

Paul's Prison Epistles

Lesson Guide

LESSON
ONE

PAUL'S IMPRISONMENT



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HOW TO USE THIS LESSON GUIDE

This lesson guide is designed for use in conjunction with the associated video. If you do not have access to the video, the lesson guide will also work with the audio and/or text versions of the lesson. Additionally, the video and lesson guide are intended to be used in a learning community, but they also can be used for individual study if necessary.

- **Before you watch the lesson**
 - **Prepare** — Complete any recommended readings.
 - **Schedule viewing** — The Notes section of the lesson guide has been divided into segments that correspond to the video. Using the time codes found in parentheses beside each major division, determine where to begin and end your viewing session. IIM lessons are densely packed with information, so you may also want to schedule breaks. Breaks should be scheduled at major divisions.
- **While you are watching the lesson**
 - **Take notes** — The Notes section of the lesson guide contains a basic outline of the lesson, including the time codes for the beginning of each segment and key notes to guide you through the information. Many of the main ideas are already summarized, but make sure to supplement these with your own notes. You should also add supporting details that will help you to remember, describe, and defend the main ideas.
 - **Record comments and questions** — As you watch the video, you may have comments and/or questions on what you are learning. Use the margins to record your comments and questions so that you can share these with the group following the viewing session.
 - **Pause/replay portions of the lesson** — You may find it helpful to pause or replay the video at certain points in order to write additional notes, review difficult concepts, or discuss points of interest.
- **After you watch the lesson**
 - **Complete Review Questions** — Review Questions are based on the basic content of the lesson. You should answer Review Questions in the space provided. These questions should be completed individually rather than in a group.
 - **Answer/discuss Application Questions** — Application Questions are questions relating the content of the lesson to Christian living, theology, and ministry. Application questions are appropriate for written assignments or as topics for group discussions. For written assignments, it is recommended that answers not exceed one page in length.

Preparation

- Read Acts chapters 21–28.

Notes

I. Introduction (0:25)

Prison Epistles: Letters to various churches and people that Paul wrote while he was in prison.

II. Background (2:50)

A. Events Preceding Arrest (3:50)

A.D. 56 or 57: Near the end of Paul's third missionary journey, Paul went to Jerusalem to deliver funds to the poor Christians who were enduring a famine.

The Holy Spirit had warned Paul that he would be imprisoned when he arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-24).

Believers prophesied Paul's coming imprisonment. Paul knew these prophecies were to prepare him for his coming hardships.

The prophet Agabus bound his own hands and feet as a prophetic sign, warning that Paul would be arrested and bound if he continued to Jerusalem.

Paul understood that his coming imprisonment would be "for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

B. Arrest in Jerusalem (8:48)

Paul hoped that the gift would make Jewish Christians more eager to receive the Gentiles as full brothers in Christ.

Paul behaved like a Gentile when among Gentiles. But he was willing to follow Jewish traditions for the sake of the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:20-21).

Paul agreed to participate in the rituals of the temple in Jerusalem:

- To demonstrate his commitment to the Mosaic Law
- For the cause of Christ among the Jews
- For the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles within the church

The Jews wrongly assumed that Trophimus had also entered that court, and they were outraged.

These Jews roused the city against Paul, and an angry mob dragged him from the court of Israel, intent on killing him.

Paul defended himself before the Sanhedrin, explaining why so many Jews had taken offense to his teachings (Acts 23:6-8).

Since Paul was a Roman citizen, he was transported to Caesarea Maritima.

Felix: Governor of the Roman province of Judea.

C. Imprisonment in Caesarea (19:16)

Caesarea Maritima: The capital city of the Roman province Judea.

Tertullus argued that Paul had disturbed the peace, incited riots, and tried to violate the temple (Acts 24:8).

Paul's response to his accusers had four main points:

1. There were no witnesses against him.
2. Others had disturbed the peace and not he.
3. He had no desire to defile the temple.
4. The Sanhedrin had not found him guilty.

Felix delayed ruling on Paul's case for two years, until replaced by governor Porcius Festus.

Paul did not want his case heard in Jerusalem. He appealed to his right as a Roman citizen to have his case heard by Nero Caesar himself.

