



PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

Date: 08.24.25 | Paul Returns to Jerusalem and Finds Trouble
Scripture: Acts 21 and 22

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

- God values all people and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost with the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and people are invited to join Him in His work.
- We are to be involved in reaching the nations through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- The church is a fellowship of believers, and we are called to meet together regularly.
- The church is not a place or a building, but rather a community of people who belong to the family of God.

HIGH SCHOOL:

- God values all people---born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths---and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes.
- We demonstrate honor for God when we respect the earthly authorities God has placed in our lives.
- The church is a community of believers called to gather regularly to study Scripture, pray, worship, serve, encourage one another, and proclaim the gospel to the world.
- The church is called to train and equip its members for works of ministry.



MEMORY VERSE

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. - Romans 1:16a

16 F l a n a o t g, f i i t p o G f s t e w b, - use this first letter memorization tool that aids in remembering text by using the first letter of each word as a cue.

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INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

“Would You Still Go?”

Set Up: Create 4–5 “what if” scenarios where students must decide if they would still go/do something even if they knew danger or difficulty was ahead.

- Example prompts:

- “You’re invited to play in a championship game, but you know the other team plays dirty and you’ll probably get hurt—do you still play?”
- “You get the chance to share your faith at school, but you know people will laugh—do you still speak up?”
- “You’re asked to help a friend, but you know others might turn against you—do you still go?”

How to Play: Read the scenarios out loud. Students move to one side of the room if they would still go/do it, and to the other side if they wouldn’t. After each round, ask a few students to briefly explain their choice.

Connection: Paul knew hardship and even prison awaited him in Jerusalem, but he went anyway because following Jesus mattered more than his safety. This sets up a conversation about courage, faith, and living boldly.



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BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

At the end of [Acts 20](#), Paul left Ephesus on a coasting vessel that traveled close to shore. Each of the places mentioned in [Acts 21:1–4](#) likely represented a day's journey and an overnight stop. At Patara, Paul and his companions, including Luke, boarded a sturdier ship for the 400-mile open-sea voyage to Tyre. There they stayed seven days with the disciples. Through the Spirit, the believers understood the suffering awaiting Paul and, out of love, urged him not to go to Jerusalem. When it was time to depart, the whole community, including families, knelt with Paul and his companions on the beach, praying before saying farewell.

On the way to Caesarea, Paul stopped briefly at Ptolemais to greet the believers ([21:7](#)). Luke does not explain how the church there began. Still, it likely arose from those scattered during the persecution after Stephen's martyrdom ([11:19–20](#)). Paul then stayed with Philip the evangelist, one of the seven chosen to serve the widows ([6:1–7](#)). Luke notes that Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied, showing that the Spirit's gifts extended to both men and women. During this stay, the prophet Agabus dramatically bound his hands and feet with Paul's belt, symbolizing that Paul would be arrested and handed over to the Gentiles in Jerusalem ([21:10–14](#)).

Paul's companions again pleaded with him not to go, but he understood the Spirit's revelation differently. He did not see [Acts 21:4, 10–13](#) as a prohibition, but as a prediction of what lay ahead. The warnings were not to deter him but to prepare him. Though their appeals broke his heart, Paul was determined to complete the mission God had given him ([20:22–24](#)). His friends finally submitted to the Lord's will, realizing Paul must follow God's leading. This was not a rash or sinful choice—Paul had long sensed he was to go to Jerusalem ([19:21; 20:3](#)), and God had already told him he would suffer for Christ's name ([9:15–16](#)). [Acts 23:11](#) later confirmed that Paul had God's approval in both his decision and his testimony. Some believers from Caesarea even traveled with him to Jerusalem. Like Christ on His final journey ([Luke 9:51; 18:31–33](#)), Paul did not let the threat of suffering keep him from God's will. As a disciple of Jesus, he was willing to follow in His steps ([1 Peter 2:21](#)), even to death ([Acts 21:13](#)).

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he reported to the Jewish believers how God had blessed his ministry among the Gentiles. Though they rejoiced, the leaders explained that his work had raised suspicions about his loyalty to the law of Moses. In context, this concern made sense: Paul never saw faith in Jesus as Messiah to be contrary to his Jewish identity, and he



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consistently observed Jewish practices. He circumcised Timothy (16:3), took vows (18:18), celebrated Passover (20:6), observed Yom Kippur (27:9), and affirmed his faithfulness to Jewish law (28:8) and customs (28:17). On trial, he never called himself a Christian, but a Jew (21:39; 22:3) and a Pharisee (23:6; 26:5–6). Yet his actions were misinterpreted, sparking a riot. The Romans arrested him, at first mistaking him for a revolutionary, but placed him under protective custody when they learned he was a Roman citizen.

