

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: February 25, 2018
Lesson Title: "Always on Mission"
Lesson Passage: Acts 28:17-28

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Paul has been assured that he will have the opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome; first, by the Lord, who appears to Paul by night (Acts 23:11), and, then, by the Roman procurator, Festus, who grants Paul's appeal to Caesar (25:12). The lesson passage (Acts 28:17-28) describes Paul's experience as a prisoner in Rome, where he freely presented the gospel to local Jewish leaders and all who would listen.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

(1) Explain the circumstances that took Paul to Rome. (2) Summarize the response of the Jews in Rome, when Paul presented the gospel to them.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Many interpreters have wondered why the Book of Acts ends as abruptly as it does. The story ends with Paul living under house arrest in Rome for two years. Nothing is said about the trial before Caesar, the very reason Paul was in Rome. According to 2 Timothy 4:11, Luke, the writer of Acts, was with Paul to the end (2 Tim. 4:6); yet Luke has nothing to say about Paul's death. Why does Acts have a seemingly incomplete ending? Dr. Frank Stagg has written this explanation: "Luke is writing about the gospel, not about Paul. Openly and unhinderedly Paul preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ...The painful fight was made for an unshackled gospel. The saddest cost of the victory was the self-exclusion of the Jews; the glorious victory was a gospel preached unhinderedly!" (The last word in Acts is "unhindered.")

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Read Acts 28:16, then review the reason Paul was in Rome and the circumstances in which he was living there:* (1) Paul was in Rome because, at the end of hearings before governor Festus and King Agrippa in Caesarea, he had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to appeal to Caesar (Acts 28:17b-19; Acts 25:11). EXPLANATION: Paul chose this option because he knew that he probably would be assassinated by the Jews in Jerusalem if he were to be sent back there for a trial (*read Acts 25:9-10*). (2) While he awaited his hearing before Caesar, he was given permission to stay in his own rented house, with a soldier guarding him night and day (28:16). COMMENT: Although he was a prisoner, with limited freedom of movement, he was at last in Rome, something that he had long prayed for (Romans 1:10-11). (3) One other good thing about his situation in Rome is that He could preach the gospel to a broad audience. In addition to the Jewish leaders whom he invited to his house

(Acts 28:17), the Roman soldiers who guarded him day and night could not help overhearing Paul as he taught, prayed and sang. Also, in his letter to the Philippians (which probably was written during the imprisonment in Rome), Paul says that the gospel "has become known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to all the rest" (Phil. 1:13). NOTE: The Praetorian Guard was an elite army unit, numbering as many as 10,000 carefully chosen soldiers, who were stationed in Rome to guard the Emperor. Its members were very influential in governmental affairs.

2. Note that, although Paul was now in the heart of the Gentile world, his first act was to invite a group of Jewish leaders to his house (Acts 28:17): COMMENTS: (1) After his encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus, Paul's whole life revolved around the fact that he was called to be an apostle to all people, both Gentiles and Jews (Acts 9:15). (2) But the more radical elements of Jewish society would never accept the notion that Gentiles would have a place in God's kingdom. (When Paul was addressing the Jews in Jerusalem who had tried to mob him, he very nearly touched off a riot when he testified that the Lord had sent him as a minister to the Gentiles--Acts 22:21.) For three decades the Jews had bitterly opposed Paul and had repeatedly attempted to kill him, forcing him to give precedence to the Gentiles in his ministry. EXAMPLES: [a] In response to the insults of abusive Jews in Ephesus, Paul and Barnabas declared their intention to go to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). [b] When Jews in Corinth rejected his message, Paul again declared, "From now on I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). (3) But, though Paul had been repeatedly rejected by his fellow Jews, he never denied his Jewish heritage. In fact, on occasion, he proudly emphasized it (Philippians 3:5-6; Acts 22:3-4). And, though he was committed to his calling as "the apostle to the Gentiles", his efforts to win his fellow Jews to Christ persisted to the very end. (4) Paul's approach to sharing the gospel with these Jews was to use their own scriptures (v. 23) to convince them that Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of Jewish religion. (5) Some of them believed, but others resisted his message. This is why Paul quoted Isa. 6:9-10 and applied it to the Jews of his day (Acts 28:26-27). He reminded his Jewish hearers that, while they had resisted the gospel, the Gentiles had shown their willingness to listen (v. 28).

CLOSING THE LESSON

Recall once again that the last word in the Greek text of Acts is the adverb "unhinderedly." (Verse 31b reads literally "teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ unhinderedly.") Comment: The Book of Acts is the story of how the gospel was able to break loose from all the shackles that would hinder it (religious bigotry, racial prejudice, and national barriers). Discuss barriers that the gospel must overcome in today's world. EXAMPLES: Religious and political oppression, faulty theological notions, atheistic and agnostic philosophies, superficial Christians who "talk Jesus" but don't live by his teachings.