

THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

Synopsis & Context – Session #30: Paul's Final Days

If one could earn frequent traveler miles two thousand years ago, Paul might hold a record. *The Story* would have us follow Paul, who after spending nearly three years in Ephesus, retraces his steps through Greece and Macedonia before docking in Miletus. There, he summoned the Ephesian elders for a tearful and final farewell. He charged them with shepherding the church of God. After a brief stay with Philip in Caesarea, Paul headed for Jerusalem, knowing that chains awaited him there.

Paul seemed to always be able to stir up a controversy. Just walking into the temple court stirred up trouble. The Jews tried to kill him in Jerusalem so the Roman authorities stepped in to arrest him. While being taken into custody, Paul gave his testimony before an angry crowd. The Roman commander brought him before the Sanhedrin to get some answers, but that only made the problem worse. Paul remained in protective custody and was transferred to Caesarea's higher court where he remained for two years before appealing to Caesar.

When Paul wrote to the church in Rome while still on his missionary journeys, he told them that he planned to visit them. He probably did not anticipate his "fourth missionary journey" to be under these circumstances. Luke joined him on this cruise to Rome with Julius, a kind Imperial centurion, as Paul's personal escort. Paul warned the crew that sailing on in bad weather would be disastrous, but they continued anyway. Conditions worsened to hurricane force winds off the coast of Crete driving their ship every which way. Weeks later the storm had not weakened, but all thoughts of survival surely had. Food was low, gear was gone, hope was gone. What seemed like a bad episode of Gilligan's Island became unlikely opportunities for Paul to talk about God. The next morning they arrived safely ashore on Malta where the islanders showed exceptional hospitality. When Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake without incident, the people thought he was either a criminal or a god. Paul healed many of the locals during their winter stay there. Three months later they were finally able to set sail for Rome.

Paul was greeted by believers at the port of Puteoli, modern day Pozzuoli, about 150 miles south of Rome. They encouraged him and he spent a week there before traveling on. When the Roman Christians heard he was coming, they joined him for the final forty miles of his trek to Rome where Paul was confined to house arrest under the supervision of a soldier. Paul invited the Jewish leaders to come to his house. There he told them about his conflict with the Jerusalem Jews and the fulfillment of the Scriptures by Jesus. Some believed, but others rejected his message. So, once again, Paul pronounced his mission to the Gentiles. He spent the next two years boldly teaching anyone who would stop by about Jesus (60-62 A.D.). In his spare time, Paul corresponded with some old friends.

Paul had a special place in his heart for the church in Ephesus. He had spent three years there developing the new church (Acts 20:31). The Letter to the Ephesians reminds the church there of the high calling in Christ that is the basis of God's plan to unite all believers—Jews and Gentiles alike—in one body, the Church. Therefore, those who are called are to conduct themselves in the highest of ethical standards. Although the world is hostile, believers are to preserve unity in the Spirit. *The Letters to Timothy* are to encourage Timothy to be faithful in preserving the gospel in the midst of persecution and false teachers.



Chapter 30: *Paul's Final Days* is 'woven' from selections from *The Acts of the Apostles* (20-23, 27-28), *Ephesians* (1-6) and *2 Timothy* (1-4).

Plot Points for Chapter #30: Paul's Final Days

Jesus told his followers that they, like him, would be hated; Paul's story proves that this was true for his followers in the early church. Paul's ministry was lived out in the context of relationships and discipleship. Paul never wasted a moment. Whether writing letters or witnessing to Roman soldiers, he spent his entire life sharing the gospel and caring for the young, growing churches he had planted.

As we have already noted, Paul kept up a tiring schedule, constantly traveling. He was, without a doubt, a man of action. Yet Paul also had an incredible focus on building relationships. One of the clearest indicators of this comes when we read the end of each of his letters. In most of them, we find an extensive list of people he is praying for and thinking about. Each name in the letters represents a personal relationship Paul has built, and it is through these kinds of relationships—and the love and encouragement so evident in his letters—that disciples are made.

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

God's Story – YOUR story!

- **Where do you find a message of grace in the midst of Paul's arrests, trials and travels?**
- **What's your biggest "take-away" from Paul the missionary (as described in Acts)?**
- **What impresses you the most of Paul's work (his letters)?**
- **What makes Paul so challenging?**
- **What makes Paul so hopeful?**

The Bible as a Dramatic Story

i - Prologue – Creation (context)

ii – Prologue – The Fall (conflict)

Act I – Israel (First Covenant)

Act II – Jesus (Second Covenant)

Act III – New Life

Epilogue – TBD