

C. Paul warns (20:28–38)

Notice how Luke interchanged the term *elders* with *overseers* in verse 28. Paul clearly affirmed that the Holy Spirit had made these men elders/overseers to feed, or pastor, the church. Also Paul reminded these pastors that God, not the elders/overseers, bought and owns the church.

Paul made clear that opposition would come from both without and within the church. The opposition would be like savage wolves who seek to destroy Christ's ministry (20:29).

READ: Acts 20:30. **ASK:** What would the savage wolves try to do? (Q14) *Draw disciples to themselves.*

Since the savage wolves would infiltrate the church, Paul commended the elders to God's Word. The Word would help them spot the false teachings of the savage wolves. It would also build them up spiritually and help them avoid falling suspect to sins such as covetousness (20:31, 32).

All church leaders are susceptible to the desire to gain power and money. Paul had many opportunities to gain financially through his ministry. He refused to do so (20:33, 34). Instead, he served those in need and focused on what he could give (20:35).

As Paul departed from the Ephesian elders, they prayed together and experienced an outpouring of emotion (20:36–38). Paul's life was already an incredible testimony of what God could do through someone surrendered to Him. But God was not yet done with Paul. He had plans to use Paul in Jerusalem and then in Rome.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Focus Examination

ASK: How do you approach the ministries you are involved in? Do you complain about having to participate? Or do you rejoice in the opportunity? (Q15)

ASK: What does your approach to ministry say about your focus in life? (Q16)

Encourage your learners to spend time examining their hearts and thinking about who or what has captured the focus of their lives.

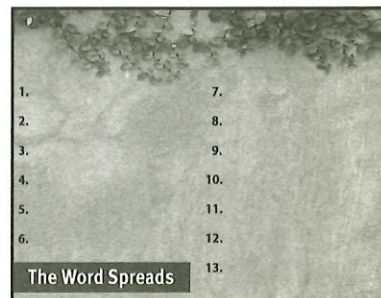
The Word of His Grace

ASK: What role does God's Word play in your life? (Q17)

ASK: What might you need to do to avail yourself of the edifying ministry of the Word? (Q18)

Review Resource

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Focus on serving God, not self.



Paul Remains Steadfast



Topic

Steadfastness

Theme

Even when treated unfairly, God's servants must remain steadfast.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will analyze his or her own attitude toward unfair situations and will determine to honor God in action and attitude in life's unfair situations.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 16

Scripture Focus

Acts 21–26

Summary

Lesson 12 draws attention to the steadfast witness of the apostle during his trials. This lesson focuses on Paul's two major speeches and his continual and faithful witness before powerful rulers.

Outline

I. Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (21:1–14)

- A. Paul warned in Tyre (21:1–6)
- B. Paul warned in Caesarea (21:7–14)

II. Paul's Reception in Jerusalem (21:15–23:35)

- A. Meeting with the Jerusalem elders (21:15–26)
- B. Seizure of Paul in the temple (21:27–36)
- C. Paul's defense before the people (21:37–22:29)
- D. Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin and the conspiracy (23:1–35)

III. Paul's Steadfastness before Powerful Rulers (24:1–26:32)

- A. Imprisonment under Felix (24:1–27)
 - 1. The charges against Paul (24:1–9)
 - 2. Paul's defense (24:10–21)
 - 3. Felix's indecision and Paul's detention (24:22–27)
- B. Imprisonment under Festus (25:1–26:32)
 - 1. Paul's defense before Festus (25:1–12)
 - 2. Paul's case discussed with Herod Agrippa II (25:13–26:32)

Memory Verses

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:22, 23).

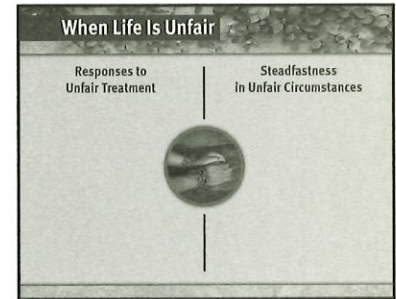
GETTING STARTED

That's Unfair!

RESOURCE: Display resource 15. **ASK:** What typical reactions do people express when they receive unfair treatment? (Q1) (Record learners' answers on the resource.) *Get angry; seek revenge; seek justice.*

ASK: Why is dealing with unfair treatment so hard? (Q2) *We are wired to defend our rights; we want to protect our reputation; we don't like injustice.*

Everyone experiences unfair treatment in life. The apostle Paul experienced more than most people (2 Cor. 11:24–28). Unfair treatment was common for Paul. Today's lesson looks at how Paul handled such treatment and how God used unfair circumstances to accomplish His will.