Paul believed that his imprisonment would further his gospel ministry.

D. Imprisonment in Rome (26:45)

Late A.D. 59: Paul was placed under the authority of a Roman centurion named Julius and put on a ship heading for Asia Minor.

A violent storm blew their ship past Cauda, far out into the Mediterranean Sea. Eventually, the ship struck a reef near the Isle of Malta and was destroyed.

Paul and everyone else from the ship were stranded in Malta for three months.

Paul presented the people of with the gospel and performed miraculous healings.

Early A.D. 60: Paul and his companions set sail for Italy. Paul arrived in Rome later that year, and was placed under house arrest.

A.D. 60-62: Paul lived under house arrest in Rome. He was permitted to receive guests and to teach freely.

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:30-31).

III. Ongoing Ministry (32:35)

God had orchestrated events so that Paul’s imprisonment in Rome would provide the opportunity for Paul to spread the Gospel of Christ to the heart of the western world.

A. Book of Acts (33:55)

Paul’s experiences of imprisonment were very important for Luke, the author of Acts. He dedicated nearly nine chapters to events related to this period in Paul’s life.

1. Awareness of Suffering (34:50)

Paul was aware that his service to Christ would bring severe hardship and suffering into his life.

Paul was acutely aware of the difficulties that awaited him in his service to Christ and his gospel, and was willing even to be martyred (Acts 20:22-25, 21:13).

2. Awareness of Purpose (36:05)

Paul was aware of the purpose of his suffering. The Lord also planned to use this suffering to promote the gospel (Acts 20:24).

Imprisonment would be the means through which Paul accomplished his ministry.

- Paul presented his testimony to the mob that sought his death (Acts 22:1-21).
- Paul testified to the gospel and Christ's resurrection before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10).

- Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Caesarean court — publicly at his hearing and privately to the governor Felix and his wife Drusilla (Acts 24:14-26).
- Paul proclaimed the gospel to the new governor Festus as well as to the Jewish king Agrippa and his wife Bernice (Acts 25:18–26:29).
- Paul regularly preached the gospel of the kingdom of God to all who had come to see him in Rome (Acts 28:23-31).

Christ's words to Paul summarize the purpose of this suffering: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome" (Acts 23:11).

3. Awareness of Blessings (38:49)

Paul was very aware of God's blessing on his ministry during this time (Acts 19–28).

- Paul received and interpreted visions to protect the lives of those on the ship that eventually crashed on the reef.
- He healed the sick.
- He ministered to the individual needs of the believers.

B. Letters to Churches (39:35)**1. Preaching (40:21)**

Paul endured prison mainly to gain new opportunities to proclaim the gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20).

Paul wanted prayer so that he would have the opportunity to preach the gospel (Colossians 4:3-4).

2. Praying (41:52)

Paul was in constant prayer for the churches.

Paul's imprisonment actually increased the time he was able to spend in prayer (Ephesians 1:16-18).

Paul's efforts in prayer constituted a vibrant and valuable ministry to those who were not near (Philippians 1:3-9; Colossians 1:9; Philemon 6).

3. **Suffering (44:40)**

When the goal and product of suffering is the advancement of God's kingdom through the promotion of the gospel, suffering is ministry.

Our suffering may provide opportunities to bless the church, testify to the gospel, and increase the glory that the church will inherit.

Suffering can be an indisputable testimony to the truth of the gospel (Philippians 1:14).

We should be willing to suffer hardship and even death for the benefit of others.

We should be thankful of the suffering that others endure for this cause (1 John 3:16; Ephesians 3:13).

Paul's suffering was a continuation of the suffering of Christ himself (Colossians 1:24).

Jesus suffers when we suffer:

- Because Jesus loves us so dearly
- Because he is united to all believers

The suffering of the church is the suffering of Christ.

Christ must suffer until his return. Paul was privileged to help Christ fulfill that appointed suffering.

4. Writing (51:06)

Paul's writing ministry during his imprisonment is demonstrated by his New Testament letters:

- The church in Colosse
- The church in Ephesus
- The church in Philippi
- The Colossian man Philemon.

Paul's ministry was informed and carefully tailored to the specific situations of the churches and individuals to whom he wrote.

