Paul’s Last Days and Letters



Scripture Reference: Acts 28:16-31

Suggested Theme: The Holy Spirit worked through Paul to share the good news and strengthen people’s faith. We can learn from the Bible and use it to share the good news.

Memory Verse: “I tell you by the authority of the Lord to read this letter to all the brothers.” 1 Thessalonians 5:27, ICB

Story Overview:

For the two years Paul was in Rome, he was allowed to live in his own rented house with a Roman guard watching him. While there, he often invited the Jews to come to his house and hear about Jesus. Some of them became Christians. From later writing we know Paul also spent time writing epistles (letters) to the churches he had previously visited. Many of these letters are the books we find in our New Testaments today.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was not thrown in prison. Instead, he was allowed to rent a house to live in. He was then placed under house arrest. He could not leave the house but could move freely within it. Since he was scheduled to appear before Caesar, there would probably have been a Roman soldier from the palace (Praetorian) guarding him at all times.

The palace guard was an elite group of soldiers. They were encamped just outside of Rome. Their primary purpose was to guard the emperor. Their secondary purpose was to guard prisoners waiting for trial in the imperial court. Paul spent time with at least five or six of these soldiers every day. They had no choice but to hear him preach.

Paul stayed in this situation for two years. A prisoner who appealed to Caesar as Paul had done was automatically taken to Rome for trial. He was kept under arrest until his accusers arrived. When they arrived, the trial would begin. If the emperor felt the charges were unwarranted (as these were), he would order the accusers executed instead of the prisoner. For this reason, many times, the accusers would not show up. They were set free if they did not come to Rome to accuse the prisoner within two years. He could never again be brought to trial by the same accusers for the same offence.

Paul used his imprisonment for King Jesus. Even though he was under arrest, he continued to preach to any non-believers who came to see him. He even preached to the soldiers with him. He continued to teach any Christians who visited him. He wrote letters to the churches he had established on his previous missionary journeys to encourage and teach them. He used all his time for Jesus Christ in any situation.

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The book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest. Church traditions and scholars hold various views about how Paul might have spent his last years, but the Bible does not mention Paul again.

One view is that Paul might have been executed at the end of this two-year imprisonment. Another view is that he was released at the end of this two-year house arrest, continued his missionary work, but was later arrested again and executed.

Whatever happened to Paul in his final years, we do know that he continued to teach and encourage in written form. He wrote letters (sometimes called “epistles”) to churches and individuals. Paul most often dictated his letters to someone who did the actual writing, but he often wrote the closing himself, as in Colossians 4:18, ICB.

The letters are full of encouragement and teaching, but occasionally, Paul mentioned his situation in prison.

> “But others preach about Christ because they are selfish. Their reason for preaching is wrong. They want to make trouble for me in prison.” Philippians 1:17, ICB
>
> “I am in prison because I am a believer in Christ. All the palace guards and everyone else knows this.” Philippians 1:13, ICB
>
> “and I am suffering because of that Good News. I am even bound with chains like a criminal. But God’s teaching is not in chains.” 2 Timothy 2:9, ICB
>
> “So I, Paul, am a prisoner of Christ Jesus. I am a prisoner for you who are not Jews.” Ephesians 3:1, ICB
>
> “I am in prison because I belong to the Lord. God chose you to be his people. I tell you now to live the way God’s people should live.” Ephesians 4:1, ICB
>
> “Also pray for us. Pray that God will give us an opportunity to tell people his message. Pray that we can preach the secret truth that God has made known about Christ. I am in prison because I preach this truth.” Colossians 4:3, ICB
>
> “I, Paul, greet you and write this with my own hand. Remember me in prison. God’s grace be with you.” Colossians 4:18, ICB
>
> “But because I love you, I am asking you instead. I, Paul, am an old man now, and a prisoner for Christ Jesus. I am asking you a favor for my son Onesimus. He became my son while I was in prison.” Philemon 9-10, ICB

Paul uses various greetings (beloved, saints, the church, etc.) as he wrote the following:

- Romans: to the church in Rome
- Corinthians: to the church in Corinth
- Galatians: to the churches of Galatia
- Ephesians: to the church in Ephesus
- Philippians: to the church in Philippi
- Colossians: to the church in Colossae
- Thessalonians: to the church in Thessalonica

Paul also wrote some letters to individual people:

- Timothy

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- Titus
- Philemon

From the time Paul became a Christian, he obeyed Jesus' commission to teach others. He suffered many hardships and was even imprisoned. Whether in person or through letters, Paul never stopped fulfilling what Jesus had commanded him:

> "Stand up! I have chosen you to be my servant. You will be my witness—you will tell people the things that you have seen and the things that I will show you. This is why I have come to you today. I will not let your own people hurt you. And I will keep you safe from the non-Jewish people too. These are the people I am sending you to. I send you to open their eyes that they may turn away from darkness to the light. I send you that they may turn away from the power of Satan and turn to God. Then their sins can be forgiven and they can have a place with those people who have been made holy by believing in me.'" Acts 26:16-18, ICB

Way to Introduce the Story:

Help the children find the book of Philippians in their Bibles. Most Bibles will have a note at the beginning that credits Paul for writing this book. Also, note Paul's name in the first verse. "Letters were written differently when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians. The letters (or epistles as they were called) did not begin with "Dear people in the church at Philippi", as we might write a letter. The person who wrote the letter often put their name at the beginning. This is what Paul (and Timothy, his helper) did. Next, he wrote the names of the people he was writing to. Then he wrote a greeting. Paul wrote lots of epistles.

Remember how the Lord told Paul that he would be going to Rome (Acts 23:11)? Today, we are going to learn about what happened when Paul got there. He didn't just sit around doing nothing. He wrote some letters!"

**Depending on the age and attention span of the children you teach, you could go on and examine any of Paul's epistles (Romans, I & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, I & 2 Thessalonians, I & 2 Timothy, Titus, or Philemon).*

The Story:

After a long and dangerous journey by ship, Paul and the centurion guarding him arrived in Italy.

Paul was still a prisoner because, over two years earlier, some angry Jews had told lies about him being a troublemaker. But Paul was not a troublemaker. Wherever he went, Paul always told people about Jesus.

Paul had known for quite some time that God wanted him to go to Rome to talk to people about Jesus. So, during his court trials back in Caesarea, Paul told the governor that he wanted to stop doing trials in Caesarea and go straight to Rome to appear before the emperor, Caesar.

Time passed, but Paul and a Roman guard were finally put on a ship and sent to Rome. It was a dangerous trip, but God kept Paul and everyone on board safe despite a shipwreck.

When Paul was in Rome, he was still a prisoner. He was allowed to rent a house, but he was always guarded by a soldier.

Paul had to wait a long time before he could appear before Caesar for a trial. What do you think Paul did while he was waiting?

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You are correct if you guessed that Paul told people about Jesus. Paul was only in Rome for three days before he began inviting the Jewish leaders to his house to tell them about Jesus.

Paul began teaching in the morning and continued until the evening. Each day, more and more people came to hear Paul preach.

Paul taught them about the kingdom of God. Since these people already believed in the Old Testament, Paul reminded them that long ago, it was written in the Old Testament that God would send a new king to rescue the whole world from the power of sin and death. That king was Jesus. He could save people from their sins because he defeated the power of sin and death at the cross and resurrection.

Some of the people Paul taught were happy to hear that Jesus was God's son. Others did not believe. But still, Paul did not stop sharing the Good News about Jesus.

The Bible does not record how Paul's two-year imprisonment in Rome concluded, nor does it record whether or not Paul had the opportunity to appear before Caesar. But Acts does end by saying that the message continued to be preached without hindrance.

However, the Bible records some letters that Paul wrote while in prison. Through the Holy Spirit, God helped Paul write some very important letters that helped people know more about following Jesus and helped Christians grow in faith.

For the rest of his life, Paul told people about Jesus. When he could not be with people to tell them, he would still tell them in the letters he wrote.