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. Paul's Journey to Jerusalem (21:1–14)

A. Paul warned in Tyre (21:1–6)

Paul headed to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey. Along the way he met with disciples to encourage them. When he landed in Tyre, he spent a week with the disciples there while the ship he was on unloaded cargo and took on a new load. The fact that Paul had to look for the disciples might suggest the church there was not very large. Ironically, Paul's persecution of the church at Jerusalem probably led to the establishment of the church in Tyre.

The believers in Tyre kept on warning Paul that he should not go up to Jerusalem (21:4). They were concerned for his safety. But Paul knew it was God's will for him to go to Jerusalem even though the advice of his friends seemed practical and wise.

ASK: Why can't we use conventional, human wisdom to guide our decision making? (Q3) *Sometimes God leads us in ways that don't make sense from the perspective of human wisdom. For Paul to go to Jerusalem was crazy from a human perspective.*

Though he only knew the disciples in Tyre for a week, Paul formed a bond with them. Entire families joined Paul in a prayer meeting on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea (21:5). The experience must have been encouraging to Paul. And no doubt God responded to those prayers for Paul and strengthened him for what he was to face in Jerusalem. Apparently the people had finally conceded that God's will was for Paul to go to Jerusalem. They turned their warnings to Paul into prayers for him.

B. Paul warned in Caesarea (21:7–14)

Paul met even more dramatic warnings when he arrived in Caesarea, the last

stop on his way to Jerusalem. While staying with Philip, one of the servants who ministered with Stephen in Jerusalem, Agabus came to Jerusalem to warn Paul. He took Paul's belt and tied himself up. He then told Paul that the Spirit had said the person to whom the belt belonged would be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem and delivered to the Gentiles.

Both Paul's traveling companions and those from Caesarea begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul was glad for their concern, but their weeping was not going to change his mind. He was steadfast in his desire to follow God's leading. The church in Jerusalem was divided over the gospel being preached to the Gentiles and the setting aside of the law and circumcision. Paul needed to address that problem.

READ: Acts 21:13. **ASK:** Describe the steadfastness with which Paul sought to obey God. (Q4) *Paul was determined to go to Jerusalem even if it meant his death.*

READ: Acts 21:13. **ASK:** What was the conclusion when Paul would not change his plans to go to Jerusalem? (Q5) *God's will would be done.*

II. Paul's Reception in Jerusalem (21:15–23:35)

A. Meeting with the Jerusalem elders (21:15–26)

Paul arrived in Jerusalem around late spring of AD 57. As Paul rehearsed and celebrated his ministry with the elders, they suggested a plan to help Paul quiet his critics, who believed Paul told the Hebrews he met on his journeys to stop adhering to the Law of Moses. Paul didn't tell the Hebrews to stop adhering to the Law. He understood they were weak believers and needed to be brought along to a fuller understanding of God's current program. Paul would not do anything to discourage the Hebrew believers in their faith.

The plan involved Paul taking four men to the temple who were about to enter the final days of their vow of purification. Paul would pay their temple fees as they spent the required time in the temple (21:23, 24). This vow of purity was most likely a Nazarite vow (Acts 18:18; Num. 6:13–15). Paul's participation in this strict Jewish ritual would show the Jews that he had not been telling Hebrews to abandon their observance of the Law of Moses.

Paul was not compromising his beliefs. Rather, he was accommodating the Jewish believers (cf. 1 Cor. 9:20). Admonishing Gentile believers not to eat meat offered to idols and having Timothy circumcised were similar accommodations (Acts 21:25; 16:1–3). Accommodating the Jews would give Paul an opportunity to talk with them about the gospel.

B. Seizure of Paul in the temple (21:27–36)

After Paul completed the vow of purity himself, Jews from Asia accused him of preaching against the law and the temple. They also said he took an uncircumcised Greek, Trophimus the Ephesian, into the temple (21:29). These Jews formed a mob and sought to kill Paul (21:30, 31). As they were beating Paul news of the

uproar came to the commander of the garrison. He took soldiers and pulled Paul from the mob (21:32).

