

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 26: Trials, the Voyage to Rome, and the Gospel Unhindered

Acts 24:1–28:31

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 24-28 brings the book to its close with Paul's trials, his voyage to Rome, and the triumphant note of the gospel proclaimed unhindered. As the final lesson, it gathers up the themes of the whole book. What is doctrinally at stake includes faithful witness before rulers, the coming judgment that confronts the conscience, the purpose of the gospel in turning people from darkness to light, genuine repentance proven by deeds, God's sovereign providence over all circumstances, the urgency of decision, and the unstoppable advance of the kingdom of God.

The heaviest doctrinal weight falls on the unhindered gospel and the kingdom of God with which the book closes (28:30-31), read in light of God's sovereign providence that brought Paul through storm and trial to Rome. Teach that God reigns over every circumstance to accomplish His purposes, that Christ's kingdom is His present reign now being proclaimed, and that the gospel cannot be chained. Let this final lesson tie together the great themes of Acts.

Yet aim at the heart. This lesson calls students to witness faithfully wherever God places them, to respond to conviction now rather than later, to live as those brought from darkness to light, to prove their repentance by their deeds, to trust God's providence, and to take up the unfinished story of the unhindered gospel. Help them close the study resolved to live and proclaim the kingdom of the reigning Christ.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul stood before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa, and in each setting he bore faithful witness to Christ (chs. 24-26). What does Paul's conduct before these rulers teach us about witnessing faithfully in every circumstance, even hostile or unlikely ones?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul found himself before a succession of powerful men, the governors Felix and Festus and King Agrippa, in settings of accusation and danger. Yet in each one, Paul turned his defense into a witness for Christ. He did not waste these opportunities defending only his own reputation; he preached the gospel to kings.

This teaches us to witness faithfully in every circumstance. Paul had earlier been told he was a chosen instrument to carry Christ's name before the Gentiles and kings (Acts 9:15), and here that calling was fulfilled. Jesus had promised that His followers would be brought before

governors and kings, and that this would be an opportunity to bear witness (Matthew 10:18; Luke 21:13).

Notice that Paul witnessed even in hostile and unlikely settings, on trial for his life, before men with power over him. He was respectful and wise, but he did not soften the gospel. He saw every situation, even imprisonment and trial, as an opportunity to point people to Christ.

Help students see the application. God places us in all kinds of settings, some comfortable, some hostile, some unlikely, and each is an opportunity for witness. We may never stand before a king, but we stand before coworkers, neighbors, family, and strangers, and like Paul, we can bear faithful witness wherever God places us, making the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Faithful witness in every circumstance, even hostile ones
- Paul's calling to bear Christ's name before kings fulfilled (Acts 9:15)
- Trials as opportunities for witness (Matthew 10:18; Luke 21:13)
- Witnessing with respect and wisdom yet without softening the gospel
- Making the most of every opportunity (Colossians 4:5)

Discussion Prompts

- How did Paul turn his trials into opportunities for witness?
- What does this teach about witnessing in hostile or unlikely settings?
- What settings has God placed you in where you could bear witness?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul bore witness to Christ whether before a hostile mob, a corrupt governor, or a king (chs. 24-26). Where has God placed you that you have not seen as an opportunity for witness? How might you bear faithful testimony there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's example presses a personal question. He saw every setting, even a courtroom where his life was at stake, as a place to witness for Christ. We, by contrast, often fail to see the settings of our own lives as opportunities for witness at all.

Invite honest reflection. Where has God placed me, my workplace, my neighborhood, my family, my circles of friendship, that I have not viewed as an opportunity for witness? We can move through these settings day after day, treating them as merely ordinary, never considering that God may have placed us there to bear testimony to Christ.

Bearing witness does not always mean preaching a sermon; it means living and speaking in a way that points to Christ. It may be a faithful life that prompts a question, a word of testimony at the right moment, a kindness done in Jesus' name, an honest answer about our hope. God places us where He does for a purpose.

