Paul on Trial



Scripture Reference: Acts 24-26

Suggested Theme: Use every opportunity to tell others about Jesus.

Memory Verse: “Jesus said to the followers, ‘Go everywhere in the world. Tell the Good News to everyone.'” Mark 16:15, ICB

Story Overview:

Paul had been falsely accused of causing trouble in Jerusalem. Although innocent of these accusations, he was kept prisoner in Caesarea and made to appear before a succession of governors and leaders, including Felix, Festus and even King Agrippa. At each court appearance, Paul spoke freely about his Christian faith. His accusers could never prove him guilty, and Paul eventually used his right as a Roman citizen to ask to be sent to Rome to appear before Caesar’s court.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

Previously, in Jerusalem (see Paul’s Nephew Uncover a Plot), Paul had been attacked and falsely accused of causing riots and defiling the temple. Wishing to avoid civil unrest, a Roman commander secretly transferred Paul under protective guard to the governor’s court in Caesarea Maritima.

On the Mediterranean coast of Israel, the city of Caesarea Maritima was built by Herod the Great, and the remaining ruins can be visited today. Herod constructed a large port and a grand palace. Caesarea became the centre of Roman government for the Judea region and was also home to the Roman Legion. Earlier, in Acts, it was home to the first Gentile Christian, Cornelius (see Cornelius Becomes a Christian).

The current lesson opens with Paul under guard, awaiting the arrival of his accusers from Jerusalem.

Because he was a Roman citizen, Paul’s rights were protected. His original accusers from Jerusalem were required to make their case against him before a Roman official. Eventually, Paul would stay in Caesarea Maritima for over two years and appear before several government officials and important people. In every case, he took advantage of the opportunity to speak about Jesus.

Paul’s Court Appearance Before Governor Felix (Acts 24:1-26):

This first court appearance occurred five days after Paul arrived in Caesarea. The High Priest, Ananias, and a lawyer, Tertullus, came from Jerusalem to make their accusations before Felix. However, after hearing from both sides, Felix was not convinced of the allegations. He dismissed Ananias and the other accusers and said he would decide the case when the original commander from Jerusalem came to the court in Caesarea. This seemed to be a way to stall the proceedings. Although he allowed Paul some freedom and let his friends tend to him, Felix kept Paul in prison for two years, hoping in vain that Paul would give him a

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bribe to secure his freedom. Paul was able to talk about Jesus often. Although Felix and his wife, Drusilla, often called Paul out of the prison to hear him talk about faith in Jesus, the text never says they committed and became followers of Jesus themselves.

paul's Court Appearance Before Governor Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27-25:12):

After two years had passed, a new governor, Porcius Festus, replaced Felix. He was more efficient than Felix and seemed to try to get to the truth of these accusations. Right away, he realised the Jews did not have a case against Paul.

Instead of waiting for Festus' decision, Paul made an extraordinary move. In an appearance before Festus, Paul used his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar. Once a Roman citizen appealed to the highest court, Festus was obligated to send Paul to Rome.

Paul Appears Before King Agrippa, High Officials and Men of the City (Acts 25:13-26:32):

While Festus was still contemplating this turn of events, the Roman-appointed king of the Jews, King Agrippa, and his wife, Bernice, happened to come to Caesarea Maritima to pay respects to the new governor. Festus told them about the prisoner (Paul) and how the former governor, Felix, had left him with this dilemma. Agrippa found this very interesting and wanted to meet Paul. Felix planned a large and ostentatious gathering with Agrippa, high-ranking officials and the important men of the city. During the gathering, Paul was brought before the group. Paul did not waste this opportunity to share his testimony with these important people. He told about his formal education, strict adherence to Jewish law and his fanatical campaign against Christians before he eventually encountered Jesus. He described, in detail, what Jesus had told him to do (see Paul Becomes a Christian). Agrippa and the others were impressed with what Paul had to say, but there is no indication that anyone in the group became a follower of Jesus.

> "King Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian in such a short time?'
>
> Paul said, 'Whether it is a short or a long time, I pray to God that not only you but every person listening to me today would be saved and be like me—except for these chains I have!'" Acts 26:28-29, ICB

Agrippa told Festus that Paul could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. He agreed that Festus would now have to send Paul to Rome.

Way to Introduce the Story:

"Let's play a game. Let's pretend that everyone who has the letters "A, E, I, O, or U" in their name has a disease called NOSE DISEASE. This pretend disease will make you grow an extra nose tonight while sleeping. That would be terrible!!! No one wants to grow an extra nose, do they?

Let's pretend I know some special words to make Nose Disease disappear. Would you want me to tell you the special words? Of course you would! You would feel very sad if I knew the special words but refused to tell you. Who wants to hear the pretend words?" (You could whisper something like "nose, nose, blow away" in each child's ear).

