



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 13 – Paul’s Imprisonment in Jerusalem and Caesarea

Paul’s visit in Jerusalem began on a very happy note. Luke writes: **“When we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present. When he had greeted them, he told in detail those things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord”** (Acts 21:17-20). At this time James, the brother of our Lord, was the head elder of the congregation at Jerusalem. He was respected by the Jewish Christians because he continued to follow the Jewish laws and customs, and it seems he was even respected by the non-Jewish Christians. Paul himself continued to follow many Jewish laws and customs, in keeping with his mission policy: **“To the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win the Jews”** (1 Corinthians 9:20). He certainly did not have to keep the Jewish customs in order to be saved or even in order to live a Christian life, but he chose to live like a Jew in order not to put off Jews at the outset if they saw him, a Jew, living like a Gentile.

But the rumor had spread among the Jews in Jerusalem that Paul was instructing Jews to give up their Jewish ways. James was concerned about this rumor. He said to Paul: **“You see, brother, how many myriads of Jews there are who have believed, and they are all zealous for the law; but they have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs”** (Acts 21:20-21). It is doubtful that Paul was guilty of saying this, since we know that he wanted Timothy, who was only a half-Jew, to be circumcised for the sake of the Gospel ministry among the Jews.

James was not one of those Jews who insisted that Gentiles must be circumcised to be saved. He had been a leader at the council in Jerusalem where that question had been raised and settled. The Christians from Jerusalem and elsewhere had agreed that they would not insist that Gentile Christians live like Jewish Christians. Therefore, he assures Paul: **“Concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality”** (Acts 21:25).

But James was concerned that the Jewish Christians would turn against Paul if they believed the false rumors about him, so James suggested a way for Paul to show everyone that he himself, as a Jewish Christian, was still following the Jewish ways and customs: **“Do what we tell you: We have four men who have taken a vow. Take them and be purified with them, and pay their expenses so that they may shave their heads, and that all may know that**

those things of which they were informed concerning you are nothing, but that you yourself also walk orderly and keep the law” (Acts 21:23-24).

Paul was willing to go along with this plan. **“Then Paul took the men, and the next day, having been purified with them, entered the temple to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them” (Acts 21:26).** This was the a Nazarite vow, which was given by Moses in the sixth chapter of Numbers.

Everything seemed to be going well, but **“when the seven days (according to the vow) were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him, crying out, ‘Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place, and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place’” (Acts 21:27-28).** The Jerusalem Jews were not the ones to assault Paul; It was the Jews from Asia, where Paul had recently spent three years, who brought charges against him. These Jews from Ephesus had spotted Paul in the temple area. They had also seen Paul in the city together with one of their fellow-Ephesians, a Gentile Greek named Trophimus. They therefore jumped to the conclusion that Paul had brought Trophimus into the temple grounds, that is, into an area that was reserved only for Jews. There was a courtyard in the temple area for the Gentiles, but it was strictly forbidden for any uncircumcised Gentile to go beyond the posted barriers. They had not actually seen Trophimus in any forbidden area, but **“they supposed that Paul had brought” (Acts 21:29)** him into the temple.

In Jerusalem it was easy to stir up a crowd against anyone who could be accused of anti-Jewish views. Their wild charges against Paul had an effect. **“All the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut” (Acts 21:30).** Missionaries like Paul are often the targets of slander, and they are accused of all kinds of offenses of which they are not guilty. Jesus had warned His disciples: **“They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake” (Luke 21:12).** He had also assured them: **“Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23).**

Paul’s life was in danger, for **“they were seeking to kill him” (Acts 21:31).** But Paul’s life was preserved by God through the Roman government. **“News came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul” (Acts 21:31-32).** Since disturbances occurred frequently in the temple area, the Romans had set up a fortress with Roman soldiers directly overlooking the temple

courts. As soon as there was some evidence of a disturbance, the Roman soldiers could arrive immediately to preserve order and quell any riots.

The Roman commander had no idea what the commotion was about. He suspected that Paul was **“the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness”** (Acts 21:38), so **“the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done. And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks. When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, ‘Away with him!’”** (Acts 21:33-36). It looked as though Paul was going to be killed in Jerusalem just like his Master, Christ Jesus. When a mob gets worked up, violence is close at hand.