Acts 21:17 notes, “the brethren received us gladly.” It is likely Paul also delivered the multichurch offering collected from Gentile congregations for the poor believers in Judea. Such generosity would explain the warm welcome. Yet not all were enthusiastic. Rumors spread that Paul was teaching Jews to abandon circumcision and their ancestral customs. In reality, Paul faithfully kept Jewish traditions but refused to impose them on Gentile converts, as confirmed by the Jerusalem Council (*Acts 15*). To quiet the accusations, James and the elders asked Paul to take part in a public Nazarite vow (*Num. 6:1–21*), demonstrating his respect for the law. They stressed that this did not overturn the Council’s decision regarding Gentiles, but would prove Paul himself remained faithful to Jewish practice.

Still, opposition arose. Jews from Asia accused Paul of two offenses: teaching against the law, the people, and the temple, and bringing Trophimus the Gentile into the inner temple courts. Both charges were false—the first exaggerated, like the accusations against Stephen, and the second impossible, as Paul would not have risked desecrating the temple. Yet the mob seized Paul, and violence erupted. Ironically, Paul saw himself as a faithful Jew, pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of Israel’s hope, but he was falsely accused and nearly killed for it.

The Roman commander quickly intervened with troops from the Antonia Fortress to restore order. Paul was bound with two chains, fulfilling Agabus’s prophecy (21:11). The tribune at first mistook him for an Egyptian revolutionary mentioned by Josephus (21:38), but Paul surprised him by speaking Greek and then addressing the Jewish crowd in Aramaic (21:37, 40). Like Jesus before him, Paul was rejected by his people yet protected by the Romans, who had mistaken him for a threat but became his shield from mob violence.

In *Acts 22:1–21*, Paul defended himself by testifying to his Jewish heritage and his encounter with Christ. Speaking in Aramaic quieted the crowd. He emphasized his upbringing, training under Gamaliel (22:3), and zeal for God shown in persecuting Christians (22:4–5). He recounted his dramatic meeting with Jesus on the Damascus road (22:6–11), his healing and commissioning through Ananias (22:12–16), and his later temple vision when God sent him to the Gentiles (22:17–21). This final claim—that God had commissioned him to the Gentiles—provoked another violent outburst (22:22).



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The commander, thinking Paul had incited the riot, ordered him flogged ([22:22–24](#)). Roman flogging was brutal and often fatal, but illegal for citizens. As Paul was stretched out for the lash, he revealed his Roman citizenship ([22:25–29](#)). The tribune himself had purchased citizenship at great cost, but Paul was one by birth. Alarmed, the Romans withdrew, realizing they had nearly violated his rights. Paul's appeal to citizenship did not contradict his willingness to suffer for Christ; instead, it opened further opportunities to advance the gospel.

Paul's defense emphasized that his faith in Jesus fulfilled Israel's promises, and his mission to the Gentiles came by divine command. Like Stephen and like Christ, he stood courageously before hostile leaders. Yet instead of execution, the Romans preserved his life. Still seeking clarity, the commander brought Paul before the Sanhedrin ([22:30](#)). Even in these tense moments, Paul's defense was shaped by grace—he did not speak merely to escape trouble, but to testify that Jesus is the Messiah. He appealed to their shared Jewish heritage while pointing to the one thing that set him apart: faith in the Son of God. He hoped that his hearers, too, might turn in faith to Christ.



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LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY

Remind your group that we are studying the New Testament. Throughout the book of Acts, Paul traveled on missionary journeys, sharing the Gospel and helping to gather groups of new believers into the first churches.



TELL THE STORY - Acts 21-22

As you tell today's story, invite the kids to respond to the story by giving a thumbs up when they hear good news or a thumbs down when they hear bad news.

Paul loved Jesus. God sent Paul on three missionary journeys. During the years, Paul traveled to different cities, sharing the gospel and starting many churches. Both Jews and Gentiles heard and believed the good news about Jesus. Today, we will learn that Paul returned to Jerusalem, where he was arrested. Paul continued to share the Gospel and trust in God even when he faced challenges.

As Paul traveled toward Jerusalem, he stopped and visited with Christians along the way. In the city of Caesarea, a man named Agabus visited Paul. Agabus was a prophet who spoke messages from God. Agabus asked to borrow Paul's belt. He tied the belt around his own hands and feet. Then he said, "The Holy Spirit says, 'This is how the Jews in Jerusalem will tie up the man who owns this belt. They will give him to the Gentiles.'"

Paul's friends begged him not to go to Jerusalem, but Paul said, "Don't cry! I am not only ready to be tied up in Jerusalem, I am ready to die for the name of Jesus."