Encourage students to reconsider their settings. Where might God be calling me to bear witness that I have overlooked? Perhaps it is the very place I find most ordinary or most difficult. Like Paul, we can come to see every circumstance as a divine appointment and ask, how might I bear faithful testimony to Christ right here?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Seeing the ordinary settings of life as opportunities for witness
- Witness through a faithful life as well as words
- God placing us where we are for a purpose
- Every circumstance as a potential divine appointment

Discussion Prompts

- Where has God placed you that you have not seen as an opportunity for witness?
- Why do we so often overlook the settings of our own lives?
- How might you bear faithful testimony there?

Question 3

Student Question:

As Paul reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the coming judgment, Felix became alarmed (v. 24:25). What does this teach about the way the gospel confronts the conscience, and why is the reality of coming judgment part of the message?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul did not give Felix a comfortable, watered-down message. He reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, and the result was that Felix became alarmed, literally, afraid. The gospel had pierced his conscience.

This teaches that the gospel confronts the conscience. It does not merely offer comfort; it exposes sin and calls for change. Paul spoke of righteousness (the standard God requires), self-control (the area where Felix, living with another man's wife, was failing), and the judgment to come (the reckoning every person will face). These truths disturbed Felix because they were aimed at his life.

The reality of coming judgment is an essential part of the gospel message. We have seen Paul preach it in Athens (Acts 17:31), and here he presses it on a Roman governor. The good news of

forgiveness only makes sense against the backdrop of the bad news of judgment. To leave out judgment is to leave people unaware of their danger and their need.

Help students see that the gospel is meant to confront, not only console. A message that never disturbs the conscience, never speaks of sin and judgment, never calls for repentance, is not the full gospel. The faithful proclamation of righteousness, self-control, and judgment is an act of love, awakening people to their need before it is too late, just as Paul lovingly alarmed Felix.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel confronting the conscience, not only consoling
- Righteousness, self-control, and judgment as part of the message (v. 24:25)
- The coming judgment as essential to the gospel (Acts 17:31)
- Forgiveness understood against the backdrop of judgment
- Confronting the conscience as an act of love

Discussion Prompts

- How did the gospel confront Felix's conscience?
- Why is the coming judgment part of the gospel message?
- Why is a message that never disturbs the conscience incomplete?

Question 4

Student Question:

Felix was alarmed by the truth but said, go away for now; when I have an opportunity I will summon you, and that convenient time never came (v. 24:25). Where do you sense God's call or conviction but keep putting it off for a more convenient time? What is the danger of delay?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Felix's response is one of the saddest lines in Acts. Convicted and alarmed, he did not reject the truth outright; he simply postponed it. Go away for now; when I have a convenient time, I will summon you. So far as we know, that convenient time never came. He kept Paul nearby for two years but never acted on the truth.

This is a sobering picture of the danger of delay. Many people, and many believers, are not so much defiant as procrastinating. They sense God's call or conviction but keep putting off their response, intending to deal with it later, when it is more convenient. But later has a way of never arriving.

Invite honest reflection. Where do I sense God's call or conviction but keep deferring my response? Is there a sin I intend to deal with eventually, an obedience I keep postponing, a step I know I should take but keep delaying for a more convenient time? Felix warns us that the convenient time may never come.

The danger of delay is real. Hearts grow harder with each postponed conviction; opportunities pass; today is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2), and we are not promised tomorrow. Scripture urges, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts (Hebrews 3:15). Encourage students to identify what they have been putting off and to respond now, while the heart is soft and the call is clear, rather than waiting for a convenient time that may never come.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of postponing response to God's call (v. 24:25)
- Procrastination as a subtle form of refusal
- Hearts hardening with each postponed conviction
- Today as the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:15)

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you keep putting off God's call for a more convenient time?
- What is the danger of delay?
- What is God asking of you that you could respond to now?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul said Christ sent him to open people's eyes, to turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness and a place among those sanctified by faith (v. 26:18). What does this verse reveal about what the gospel accomplishes in a person's life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In recounting his commission, Paul gives one of the most beautiful summaries of what the gospel accomplishes. Christ sent him to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. Each phrase reveals a dimension of salvation.