But Paul managed to speak in Greek to the commander before he was taken away. He said to him: **“I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people”** (Acts 21:39). Surprised that Paul spoke Greek, and learning that Paul was a citizen of Tarsus, the commander gave Paul permission to address the crowd. There on those stairs leading from the temple courtyard to the barracks of the soldiers, Paul **“motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language”** (Acts 21:40). Paul considered this as a great opportunity to address many of his fellow-Jews and tell them the truth about who he was and what he was doing in Jerusalem. And of course he would use this opportunity to tell the Jews about their Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.

The crowd became silent and listened to what Paul had to say. He told them first that he was born in Tarsus and brought up in Jerusalem with the famous Gamaliel as his teacher. He told them that he had fiercely persecuted the followers of Jesus at first. In fact, he had even received authority from the high priest to track down Christians in other cities and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial and punishment.

Paul then informed these Jews that the risen Jesus Himself, the Man they had crucified, had appeared to him when he was on the road to Damascus and said: **“I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting”** (Acts 22:8). Jesus then told he to continue on to Damascus and where he would be told what he should do. Since Paul had been blinded by the bright glory of Jesus, he had to be led by the hand into the city. Soon a Jewish Christian named Ananias visited him and was given power to restore Paul’s sight. Ananias then told the one-time enemy of Christ and all Christians: **“The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth. For you will be His witness to all men of what you have seen and heard”** (Acts 22:14-15). Then Ananias baptized Paul and the former zealous Jewish Pharisee who had hated Christ and Christians was now a Christian himself.

Paul then jumped ahead to a later time when he had come to Jerusalem preaching the Gospel of Christ to his fellow-Jews. At that time the risen Jesus had appeared to him in the temple and had said: **“Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, for they will not receive your testimony concerning Me”** (Acts 22:18). Paul had dared to argue with Jesus, pointing out that he was eminently qualified to preach the Gospel to the Jews: **“Lord, they know that in every synagogue I imprisoned and beat those who believe on You. And when the blood of Your martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him. Then He said to me, “Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles””** (Acts 22:19-21).

As soon as Paul uttered the word **“Gentiles”**, the Jewish crowd went wild. This was the very reason they hated Paul so much. He was a Jew, but he was treating the Gentiles as equals. He was sharing the Jewish hope of the Savior with Gentiles and then claiming that the crucified and risen Jesus had commanded him to do so. This was too much. **“They raised their voice and said, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!’ Then, as they cried out and tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air, the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, and said that he should be examined under scourging, so that he might know why they shouted so against him”** (Acts 22:22-24).

Jesus had been scourged. Now it looked as though His chosen missionary Paul would be scourged also. But Paul used his Roman citizenship to save himself: **“As they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.’ Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was born a citizen’”** (Acts 22:25-28).

From this incident we learn that it is not wrong for a Christian to use legitimate efforts to escape suffering. Jesus does not command His disciples to seek persecution or martyrdom, but only to endure it if it happens despite efforts to avoid it. In this case commander rescinded the order to scourge him. **“Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him”** (Acts 22:29).

On the very next day the commander brought Paul to stand before the Jewish high priest Ananias, the chief priests, and the Jewish council. The commander, Claudius Lysias, **“wanted to know for certain why he was accused by the Jews”** (Acts 22:30). In his early years, when Paul was known as the Pharisee Saul who was persecuting Christians, he had been highly favored by this Jewish council. But now Paul barely opened his mouth, **“and the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth”** (Acts 23:2).

Paul immediately lashed out: **“God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! For you sit to judge me according to the Law, and do you command me to be struck contrary to the law?”** As a Pharisee, Paul was well-acquainted with Jewish law, and he knew how such hearings ought to be conducted. It seems that his temper got the best of him in this instance. Compare how Jesus reacted to a similar incident in His own trial before the Jewish court. When Jesus first opened His mouth in His hearing before Annas, we read that **“one of the officers who stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, ‘Do You answer the high priest like that?’ Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’”** (John 18:22-23). Jesus calmly called attention to the evil action without calling anyone names or threatening judgment. As Peter wrote: Jesus **“committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously”** (1 Peter 2:22-23). The missionary, as an ambassador of Christ, should follow his Master’s example rather than Paul’s example here.

Paul quickly recovered from his burst of anger. When he was told that he had reviled the high priest, he responded: **“I did not know, brethren, that he was the high priest; for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people’”** (Acts 23:5). How difficult it is to remain calm and controlled when we face such unjust treatment and hear slander and lies from our opponents!

As Paul now faced this council, he recognized from his many years in Jewish circles that some of the council members were Pharisees and others were Sadducees. These two groups were bitter rivals. Most of the priests themselves were Sadducees, who did not believe in angels or spirits or the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees, on the other hand, accepted all of the Old Testament as God’s Word and concentrated on keeping the details of the law down to the last letter. Jesus had once told His disciples to be harmless as doves and as wise as serpents. Paul showed his wisdom now by calling out: **“I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged”** (Acts 23:6).