ASK: How do you think you would react to being attacked by an angry mob for something you didn't do? Would steadfastness be one of your reactions? (Q6)

After binding Paul with chains, the commander failed to ascertain why the mob was beating Paul. So he ordered Paul taken to the barracks.

READ: Acts 21:35, 36. **ASK:** Describe Paul's experience as the soldiers escorted him to the barracks. (Q7) *The mob was so intent on attacking Paul that the soldiers had to carry Paul to keep him out of their reach. Paul would have seen their angry faces and heard them cry, Away with him!*

C. Paul's defense before the people (21:37–22:29)

When Paul was about to enter the barracks, he asked for and received permission to speak to the people. Paul gave a detailed testimony of his background and conversion. He again recounted his devout Jewish upbringing and zealotry for God. He told of his persecution of Christians and his conversion on the road to Damascus.

READ: Acts 22:3–21. **ASK:** What would you say was the purpose of Paul's speech? Was he trying to convince the commander to let him go? (Q8) *Paul was not angling for his release. He would have never mentioned God calling him to the Gentiles if that was the case.*

Paul concluded his speech by recounting a conversation he had with the Lord. The Lord told him to leave Jerusalem because the Jews would not accept his message. After some resistance from Paul, the Lord directed him to minister to the Gentiles.

READ: Acts 22:22, 23. **ASK:** How did the Jews respond to Paul's revelation that God had sent him to the Gentiles? (Q9) *They demanded Paul be put to death saying he was not fit to live on the earth. They tore their clothes and threw dust in the air to show their anger.*

Realizing the crowd would no longer listen to Paul, the Roman commander ordered Paul taken to the barracks to be scourged and interrogated. Paul appealed to his Roman citizenship to avoid the beating. But he remained in jail until the Sanhedrin could be assembled the next day (22:24–30).

D. Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin and the conspiracy (23:1–35)

Paul began his address to the Sanhedrin by stating that he had lived according to his conscience. He lived up to the light he had about God even as an unbelieving Pharisee. The chief priest responded by having Paul slapped, an action that was against the law. Paul called the chief priest on his actions. Paul said the chief

priest was a whited wall, or hypocrite, for judging Paul according to the law that he just broke. Apparently Paul did not realize the person he called a hypocrite was the chief priest. Those who stood near Paul told him, and Paul responded by giving respect to the office (23:4, 5).

Realizing he would most likely be condemned by the Sanhedrin if they continued to try him, Paul wisely cried out that he was being judged for the hope and the resurrection of the dead. Paul knew that Sadducees were part of the Sanhedrin. They denied the resurrection while the Pharisees believed in it. The two groups began such a violent argument that Paul had to be rescued by the guards (23:6–10), thus ending the trial.

READ: Acts 23:11. **ASK:** What reassurance did the Lord give to Paul as he sat in jail? (Q10) *The Lord told Paul he would testify for Him in Rome. That meant Paul was not going to be put to death as a result of a trial in Jerusalem. It also meant that Paul was in the center of God's will, a good reason for being of good cheer!*

READ: Acts 23:12. **ASK:** How silly did the Jews' plot look in light of the Lord's message to Paul? (Q11) *The Jews' pledge not to eat or drink anything until they had killed Paul looked pitiful and powerless in light of the Lord's message to Paul.*

The son of Paul's sister learned of the Jews' plot to kill Paul (23:16–22). The brave young man revealed the plans to Paul and the commander, who then had Paul escorted to Governor Felix in Caesarea for protection (23:23). The commander sent a letter along with the escort. It filled Felix in on the situation and his desire to find out what the Jews were accusing Paul of (23:24–35).

III. Paul's Steadfastness before Powerful Rulers (24:1–26:32)

A. Imprisonment under Felix (24:1–27)

Felix served as the governor of Judea from approximately AD 52 to 59. He ascended to power through his influential brother Pallas, political connections, maneuvering, and several marriages. Throughout his life, he had three wives, one of whom was the granddaughter of Antony and Cleopatra. During Paul's time, Felix was married to Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa I, the king who killed James and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12) and whom God punished through death. Felix was the first former slave to ascend to the position of governor of a Roman province. History remembers Felix as a harsh, cruel ruler, especially to the Jews. His mismanagement of Jewish and Gentile conflicts led to his removal as governor around AD 59.

