

## STUDY NOTES

### Lesson 9: Acts 25, 26, 27, 28

*“Praying...that utterance may be given unto me,  
that I may open my mouth boldly,  
to make known...the gospel,  
For which I am an ambassador in bonds:  
that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.”  
Ephesians 6:18-20*

#### ACTS 25: PAUL IN THE CUSTODY OF ROME AT CAESAREA

Chapter 25 is short and filled with fairly uninteresting details about Paul’s imprisonment at Caesarea, the Roman provincial capital of Judea. It would be an easy chapter to skip. But there are interesting lessons here. At this point Paul is a prisoner and because of that, he is completely powerless in any earthly sense. Around him are all the trappings of power in the governments of men. In this chapter we find palaces, plots, politicians, councils and parties, judgment halls, kings, consorts and “great pomp.” Here are all the important and powerful things in life, arrayed against one poor, powerless itinerant preacher. The question to ask is “Why?” Why did the mighty and powerful rage against this man and do everything in their power to stop him? Why did God prevent them and keep His poor preacher alive?

It is because, as Paul states so eloquently in his letter to the saints in Corinth, God’s way is to purposely pick the powerless to show forth His power in the world, so that the praise will go to Him who deserves praise, rather than to man. The most powerful and important and far reaching thing that God can give to any man or woman is the truth. And God has very particular methods of sending His truth into the world.

Listen, as if you were hearing Paul himself preach the following words, which so eloquently describe his passionate feelings:

“17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

20 Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

22 For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:17-31)

Well might we ask, "Where is Felix? Where is Festus? Where is King Herod Agrippa? Where is the beautiful Bernice? Where is the high priest of Jerusalem and where are his co-conspirators on the council of the Sanhedrin? Where is the glory and might and authority of Rome? They have all come to dust. But the poor, itinerant preacher is one of the most honored men who ever lived; although he would humbly deflect any such praise to the Master he served.

And what is the lesson to us, to LDS women in the 21st century? Is it not to learn to ignore the world's judgments of what is important or powerful or that even emptier criterion, what is popular? If we hold on to the iron rod of God's word (in the scriptures, in our answered prayers, through the prophet) and don't spend too much time gazing into the great and spacious building, we will come safely home to God. But we must make that choice. If we spend our time trying to copy Bernice's hairstyles and fashion choices we will fail. You cannot ride two horses. We must choose the cause of Christ over the hypnotic enticements of worldly things.

### **PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA**

King Agrippa wants to hear what Paul has to say out of curiosity. He will most certainly have heard of Jesus and that some people regard him as the Messiah. Now is his chance to hear first hand from one of the leaders of this sect what it is all about. The details of the story as told in the 26th chapter of Acts are not new, as they have appeared in previous chapters. What makes this chapter and its retelling of the familiar story so compelling is that Paul does not give Agrippa what he wants to satisfy his curiosity. He presents his message as a challenge to believe, as if he were saying, "Here King Agrippa, is your chance to respond to the message of Christ's redemptive work for mankind. The choice is now yours." Unsaid is the implication: "Choose wisely."

The King James translators have famously translated Acts 26:28, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." And certainly a good sermon can be made of the word "almost." But all modern day translators and Greek scholars agree that this misses the mark of the original Greek language. Translated literally word for word it reads, "And Agrippa said to Paul; In a little me thou persuadest a Christian to make?" Or, in more readable modern English, "Are you actually trying in this little speech to make me a Christian too?" Agrippa wanted to know something about Christianity. At some point in Paul's recitation, he realizes that Paul is challenging him personally to accept what he is saying as truth. Perhaps he was somewhat surprised and even offended that Paul would be so bold as to try and convert him, a King. Paul, of course, was not a man to be im-

pressed by worldly credentials. He tried to convert everybody! Paul did not give the king special treatment.

Perhaps to diffuse the tension in the situation, Paul replies to Agrippa with a touch of ironic humor. “Yes, your majesty. I would to God that all men were believers just like me—not counting these shackles of course!” And with that the King, Festus and Bernice stride out of the room. The message of the gospel was never really heard by them at all. But Paul is now cleared of the “blood and sins” of these people, for they have heard the testimony of the risen Christ from one who was His courageous witness. The one thing the king and the governor seem to take away from Paul’s appearance before them is the realization that Paul is an honest man and hasn’t done anything worthy of death.