This remark set the Sadducees against the Pharisees in the council. **“The assembly was divided”** (Acts 23:7). Since Paul was a Pharisee and openly confessed the resurrection of the dead, some of the Pharisees took Paul’s side in the debate that followed. **“The scribes of the Pharisees’ party arose and protested, saying, ‘We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God’”** (Acts 23:9). This remark seems to reflect the earlier advice of Gamaliel, Paul’s teacher, when Jesus’ apostles had been brought before the council.

When Claudius Lysias saw that the dissension in the council was fierce, he was afraid that Paul, a Roman citizen, was in danger of bodily harm. Therefore he **“commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks”** (Acts 23:10). Once again God used the Roman government to save Paul from physical harm and possible death. **“On the following night the Lord stood by him and said, ‘Be of good**

cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome” (Acts 23:11). Now Paul knew that his plan to go to Rome would come to pass, for the Lord Himself gave Paul gave him this promise. But there would be many more dangerous adventures and frustrating delays before Paul would set foot in Rome. Missionaries need to learn that God’s timing is often very different from our own.

Already the next day Paul’s life was in danger. **“Some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy”** (Acts 23:12-13). This band of assassins told their plan to the chief priests and elders: **“We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul”** (Acts 23:14). These leaders were so corrupt that they willingly cooperated with the gang. They would ask the commander to bring Paul down to them again for another hearing, so that they could ambush him and kill him on the way.

This time God used a young boy, Paul's own nephew, to thwart this plan. Somehow Paul's nephew learned of the plot against his uncle and was able to enter the barracks and warn Paul. Paul asked one of the Roman centurions to escort his nephew to Claudius Lysias, the commander. The boy reported: **"The Jews have agreed to ask that you bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were to inquire more fully about him. But do not yield to them, for more than forty of them lie in wait for him, men who have bound themselves by an oath that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him; and now they are ready, waiting for the promise from you"** (Acts 23:20-21).

The commander took this threat seriously and acted immediately. **"He called for two centurions, saying, 'Prepare two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at the third hour of the night; and provide mounts to set Paul on, and bring him safely to Felix the governor'"** (Acts 23:23-24). The commander also wrote a letter to Governor Felix, explaining why he was sending Paul to him; however, he covered up the truth of what had happened to save his own skin, reporting: **"This man was seized by the Jews and was about to be killed by them. Coming with the troops I rescued him, having learned that he was a Roman"** (Acts 23:27). Actually, the commander had thought at first that Paul was an Egyptian assassin and had given the orders that he be scourged before he learned that Paul was a Roman citizen. But he was correct in saying that the Jews wanted to kill him because **"he was accused concerning questions of their law, but had nothing charged against him deserving of death or chains"** (Acts 23:29).

The midnight ride went according to plan, and after a night at Antipatris the soldiers and spearmen returned to Jerusalem, while the horsemen took Paul to Caesarea and presented him to the governor. Felix learned that Paul was originally from Cilicia (where Tarsus was located) and determined that he would hear his case. **"He commanded him to be kept in Herod's Praetorium"** (Acts 23:35).

Five days later the high priest Ananias, some Jewish elders, and an orator named Tertullus came from Jerusalem to Caesarea and **"gave evidence to the governor against Paul"** (Acts 24:1). After words of praise for the governor, Tertullus presented the accusation of the Jews: **"We have found this man a plague, a creator of dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He even tried to profane the temple, and we seized him, and wanted to judge him according to our law. But the commander Lysias came by and with great violence took him out of our hands, commanding his accusers to come to you"** (Acts 24:5-8). Notice how the Jews twisted the facts in their favor, just as Commander Lysias had. Unbelievers in this world are always inclined to explain events to their own advantage; Christians, on the other hand, should always speak the truth, just like their Lord and Savior.

Paul had no lawyer like Tertullus to present his case before Governor Felix, so he himself was permitted to speak. He told the truth. He said in his own defense: **"You may ascertain that it is no more than twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem to worship. And they neither**

found me in the temple disputing with anyone nor inciting the crowd, either in the synagogues or in the city. Nor can they prove the things of which they now accuse me” (Acts 24:11-13).