Even when bad things happened to him, like shipwrecks and prison, Paul did not stop following God. When he was very old, this was one of the last things Paul wrote in a letter to his friend Timothy. Paul said, "I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Now, a crown is waiting for me. I will get that crown for being right with God." 2 Timothy 4:7-8a, ICB.

Paul was a great man of God. The Holy Spirit worked mightily through him and gave him courage to share the good news with others.

Paul wrote letters while in prison, but he also wrote others before and after that time. Another word for "letters" is "epistles." If you open your Bible to the New Testament, you will find some of the Epistles Paul wrote.

- Romans: to God's people in Rome
- Corinthians: to the church in Corinth
- Galatians: to the churches of Galatia
- Philippians: to the church in Philippi
- Thessalonians: to the church in Thessalonica
- Ephesians: to the church in Ephesus
- Colossians: to the church in Colossae

Paul also wrote some epistles to people. These people were:

- Philemon
- Timothy and
- Titus

How many of Paul's epistles can you find in your Bible? How can you learn from the Bible or use it to share the good news? Who can you share the good news with?

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- How did Paul get to Rome? (In a ship)
- What is an epistle? (A letter)
- Where was Paul when he wrote many of the epistles? (In prison in Rome)
- Where did Paul stay while in prison? (In a house he rented. A Roman guarded him at all times)
- What did Paul do while he was in prison in Rome? (Wrote letters to believers and churches, taught the Jews, boldly shared about Jesus, prayed, etc.)
- What do you think Paul learned from being in prison?
- Why do you think God let Paul be in prison, if Paul was following God and sharing the good news?
- If Paul hadn't written the letters while in prison, we wouldn't have those books of the Bible that help us grow in faith and understanding about God. Can you think of another Bible story where God used something bad for good?
- What does this story show you about God?
- What does this story show you about people?

Reflection:

- What do you think the house Paul rented looked or felt like? What do you think it was made of?
- Have you ever written a letter to someone before? Who would you write letters to if you were in prison and didn't have another way to communicate (no phones)?
- What do you think helped Paul be so bold as he shared about Jesus to people?
- If you were in prison for two years, how would you feel? How would you spend your time?
- How do you think Paul felt about being in prison in Rome for two years?

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- How do you think God felt about Paul as he was in prison, serving God and sharing the good news?
- What do you think happened to Paul after his two years of imprisonment in Rome?
- What good things did God bring about by using Paul's situation in prison in Rome?
- What ways of sharing the good news have you seen? (examples might include bible study, street preaching, knocking on doors, service projects, conversations, handing out tracts or books, events, etc.) What do you think about these?
- What question do you have for God about this story?
- What part of this story is most interesting to you?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- B-I-B-L-E
- Books of the New Testament
- I Can Be a Missionary
- L-O-V-E Song
- Read Your Bible, Pray Every Day Song
- This Little Light of Mine
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

- Find the city of Rome on a map
- Help the children find the table of contents in their Bibles and point out all of Paul's epistles.
- Invite a guest speaker today who can explain how they use the written word to teach people (people who send out correspondence courses would be good).
- Write notes or send pictures to someone to explain something from God's word.

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- Older children could brainstorm various media that could be used to teach about Jesus. After brainstorming, guide the children in designing their own versions. This could include cards and letters, bookmarks, website articles, podcast episodes, videos and more.
- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.



- If you prefer, you can download and print the illustration of Paul provided here and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.
- Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable “God’s Story” printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- Create a poster depicting a truth from the Bible. You might use a Bible verse or story.
- Make a relief map of Paul’s Journeys featuring the place in today’s story. If you are studying Paul’s journeys over a few lessons, you could add more details to the map each time you learn about another stop on the journey. Instructions on how to make a relief map are at https://www.weirdunsocializedhomeschoolers.com/step-by-step-to-making-salt-dough-map/

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page with text (Ministry Spark)

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- Wordsearch of Books of New Testament (christiananswers.net)
- Review: Create a “passport” that covers the life of Paul. Good visual ideas and activities. It could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul (kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz)
- Youtube video (2 minutes 20 seconds) about Paul’s Letters

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