### **SEA VOYAGE TO ROME**

Chapters 27 and 28 contain the exciting story of Paul’s journey to Rome. It is the kind of story young boys would love to read—full of howling storms and shipwrecks, treacherous sailors who would leave their passengers to drown except for our hero Paul’s intervention, the dramatic rescue of 276 souls who are thrown into the stormy sea and must swim to shore, and a poisonous snake slithering out of the fire to strike God’s servant. This last vignette is a fitting symbol for the truth we find represented in these stories, for as a symbol for Satan, the snake shows the hate-filled attack of the Adversary as he tries everything in his power to destroy the powerful witness of Paul. But the evil one may hiss and slither and strike all he wants to: as long as God has a purpose for Paul to be alive, His power makes the power of the devil look puny. Paul merely shakes the snake off into the fire and is not harmed. Satan cannot prevent God’s servants from doing what God has appointed them to do.

### **ROME AT LAST**

After an eventful trip of 1,000 miles on three different ships, the weary travelers finally reach Italy. From various statements in the text it seems that the Roman centurion, Julius, who has been in charge of Paul on this entire journey, has developed quite a deep bond with him. He was even willing to risk trouble with his superiors to save Paul’s life in the shipwreck when military policy seemed to dictate killing the prisoners rather than risk letting them escape. They had certainly been through a lot together. Julius had many reasons to respect and trust Paul. Perhaps this is why Paul and his party were allowed to stay for seven days in Puteoli at the request of the Christians there as they neared Rome.

Perhaps Julius also had something to do with Paul’s rather favorable circumstances in Rome. All the prisoners were delivered to the “captain of the guard” except Paul who was allowed “to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.” In the relationship between Paul and Julius we see how effectively we can witness of the gospel of Christ just by the example of our character and the outward effects of the spirit working in our lives. By being “who we are,” consecrated Saints of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give off a light

into the lives of those around us that often draws them to us. This is an important way for us to live out a witness in our own circle of acquaintance.

Paul had his own dwelling in Rome and it was large enough to have a considerable group of people meet there. There didn't seem to be any restrictions on the support of his friends and co-workers. They were able to support and care for him freely. He was apparently required to wear some kind of chain to signify his status but it did not restrict his movement. Luke's account regards Paul's coming to Rome as the triumphal finish to Paul's story, for he has successfully brought his powerful witness of Christ into the very heart of the Roman Empire.

For Paul, all of life was a ministry. He had now been carrying his missionary message to Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Achaia for 30 years. He had been tireless, dedicated and courageous in his labors. It does seem amazing that he never said, "I've done enough. I'm going to retire." But of course, Paul did not regard his life as his own. This is clearly seen in his comments on board the prison ship. After many days of storms Paul is visited by an angel who reassures him of a successful conclusion to the journey. He describes this to his fellow shipmates the next day in this way: "For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, ..." Paul did not belong to himself; he belonged to God.

### **THE FUTURE FORESHADOWED**

The book of Acts closes with a series of two meetings Paul has at his house with the leaders of the Roman Jewish community. Paul repeats the pattern here that existed in all of his ministry--"to the Jew first, and then the Gentile." Paul's countrymen are always given the first opportunity to accept his message. But as in all the other cities where he preached, his appeal is for the most part rejected by the Jews.

Acts ends with a quote from Isaiah 6: 9-10. Paul quotes these words as prophetic of what the Jew's response would be to the good news that the Messiah had come. They would hear but hear not, and see but see not, because their "hearts were fat." This same passage was quoted by the Savior in his own ministry, who faced the same rejection that Paul did. (See for example, Matthew 13:13-15.) Paul's missionary plan was to give the Jews their opportunity, and when they rejected it, to take the revolutionary step of offering the message to the Gentiles. We have seen in our reading the great success of this missionary program of Paul. Thousands of Gentiles had converted to Christianity.

Many scriptural passages in Isaiah also foreshadow this development. Isaiah 42:6 is typical: "I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles." (See also Isaiah 42:1 and 49:6) Thus closes Luke's account of the triumphant march of the message of Jesus the Messiah, from Jerusalem, to "all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) It is now up to the saints of the latter-days to finish the mission that Peter, Paul, Luke, Barnabas, Timothy and all the other early saints started for us, by continuing the great work of proclaiming the gospel to the whole earth.