Did you know that Paul had something very special to tell people? Something that would save them from something even worse than Nose Disease? Paul wanted to tell everyone about Jesus because Jesus could save everyone from their sins. Today, we will learn how Paul told people about Jesus even when he was in a courtroom.

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The Story:

Paul loved God. He was a missionary who travelled to many places, telling people about Jesus. He was also an educated man and a Roman citizen.

Being a Roman citizen meant that Paul had special rights. Roman citizens could not be imprisoned unless someone could prove they were guilty. A Roman citizen had a right to a trial in a court of law.

The High Priest and other Jewish leaders from Jerusalem had accused Paul of being a troublemaker. They told lies and said he had disrespected God's temple and tried to cause riots. They even wanted him put to death.

But, since Paul was a Roman citizen, he had the right to appear before a Roman official in a court of law. A Roman official could listen to all the evidence and decide whether or not the accusations were fair and true.

So Paul was taken to the Roman city of Caesarea for a trial before the Roman governor, Felix. The Jewish leaders who had accused Paul brought a lawyer, Tertullus, with them to the trial. The lawyer tried to convince the governor that Paul deserved to be punished.

When Paul was allowed to speak to the governor, he told Felix he was not a troublemaker. Paul said that he had been to the temple but showed respect when he was there. He said that he worshipped God but followed Jesus's way.

Paul said that other people were making false accusations against him and that Felix could check this out by investigating the facts.

Felix, the governor, listened to both sides very carefully, but he could not decide who was telling the truth. Felix did not want to make a decision yet. Maybe everyone should wait until the Roman commander came from Jerusalem to say what he thought the truth was.

So Felix decided that Paul should stay in prison in Caesarea until the Roman commander from Jerusalem came to Caesarea and told his side of the story.

Paul stayed in the prison known as Herod's Palace. Felix allowed him freedom and let Paul's friends take care of him. Felix and his wife, Drusilla, also liked to invite Paul to come to them and talk about faith in Jesus Christ.

But Felix did not want to follow Jesus. Part of the reason he kept listening to Paul was because he hoped he would pay him a bribe to get out of prison. But Paul did not pay a bribe. He remained in prison for two years, waiting for a fair trial.

After two years, a new governor replaced Felix. The new governor's name was Festus.
Once again, the Jews from Jerusalem made accusations against Paul. They told Governor Festus that he should send Paul back to Jerusalem. They said it was so he could have another trial in Jerusalem, but it was a trick. Going back to Jerusalem would be very dangerous for Paul. If he went back to Jerusalem, the Jews would kill him.

Governor Festus called everyone together for a new trial. He asked Paul to tell his side of the story. After hearing this, Festus knew the Jews did not have enough proof against Paul. It would not be fair to say Paul was guilty.

However, the Jewish leaders were very powerful, and Governor Festus did not want to make a decision that would make them angry. He asked Paul if he would like to return to Jerusalem and let the Jewish leaders decide. Paul knew that the Jews would probably kill him if he went back to Jerusalem, so he did not want to go.

Then Paul said something that no one expected. What he said next was a law that no one, not even Governor Festus, could break.

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Paul said, “I am a Roman citizen and I have the right to appeal to the highest court in the Roman Empire. If this Roman court cannot make a decision,” Paul said, “then, as a Roman citizen, I will appeal to the highest court. I want to travel to the capital city, Rome, and appear in a court before Emperor Caesar.”

Governor Festus must have been so surprised to hear Paul say this. But Paul was right. The governor could not say “no.” If a Roman citizen wanted to go to Rome and appear in the highest court of the empire, the governor had to send the prisoner there. So Governor Festus told Paul and everyone in the court that Paul would now be going to Rome as soon as it could be arranged.

Governor Festus and all of the Jews were surprised that Paul said he wanted to make the long and dangerous journey to Rome. But Paul was not worried. He knew something that none of the others knew about.

Two years earlier, a special visitor came to him at night when Paul was first in prison in Jerusalem. This was the most special visitor anyone could ever have. When Paul was the most frightened and upset, JESUS appeared to him in the prison. Jesus stood near Paul and said, “Be brave! You have told people in Jerusalem about me. You must do the same in Rome also.” (Acts 23:11)

For this reason, Paul was confident that he would be safe. He knew that God wanted him to tell people in Rome about Jesus, and God would take care of him and get him safely to Rome.

When the prisoner, Paul, was waiting for a ship to Rome, Governor Festus had a visit from King Agrippa and his wife, Bernice. King Agrippa did not have much power, but he was respected as the king of the Jews.

When King Agrippa heard about the Jews from Jerusalem being angry with Paul, he asked to hear what Paul had to say. So Governor Festus gathered the city leaders and King Agrippa in one big and important meeting. The meeting had many ceremonies and probably lots of speeches. Paul was called to speak in front of all of these important people.