The gospel opens blind eyes. Before Christ, people are spiritually blind, unable to see the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4). The gospel brings sight, enabling people to perceive and embrace the truth about God and themselves.

The gospel transfers people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Salvation is a rescue, a deliverance from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (Colossians 1:13), from the dominion of Satan to the rule of God. It is a change of kingdoms and masters.

And the gospel brings forgiveness of sins and a place among the sanctified, those set apart as God's own, made holy through faith in Christ. The forgiven sinner is not only pardoned but given

a place in God's holy people. Help students grasp the fullness of what the gospel does: it opens our eyes, rescues us from darkness and Satan, forgives our sins, and makes us part of God's holy people. This is the great salvation Christ accomplishes in all who come to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel opening spiritually blind eyes (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- Salvation as transfer from darkness to light and Satan to God (Colossians 1:13)
- Forgiveness of sins through Christ
- A place among the sanctified, God's holy people, by faith
- The fullness of what the gospel accomplishes

Discussion Prompts

- What does this verse reveal about what the gospel accomplishes?
- What does it mean to be transferred from darkness to light and Satan to God?
- How does it encourage you to consider all that salvation includes?

Question 6

Student Question:

The gospel transfers us out of darkness and into light, out of Satan's power and into God's (v. 26:18). If you are in Christ, you have been brought from darkness to light. How fully are you living in that light, and where do shadows of the old life still linger?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

If we are in Christ, the great transfer described in this verse has already happened: we have been brought from darkness to light, from Satan's power to God's. This is our new identity and reality. The question is how fully we are living in it.

Invite honest reflection. I have been brought into the light, but am I living as a child of light? Or do shadows of the old life still linger, old habits, attitudes, sins, and patterns that belong to the darkness I was rescued from? The New Testament repeatedly calls us to live out our new identity: you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (Ephesians 5:8).

There is often a gap between our new identity and our daily reality. We have been transferred into the light, yet we sometimes still walk in the shadows, tolerating sins and patterns that no longer fit who we are in Christ. Growth in the Christian life is increasingly bringing our actual living into line with our new identity.

Encourage students to identify where shadows linger. What part of the old darkness still clings to me, that I need to leave behind and walk fully in the light? Naming it is the first step. We are

children of the light; the call is to live like it, letting the light of Christ reach into every remaining shadow until our lives match our new identity in Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The believer's new identity as a child of light (Ephesians 5:8)
- The gap between new identity and daily reality
- Living out our transfer from darkness to light
- Growth as bringing daily life into line with our identity in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How fully are you living in the light Christ brought you into?
- Where do shadows of the old life still linger?
- What part of the old darkness is God calling you to leave behind?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul preached that people should repent, turn to God, and perform deeds in keeping with their repentance (v. 26:20). What does this teach about the nature of genuine repentance, and how is true repentance shown by more than words?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul summarizes his whole message in a single phrase: that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. Genuine repentance is not merely feeling sorry or saying the right words; it is a turning to God that shows itself in a changed life.

This teaches the nature of true repentance. Repentance is a change of mind that leads to a change of direction and a change of conduct. John the Baptist preached the same thing: bear fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8). Repentance that produces no change in how we live is not the repentance God calls for; it is mere words or feelings.

True repentance is shown by deeds. When a person genuinely turns from sin to God, the turning becomes visible in their conduct, the sin abandoned, the wrong made right, the new obedience taken up. As Paul says, godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:10-11), and that repentance bears fruit. The deeds do not earn salvation, but they demonstrate that the repentance is real.