As usual, Paul used this opportunity to confess his faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Jewish Messiah before the governor and the others who were present. In his testimony he showed that he was a firm believer in the sacred writings of the Jews and trusted in the promises of the Messiah. He therefore believed in the resurrection of the dead and understood that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah because of His resurrection from the dead. This was the Way that he followed. In Paul’s testimony we have an excellent example of how Christian missionaries ought to testify when they are called on by authorities to defend themselves against false accusations. Pay close attention to Paul’s words: **“I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men. Now after many years I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation, in the midst of which some Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with a mob nor with tumult. They ought to have been here before you to object if they had anything against me. Or else let those who are here themselves say if they found any wrongdoing in me while I stood before the council, unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day’”** (Acts 24:14-21).

Governor Felix had some knowledge of the Way, as it was called, so he was not willing to take a stand with the high priest Ananias against Paul at this time. **“He adjourned the proceedings and said, ‘When Lysias the commander comes down, I will make a decision on your case’”** (Acts 24:22). There is no report that Lysias ever did come down to Caesarea, so Paul remained a prisoner awaiting trial. Governor Felix did not consider Paul a threat to the government, so **“he commanded the centurion to keep Paul and to let him have liberty, and told him not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him”** (Acts 24:23). Surely Paul used this opportunity to teach and train his friends and associates in the Christian Way.

Among those whom Paul tried to reach and teach during those days was Governor Felix himself. For Luke informs us that **“after some days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, he sent for Paul and heard him concerning the faith in Christ”** (Acts 24:24). How does an ambassador of Christ address an unbelieving governor? Does he say only those things he knows the governor will want to hear? Not at all. Paul **“reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come”** (Acts 24:25). No one has any desire or feels the need for the Good News of Christ’s forgiveness and salvation if he does not first recognize that he is a sinner who will one day face the judgment of a holy God. Paul preached Law and Gospel, sin and grace. It seems the Law was having its effect on Felix, for

“Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you’” (Acts 24:25).

Although Paul remained as a prisoner of Felix in Caesarea for two more years, and Felix **“sent for him more often and conversed with him”** (Acts 24:26), it seems the governor was only hoping for money from Paul and his friends to induce him to let Paul go free. That bribe never came, and when Governor Felix was replaced by Governor Porcius Festus, **“Felix, wanting to do the Jews a favor, left Paul bound”** (Acts 24:27). We may wonder why God left His missionary in prison during this whole time, when Paul could have been bringing the Gospel to Italy and Spain, as he had planned. But God’s ways are not our ways. God had promised that Paul would preach the Gospel in Rome, and Paul could depend on that promise. This long delay was also part of God’s plan for Paul, and Paul had to learn, as we all do, that **“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose”** (Romans 8:28).

Even after two years the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem were still intent on putting Paul to death. Therefore, when the new governor, Porcius Festus, went up to Jerusalem shortly after he became governor, **“the high priest and the chief men of the Jews informed him against Paul; and they petitioned him, asking a favor against him, that he would summon him to Jerusalem – while they lay in ambush along the road to kill him”** (Acts 25:2-3). They had no intention to give Paul a fair trial. All they wanted was to put him to death.

Festus did not agree to their proposal. Instead, he said that he would be going soon to Caesarea, where Paul was a prisoner. If they wanted a trial there, they should go to Caesarea also and bring their charges against Paul there. So once again Paul stood before his accusers, who **“laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove”** (Acts 25:7). Paul once more defended himself, saying: **“Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all”** (Acts 25:8). Paul was not willing to confess to any crime he had not committed.

Governor Festus wanted to stay on good terms with the Jewish leaders. Therefore he asked Paul: **“Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?”** (Acts 25:9). This is exactly what the Jewish leaders wanted, for then they could carry out their assassination attempt. But Paul used his privilege as a Roman citizen and said: **“I stand at Caesar’s judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar”** (Acts 25:10-11).

The Lord had promised Paul that he would have the opportunity to preach the Gospel at Rome. Since Paul had appealed to Caesar, he would be going to Rome. **“Festus, when he had**

conferred with the council, answered, ‘You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!’” (Acts 25:12).

But now Governor Festus had a problem. He was going to send his prisoner Paul to Caesar, but he did not know what he could write to Caesar concerning Paul’s offense. As Festus said later: **“It seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him”** (Acts 25:27). After a few days Governor Festus was visited by King Agrippa (Herod Agrippa II, a descendant of Herod the Great) and his female companion Bernice. **“Festus laid Paul’s case before the king”** (Acts 25:14). In telling Agrippa about Paul’s case, Festus made the comment: **“When the accusers stood up, they brought no accusation against him of such things as I supposed, but had some questions against him about their own religion and about a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul affirmed to be alive”** (Acts 25:18-19).