What do you think Paul talked about? Do you think he begged them to let him out of prison? No, Paul used this opportunity to tell these important people about Jesus!

Paul told King Agrippa how his whole life changed years ago when he had met Jesus. Paul explained that he had been like the other Jewish leaders for many years. He used to think followers of Jesus were troublemakers, too. But now he knew the truth. Jesus had come to him in a vision. Now, he followed Jesus and always tried to tell people about Jesus.

Paul said that God wanted everyone to hear about King Jesus. This is the reason the Jews tried to kill him. When he said that, Governor Festus interrupted him and said, “Paul, you have been studying so much that you are going crazy!”

But Paul was not crazy. He just wanted everyone to know about Jesus and how Jesus could forgive their sins.

Paul was unafraid to tell everyone, even governors and kings, about Jesus. In front of all of these important people, Paul told King Agrippa that he should follow Jesus too.
But sadly, King Agrippa did not want to follow Jesus.

After leaving Paul, King Agrippa told Governor Festus that Paul had not done anything to deserve death. He should have been set free.

But everyone knew the law that could not be broken. Paul had appealed to Caesar’s official court in Rome. No one had a choice now. Paul would be going to Rome.

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of 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.
Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.

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Click here to download the slideshow, or click here for the printable illustrations.
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.

Or use the following video.

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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:

- What was the name of the city where Paul spent three years appearing before governors Felix, Festus and King Agrippa and waiting for a trial? (Caesarea)
- Because Paul had to wait for two years, what did this allow him to do? (Share the gospel with many people, including important Roman leaders)
- Did the governors and the King that Paul spoke to become Christians? (Not that we know of)
- What did Paul think would happen if he went back to Jerusalem? (The Jews would kill him)
- What had Jesus told Paul would happen in Rome? (Paul should share the gospel in Rome)
- Where did Paul appeal to go, and to see whom? (Rome, to see Emperor Caesar)
- What would happen to Paul in Rome? (The Emperor would hear Paul's case and decide if he was guilty or innocent)

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- Who can tell people about Jesus? (Me!)
- What does this story show you about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit)?
- What does this story show you about people?

Reflection:

- How do you think Paul felt as he was on trial, sharing his side of the court case and sharing his faith?
- How do you think Paul felt about staying in Caesarea for two years? How would you feel if you had to wait in jail for two years?
- Why does God sometimes ask us to wait for things He has promised us?
- The Roman governor allowed Paul's friends or family to come and visit him. What do you think they did together or talked about? Who do you think came to see Paul?
- Do you think Paul was afraid of the Sanhedrin or the Roman leaders? Why or why not?
- When you think about sharing Jesus with people, how do you feel? What questions do you have?
- What is the good news about Jesus? What do you wish everyone knew about Jesus?
- Do you talk about Jesus or God with your friends or teachers? (Suggestion: Pray with the children and have them ask God to bring to mind someone they could talk about God/Jesus with)
- What is one thing you could tell a non-believer this week about God or Jesus? (Ex: Jesus loves you, God made you and loves you, You're never alone because God is with you, etc.)
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What question do you have for God about this story?

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:

- Hello Hello Song
- I Can Be a Missionary
- J-E-S-U-S Cheer Song
- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Love is Something If You Give It Away Song
- L-O-V-E Song
- Oh, How I Love Jesus Song
- This Little Light of Mine
- Roll the Gospel Chariot Along
- Choose songs from a church hymnal with the theme of telling people about Jesus.
- 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:

- Discuss ways to tell people about Jesus (Be sure and stress verbal ways today. We will discuss written methods–correspondence courses, etc. in the lesson Paul Writes Letters from Prison).
- Make a list of things about Jesus that we know and can share (Jesus healed a blind man, Jesus died on the cross, Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus loves us, etc.)
- Invite someone to share how they have talked about Jesus with others.
- Provide links to online resources so older children can research the “Caesarea Maratima” location and report back to the group. Some good resources are:
  - bible-history.com/archaeology/ancient-caesarea-harbor
  - https://www.biblewalks.com/Caesarea
  - bibleplaces.com/caesarea
  - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarea_Maritima

- 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.

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Crafts:

- Guide children in drawing a picture of themselves before a group of people. Specifically, they could name the group (friends at school, sports team, etc.) The children could then add speech bubbles or thought clouds of godly things they might say or think to interact with this group.
- 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. Refer to the overview of the Book of Acts. Instructions on how to make a relief map 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 and puzzle worksheets- Paul sent before Felix (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets- appearance before Agrippa (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft: Doorknob hanger (sundayschoolcrafts.net)
- Review: Create a "passport" that covers Paul's life. 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)

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