Help students examine their own repentance. It is possible to say sorry, feel regret, even pray for forgiveness, without truly turning. Genuine repentance changes how we live. The test is not the intensity of our feeling or the eloquence of our confession, but whether our lives actually turn from the sin to God. Real repentance always bears fruit in keeping with itself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Repentance as turning to God shown in a changed life (v. 26:20)
- Bearing fruit in keeping with repentance (Matthew 3:8)
- True repentance demonstrated by deeds, not mere words or feelings
- Godly grief producing genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10-11)
- Deeds demonstrating, not earning, the reality of repentance

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to perform deeds in keeping with repentance?
- How is genuine repentance shown by more than words?
- How can you tell whether repentance is real?

Question 8

Student Question:

King Agrippa told Paul, in a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? coming close but not committing (v. 26:28). Is your repentance bearing real fruit in your life, and have you truly committed to Christ, or are you, like Agrippa, lingering close without deciding? Where do you need to move from almost to fully?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Agrippa's words capture the tragedy of coming close to Christ without committing. Confronted with the truth and clearly moved, he held back: in a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian? He came near the kingdom but did not enter. Paul's longing reply was that all who heard him might become as he was, fully Christ's, except for the chains.

This presses two related questions on us. First, is my repentance bearing real fruit? It is possible to be close to genuine change without ever actually changing, to feel conviction, to intend to turn, yet to remain where we are. Real repentance moves from intention to action, from almost to actually.

Second, have I truly committed to Christ, or am I lingering close without deciding? Some people spend years near the kingdom, interested, moved, even convinced, yet never fully surrendering. Like Agrippa, they come close but hold back, always almost. The call of the gospel is not to admire Christ from a distance but to give ourselves fully to Him.

Encourage students to examine where they are almost rather than fully. Where am I lingering close without deciding, in my initial response to Christ, or in some area of ongoing surrender? The danger of almost is that it feels safe while leaving us short of the kingdom. Help students move from almost to fully, whether in first obeying the gospel or in surrendering an area still held back. Christ calls not for admiration but for wholehearted commitment.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The tragedy of coming close to Christ without committing (v. 26:28)
- Repentance moving from intention to action
- The danger of lingering near the kingdom without entering
- The gospel's call to wholehearted commitment, not admiration

Discussion Prompts

- Is your repentance bearing real fruit, or stalled at good intentions?
- Are you, like Agrippa, lingering close to Christ without fully committing?
- Where do you need to move from almost to fully?

Question 9

Student Question:

God brought Paul safely through storm, shipwreck, and trial to Rome, where the book ends with Paul proclaiming the kingdom of God with all boldness and without hindrance (vv. 27-28; 28:30-31). What does this triumphant ending teach about God's sovereign providence and the unstoppable advance of the kingdom of God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson and the fitting climax of the whole study, so give it room. The book of Acts ends not with Paul's release or martyrdom but with a deliberate, triumphant note: Paul in Rome, a prisoner in chains, yet proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. The very last word of Acts, in the original, is essentially unhindered. Luke ends here on purpose, and the ending teaches us two great truths that have run through the entire book.

First, God's sovereign providence over all circumstances. Trace how Paul reached Rome: through false accusations, imprisonments, plots, appeals, a violent storm, and a shipwreck. Again and again it seemed Paul might never make it. Yet through it all, God was sovereignly working to bring His servant exactly where He intended. The Lord had said Paul must testify in Rome (Acts 23:11), and an angel in the storm confirmed it: you must stand before Caesar (Acts 27:24). God ruled over governors, kings, storms, and the sea to accomplish His purpose, and He even spared all 276 aboard the ship for Paul's sake. Nothing, not the malice of enemies nor the fury of the sea, could thwart God's plan. This is the providence that governs all of history and all of our lives: God works all things according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1:11), and His purposes cannot be defeated.

