–38)

How did Paul remain calm? He relied on a previously developed, surefire method of weathering life's storms that he had learned which allowed him to be calm. We can use calm as an acronym advising us to: Call on God during crises, anticipate God stepping in to save us, listen to God's instruction, and make known God's promises.

Call on God during crises. Faith is an anchor, not a crutch. It tethers us to our Lord and Savior, who teaches us how to act calmly during storms. In faith, Paul called on God during the crisis, and God answered by sending a heavenly messenger. As the days lengthened, the storm became stronger while the passengers' hope of survival diminished. They needed God's help. Calling on God during a storm is paramount for the Christian who wants to weather that storm calmly.

Anticipate God stepping in to rescue us. Initially, Paul had sensed prophetically that there would be loss of life and loss of ship. Later, however, God in His mercy sent an angel to strengthen Paul and to deliver a divine message. Thus, despite the raging seas, Paul anticipated God's salvation. He expected to live, not die. Paul's trials had taught him to surrender his will, emotions, and plans to God. We must do the same in order to weather life's storms with calm as we anticipate God's salvation.

Listen to God's instruction. In Acts 27:24, Paul was instructed to "fear not" (KJV). It is the same instruction Abram, Israel, Joshua, and many others received in the past. It is the same instruction that God whispers to His children today. He intends for Christians to go through storms without fear. Prayer, Bible study, fellowship with other believers, and a dogged

determination to trust God are all necessary at such times to help defeat fear.

Make known God's promises. After Paul received instructions from the angel, he shared the vision and the inherent promise with the other passengers. He encouraged them, “[K]eep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me” (from v. 25, NIV). Sometimes in the storms of life we are involved not for our own good but for the good of others. Through us, others can see the mercy, grace, and love of God. That Paul and all others on board the ship could go more than two weeks without eating, for example, is a testament that God alone kept them alive. That they broke their self-imposed fast by eating bread is also miraculous as most people seek liquid to ease their bodies back into eating after a prolonged fast. Furthermore, that they could still be strong to maneuver the ship, that none died from disease or starvation prove that there was another “force” battling the external situations. Finally, although they may not have realized God's presence or protection, they were comforted by His promise as shared by Paul.

3. Shipwrecked, But Saved (vv. 39–44)

Panicking neither diminishes nor stops a storm. Rather, panic hinders our ability to hear from God and to share God's promises with others. When Christians respond by staying calm, their faith shines through storms. Our friends, family members, and coworkers observe the confidence we have in God and can gain strength from us as we cope calmly with crises. Thus, it's possible to turn storms into opportunities to share Christ and to bring others to salvation. We learn from Paul's experience that in many storms of life, we are unprepared to handle the storm without God's help. Our educational background, gifts, talents, finances, or other resources cannot provide the safe harbor we seek.

Satan is a thief that “comes only to steal and kill and destroy” (from John 10:10, NIV). When storms arise, he uses them to fulfill that purpose. But God is greater than our enemy. This is an important lesson to learn because when everything else fails, when all of our systems, vehicles, plotting, and schemes fail, we can be assured that “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8, NIV). He never fails, and we can trust Him despite the thoughts that the enemy may place in our minds.

Finally, the crewmen's sneaky decision to cast out to sea with lifeboats—and later, their plot to kill the prisoners (Acts 27:30, 42)—shows how times of panic can lead us to behave irrationally. Ultimately, the ability to weather the storm was due in large part to Paul's calm response to it. He trusted in God's faithfulness. When we respond in a similar fashion, we, too, help others draw closer to God.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the centurion ignore Paul's advice in Lasea (Acts 27:8, 11–12)?
2. How did all of the passengers get to safety (v. 44)?

Discuss the Meaning

Paul's past experience with life's storms enabled him to calmly weather a natural storm. What have you learned in the past that enabled you to weather a recent storm? How did your positive response affect others?

Liberating Lesson

Places such as Japan, Haiti, and some southern U.S. states have been hit hard recently by tumultuous weather conditions. When storms strike, how can Christians serve as beacons of calm and hope?

Application for Activation

Paul was able to provide an encouraging word to the others in the storm. Ask God to show you how to encourage others through e-mails, letters, or cards that provide hope and peace.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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Say It Correctly

Adramyttium. ad'ruh-MIT-ee-uhm.
 Augustus. aw-GUHS-tuhs.
 Aristarchus. air'is-TAHR-kuhs.
 Centurion. sen-TOOR-ee-uhn.
 Julius. JOOL-yuhs.
 Macedonian. mas-eh-DOH-nee-uhn.
 Thessalonica. thes-uh-LON-nay-kuh.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Called to Be an Apostle
 (Romans 1:1-7)

TUESDAY

Encouraged by Each Other's Faith
 (Romans 1:8-12)

WEDNESDAY

Eager to Proclaim the Gospel
 (Romans 1:13-17)

THURSDAY

Paul's Journey to Rome Begins
 (Acts 27:3-12)

FRIDAY

A Fierce Storm Dashes Hope
 (Acts 27:13-20)

SATURDAY

Keep Up Your Courage
 (Acts 27:21-32)

SUNDAY

Brought Safely to Land
 (Acts 27:1-2, 33-44)