The real reason for the Jewish hatred against Paul was not that he had brought Gentiles into the temple court, but that Paul was preaching the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Jewish leaders had succeeded in getting Jesus crucified, but they could not keep Him dead. The evidence for Jesus’ resurrection from the dead was all around them, and many of the Jewish people had become convinced by the evidence that Jesus was truly alive. Because they were not able to disprove the evidence, the Jewish leaders were determined to silence the preacher who most loudly proclaimed that resurrection: the apostle Paul. This was the real reason for their hatred and their violence, along with the fact that Paul was even spreading the account of Jesus’ resurrection among the hated Gentiles.

After hearing Festus describe the case against Paul, King Agrippa told Festus: **“I also would like to hear the man myself”** (Acts 25:22). So once again Paul was given the opportunity to proclaim Jesus before an audience of rulers and authorities. We are reminded of Psalm 119:46: **“I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed.”** On the very next day, **“when Agrippa and Bernice had come with great pomp, and had entered the auditorium with the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at Festus’ command Paul was brought in”** (Acts 25:23).

After Festus explained the situation to the assembly, King Agrippa gave Paul the opportunity to tell his story. He said to the king: **“You are expert in all customs and questions which have to do with the Jews”** (Acts 26:3). He then talked about his background and his education. He had been a strict Pharisee, as the Jewish leaders knew very well. He was still a faithful Jew, accepting all the Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah. He now believed now that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, and that Jesus had proved that He was the Messiah by rising from the dead. Paul asked: **“Why should it be thought incredible by you that God raises the dead?”** (Acts 26:8). This was a doctrine taught and accepted by all Pharisees.

Paul explained that he himself had thought Jesus to be a fraud at first and had even persecuted the followers of Jesus both in Jerusalem and in other cities. But this all changed when the risen Jesus Himself appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus. He remembered Jesus' words to him very well: **"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me"** (Acts 26:15-18). Paul's life mission was there laid out for him, and he was merely carrying it out to the best of his ability.

Paul knew that it was his preaching of Jesus as the Messiah and his insistence that the Messiah had sent him out to the Gentiles that prompted the Jews to hate him. Paul said to Agrippa and the assembly: **"For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me"** (Acts 26:21). But he was still a faithful Jew, believing God's promises to His people and proclaiming the truth that Jesus of Nazareth was clearly the fulfillment of all these promises. Paul said: **"To this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles"** (Acts 26:22-23).

At this point Governor Festus interrupted Paul with a loud cry: **"Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!"** (Acts 26:24). The Gospel of Christ seems like foolishness to the wise of this world. But Paul responded: **"I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner"** (Acts 26:25-26).

Paul was hoping for a better response from King Agrippa. He asked the king a direct question: **"King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe"** (Acts 26:27). Kings and rulers need salvation through faith in Jesus, just like everyone else. The king's answer was not altogether negative. He said: **"You almost persuade me to become a Christian"** (Acts 26:28). Paul replied by explaining his motivation and the motivation of every Christian, especially every Christian pastor and missionary: **"I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains"** (Acts 26:29). A Christian ambassador is always hoping, praying, and working toward this end: that all his hearers might come to faith in Christ and enjoy eternal salvation. We pray that through the words of God we speak, the Holy Spirit may work the miracle of conversion.

The hearing ended at this point. We do not hear of any immediate confessions of faith in Christ. But those who were present were convinced that Paul was innocent of the charges

against him. In fact, King Agrippa said to Governor Festus: **“This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar”** (Acts 26:32). But God’s plan was that Paul would go to Rome as a prisoner.

Questions

1. What did James ask Paul to do when he arrived at Jerusalem?
2. Why was Paul willing to go along with James’ request?
3. What accusation against Paul was brought by some Jews from Ephesus?
4. Why was Paul’s life in danger in Jerusalem?
5. Who rescued Paul from those who wanted to harm him?
6. Why did Paul become so angry when he faced the Jewish council?
7. Who discovered the secret plot against Paul’s life?
8. What did the Roman commander do to protect Paul?
9. How did Paul defend himself before Governor Felix?
10. Why did Governor Felix keep Paul in prison for such a long time?
11. What did Paul do when Governor Festus wanted him to go to Jerusalem?
12. What was Festus’ response to Paul’s account before King Agrippa II?
13. What was Paul trying to do in his speech before King Agrippa II?
14. How was God’s plan for Paul to go to Rome different from Paul’s plan?
15. Why is patience such an important virtue for a Christian missionary?