Paul directed his letters to the theological issues that involved the church as a whole.

IV. Theological Unity (54:59)

Paul's letters from prison share some important doctrinal foundations.

- Affirm the same gospel.
- Share a common way of presenting the gospel
- Tend to emphasize the same aspects of that gospel.

Common foundation: Jesus Christ is the conqueror and ruler of all creation.

A. King of Creation (56:30)

1. Sovereignty (57:07)

Christ has the strength and power to accomplish his will, and the legal authority and right to do so.

When Jesus ascended into heaven, God the Father vested him with sovereignty over all creation (Ephesians 1:20-22).

Jesus Christ rules over the entire creation with absolute power (Matthew 28:18).

Not everything in creation obeys him as it should. But Jesus has the right to command its obedience, and the power to make it obey.

2. Honor (59:44)

Christ's glory and value demand the responses of respect, emulation and worship.

Jesus is God, and God is worthy of the highest honor imaginable (Colossians 1:16-17).

3. **Determination (1:02:15)**

Paul's outlook on the return of Christ grew out of traditional Jewish views of the end times.

Jesus revealed that this traditional Jewish conception was not entirely accurate. The age to come would replace the present age, but not all at once. The two ages would overlap for a time.

Jesus reigns as king from heaven. He wants and plans to rule over every inch of creation as fully and gloriously as he now reigns in heaven.

Our future inheritance is guaranteed. Jesus must return in order to deliver our inheritance in the consummated kingdom (Ephesians 1:13-14; Philippians 3:20-21).

B. Union with Christ (1:07:15)

When we believe in Jesus, we are united to him in a spiritual, though mysterious way.

Paul frequently encouraged his readers through their sharing in Christ's kingship.

We are united to Christ:

- In his death (Colossians 3:1-4)
- In his resurrection and ascension (Ephesians 2:6-7)
- In his sufferings (Colossians 1:24)

Paul spoke of our union with Christ in order to encourage believers that they did not suffer alone, and that they did not suffer in vain.

Paul took comfort in the fact that when we suffer for the gospel, our union with Christ ensures that Christ suffers and sympathizes with us.

C. Ethical Living (1:11:57)

Paul spent much time teaching about ethical Christian living in addition to addressing doctrinal matters (1 Corinthians 13:2).

1. Christ as King (1:14:10)

Because Christ is both sovereign and just, we are legally and ethically obligated to obey everything that he commands (Philippians 2:9-12).

Christ's kingship should always be one of our fundamental motivations to live godly lives (Philippians 1:27; Colossians 1:10).

2. United to Christ (1:17:13)

Our union with Christ obligates and enables us to live ethically:

- Christ indwells us by his Spirit, giving us a new nature and compelling us to do good works (Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:5-10).

- God has commanded that all who are united to his Son must live holy lives. God has predestined good works for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

- We are united to one another through Christ. This obligates us to treat one another as we would treat Christ himself, and as we ourselves want to be treated (Philippians 2:1-3).

V. Conclusion (1:21:48)

3. Summarize the events and nature of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea.

4. Summarize the events and nature of Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

11. What is the main theological truth that underlies the theological unity of Paul's prison epistles? How does it relate to the themes of Christ's kingship over creation, our union with Christ, and ethical living?

Application Questions

1. Paul received many warnings regarding imminent danger in Jerusalem, yet he continued toward the city. What gave Paul the confidence and fortitude to move forward in faith? How may we learn from the example of Paul as he faced difficult circumstances and adversity?
2. Why was Paul able to minister freely both to Jews and to Gentiles? What does it look like for believers today to live out Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:20-21?
3. God used Paul's imprisonments to advance the gospel and the kingdom of God. How has God worked through adverse circumstances in your life to advance his gospel and kingdom?
4. Explain how suffering can be a form of Christian ministry. Compare and contrast Paul's outlook on suffering with your present understanding of suffering.
5. While Paul's situation as a prisoner was not ideal, he still continued to seek opportunities to proclaim the gospel. What opportunities do you have to proclaim the gospel?
6. Paul spoke often of our union with Christ. In what ways does understanding the doctrine of our union with Christ bring you hope and comfort?
7. What is the most significant insight you have learned from this study?