When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, the believers there welcomed Paul, and Paul began to share what God had done among the Gentiles. People from other nations had heard the gospel and trusted in Jesus! The believers listened to this report and praised God, but the leaders were also worried. That was good news, but those Jewish Christians were upset because they had heard things about Paul that weren't true. Still, Paul didn't let this stop him.

One day, Paul went into the temple. When some Jews saw him there, they yelled and caused a big commotion. The whole city was stirred up, and a crowd grabbed Paul and dragged him out of the temple. As the crowd was trying to kill Paul, the Roman commander in the city and his soldiers heard what was happening. They rushed to Paul to find out what



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was happening. Because the crowds were so upset, the commander decided to take Paul somewhere safe.

Before he left, Paul asked to speak to the crowd. Paul told them about this life before he met Jesus. He had been a very religious man who tried hard to follow the law. He even mistreated Christians because he thought it was the right thing to do. Then, Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and changed his life.

The people listened quietly until Paul said that God sent him to tell the Gentiles about Jesus. This made them angry. They didn't like the Gentiles. They yelled at Paul and refused to listen to anything else.

The soldiers took Paul indoors. They were going to punish him, but Paul told them he was a Roman citizen. Because of this, the soldiers had to take good care of Paul until he could have a fair trial.

God was faithful to help Paul and protect him. God even planned for Paul to be born as a Roman citizen so that he could use that to his advantage. Like Paul, we can trust God and follow Him. We can have the confidence that Paul had, trusting in the same God who raised Jesus from the dead.



RETELL THE STORY



SHARE THE GOSPEL

Paul followed God's plan and returned to Jerusalem, despite facing danger in the city. Paul believed that God, who was faithful to raise Jesus from the dead, would help him in his troubles. We can follow God's plan to tell others about Jesus and trust God to take care of us.



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QUESTIONS TO REBUILD THE STORY

Paul followed God's command to go and preach the good news to those who had not heard. Following God's plan was often dangerous for Paul, but he continued, knowing God would care for him. Paul planned to return to Jerusalem even though he knew he would be persecuted there. **How did Paul respond to his friends' concerns for his safety?** (*Acts 21:13*) Paul told his friends that he was ready to be arrested or even die so that others could hear the gospel and trust in Jesus. Paul obeyed the Spirit and went to Jerusalem knowing he would face trouble.

While Paul was in Jerusalem, some Jews made false accusations against him. They stirred up the crowds to attack and almost kill Paul. After a Roman commander rescued Paul, he was allowed to speak to the crowd. **What did Paul share with the crowd?** (*Acts 22:12-16*) Paul shared how Jesus had saved him and called him to be a witness for Jesus to all people. Even when Paul was under threat from these Jewish leaders, he continued to preach the gospel.

Is following God's plan always easy? Why not? Oftentimes, following God's plan will not be easy. Following Jesus means we must be willing to make sacrifices of our time, possessions, popularity, and possibly even our lives. We can adopt the same attitude as Paul, believing that nothing is more important than following Jesus.

Paul trusted God would take care of him. How can we trust God to care for us?

Throughout the Bible, we see how God has faithfully loved and cared for His people. This is the same God we serve: He never changes. Remember that no matter what difficulties we face, He will care for us.

Paul told the crowd he used to be very religious. What are the differences between being religious and trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior? Some people live as Paul once lived, trying to be good and do good. Paul thought following the law would make him right with God. We can never be good enough to earn forgiveness for our sins. Only trusting in Christ as Savior and lord saves us.



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Describe your own salvation story. How has life been different for you since accepting Christ as Lord?

How has God been faithful to help you in your troubles?

What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?

What does the story teach me about myself?

Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?

Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?

How does this story help me live on mission?



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PRAYER PROMPTS

Thank You, Lord, for Your faithfulness. Thank You that we can trust You to care for us, even during hard times. Help us follow Your plans for our lives.

REVIEW UNIT VERSE:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. - Romans 1:16a

16 F l a n a o t g, f i i t p o G f s t e w b, - use this first letter memorization tool that aids in remembering text by using the first letter of each word as a cue.



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ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

ATTENTIVE - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

COMPASSIONATE - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR - God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER - God rescues and saves his children.

ETERNAL - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL - God always keeps his promises.

GENEROUS - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS - God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

JEALOUS - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

JUST - God is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

MERCIFUL - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.



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ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

OMNIPRESENT - God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING - God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER - God meets the needs of his children.

REFUGE - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

RIGHTEOUS - God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

TRANSCENDENT - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WISE - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

WRATHFUL - God hates all unrighteousness.



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Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?



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Application Questions

LOOK OUTWARD



- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

LOOK FORWARD



- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?