Second, the unstoppable advance of the kingdom of God. The book that began with a small band of disciples in Jerusalem ends with the gospel proclaimed in Rome, the capital of the empire. Along the way the refrain kept sounding: the word of God increased and multiplied

(Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20). Now it has reached the heart of the world, and it is unhindered, even though its preacher is in chains. This is the great theme of Acts: the kingdom of God, the reign of the risen Christ, advancing irresistibly through every obstacle. Note that Paul preached the kingdom of God, the present reign of Christ that began at Pentecost and continues now, not a future earthly kingdom but the rule of the exalted Lord, into which people are called even now. The gospel of that kingdom cannot be chained, jailed, shipwrecked, or silenced.

Hold these together for students. God sovereignly rules over every circumstance to advance His unstoppable kingdom, and He does it often through suffering, weakness, and chains rather than around them. Paul was bound, but the word was free. The same is true in every age: rulers, persecutions, and powers rage against the gospel, but they cannot stop it, for it is the kingdom of the reigning Christ, and of His kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:33; Daniel 2:44).

Pastorally, this is the perfect note on which to end the study of Acts. The story does not really conclude; it is deliberately left open, because the advance of the unhindered gospel continues, through the church, through ordinary believers, through us. We now stand in the same story, carrying the same gospel of the same reigning Christ, in the confidence that the God who brought Paul to Rome reigns over our circumstances too, and that His kingdom cannot be stopped. The question Acts leaves with us is simply this: will we take up our part in proclaiming the kingdom of God with boldness, trusting the sovereign God whose word no chain can bind?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's sovereign providence over all circumstances (Ephesians 1:11)
- God ruling over rulers, storms, and the sea to accomplish His purpose (Acts 23:11; 27:24)
- God's purposes unable to be thwarted by any opposition
- The unstoppable advance of the gospel and kingdom (Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20)
- The kingdom of God as the present reign of the risen Christ
- The gospel unhindered even when its messengers are bound (v. 28:31)
- The open ending summoning the church to continue the mission

Discussion Prompts

- How did God's providence bring Paul through every obstacle to Rome?
- What does the unhindered gospel teach about the advance of God's kingdom?
- Why do you think Luke ends the book this way, and what does it call us to?

Question 10

Student Question:

This is the final lesson in our journey through Acts, the birth and advance of the Lord's church and the spread of the gospel of the reigning Christ. Looking back over the whole book, name one specific way the Lord has been forming you through this study, and what is one step you will take to carry the unhindered gospel forward in your own life.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone closes not only the lesson but the entire study, so invite students to look back over the whole journey through Acts. We have traced the ascension and reign of Christ, the coming of the Spirit, the birth of the church at Pentecost, the plan of salvation preached and obeyed, the gospel breaking through every barrier, the courage of the witnesses, and the unstoppable advance of the kingdom to Rome.

Invite each person to reflect on how the Lord has been forming them through the study. What truth has gripped them? What conviction has taken root? How have they grown in understanding the gospel, the church, and the reigning Christ, and in being shaped into His likeness? The aim of this study was never mere knowledge but transformation.

Then invite one concrete step to carry the unhindered gospel forward. The book of Acts is deliberately unfinished, because the story continues through us. Perhaps the step is to share the gospel with someone, to obey Christ more fully, to take up a ministry, to live as a citizen of the kingdom, or to commit afresh to the Lord's church and mission.

Close by reminding students that they now stand in the same story Acts tells. The same risen and reigning Christ, the same Spirit, the same gospel, and the same sovereign God who brought His word from an upper room to the heart of Rome are at work in them. The unhindered gospel is now in their hands. May they carry it forward with all boldness, until the kingdom of our Lord fills the earth.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The study aiming at transformation, not mere knowledge
- The believer standing in the continuing story of Acts
- Carrying the unhindered gospel forward
- Living as citizens and witnesses of the reigning Christ's kingdom

Discussion Prompts

- Looking back over the whole book of Acts, how has the Lord been forming you?
- What truth or conviction has most gripped you through this study?
- What step will you take to carry the unhindered gospel forward in your life?