1. The charges against Paul (24:1–9)

Ananias the high priest, some elders from the Sanhedrin, and an orator (attorney) named Tertullus appeared as Paul's accusers. Tertullus was probably a Hellenistic Jew. He began his oratory with a customary, flattering introduction (24:2–4). This type of flattery was commonplace among Roman officials. However, Tertullus also realized he had no proof against Paul, so he shaded the truth. His accusation against Paul did not involve any actual eyewitness accusers.

Tertullus identified three charges against Paul. First he said Paul was a

troublemaker throughout the empire (24:5). The charge was serious, since Jewish uprisings disquieted the empire. The Romans had much more difficulty handling Jewish affairs than they did handling the affairs of most other ethnic groups. Jewish uprisings often led to the replacement of Roman officials who couldn't keep the Jews quiet. So Tertullus shrewdly brought this serious charge, knowing it would concern Felix.

Next, Tertullus portrayed Paul as a leader of the Nazarenes, a sect outside the scope of Judaism (24:5). Tertullus sought to identify all Christians as dangerous, radical revolutionaries. Thus, using misrepresentation, Tertullus sought to heighten prejudice against all Christianity.

Finally, Tertullus portrayed Paul as a desecrater of the temple (24:6). The Jews could use capital punishment when it involved temple desecration. So this charge implied that Felix should put Paul to death.

ASK: What two words would you use to describe Tertullus' case against Paul? (Q12) *Perhaps sham and unfair.*

2. Paul's defense (24:10–21)

Paul addressed each charge. He mentioned that he had no history of causing insurrection and that he had been in Jerusalem only twelve days. Both Paul's history and the insufficient time of twelve days to cause a riot nullified the charges against him (24:12, 13).

Paul refuted the second charge of leading an aberrant cult by showing how his teachings harmonized with Hebrew Scripture (24:14–16). Paul specifically mentioned the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (24:15). This topic must have agitated Ananias, since Sadducees did not believe in any future resurrection.

As Paul refuted the third charge, he simply mentioned that he had gone there to provide a monetary gift to the poor saints in Jerusalem (24:17). While in Jerusalem he performed the purification rites (24:18). Paul also highlighted that actual eyewitnesses were absent from the proceeding. Therefore, under Roman law, little evidence existed to substantiate the charges (cf. 25:16). While Paul spoke with both vigor and legal precision, his defense had no self-pity or bitterness. Paul never saw himself as a political pawn but rather as a servant of the most high, sovereign God.

ASK: How should being servants of God affect how we react to being treated unfairly? (Q13) *We should react with a quiet assurance that God is aware of our situation. We should trust God and turn to Him for wisdom.*

3. Felix's indecision and Paul's detention (24:22–27)

Felix delayed his judicial decision, hoping that Paul would provide money for his release and because he wanted to do the Jews a favor (24:26, 27). Notice that Felix had knowledge about Christianity (*that way*, 24:22), and he trembled as Paul discussed righteousness, temperance, and future judgment (24:25). Unfortunately, Felix delayed not only his judicial decision but also an eternal decision.

Paul remained in detention for about two years, although he enjoyed a degree of freedom (24:23, 27).

B. Imprisonment under Festus (25:1–26:32)

1. Paul's defense before Festus (25:1–12)

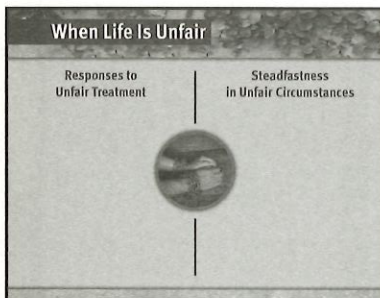
Porcius Festus replaced Felix as governor somewhere between AD 58 and 60. We know little about Festus except that he appeared to be a fair-minded man. His governorship ended when he died about AD 62.

Luke recorded a Jewish plot that, had it worked, would have tricked Festus into returning Paul to Jerusalem to stand trial so the Jews could kill him (25:1–3). Apparently Festus, unaware of the plot, declined the request anyway (25:4). Since the Jews could not prove their case against Paul in Roman court (25:7) and since Festus clearly favored the Jews, he asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial (25:9). Paul, understanding what was really happening, invoked his legal right as a Roman citizen. He appealed his case to Caesar (25:10–12). Apparently the governor did not have to grant the appeal to Caesar, although Festus was glad to do so.

2. Paul's case discussed with Herod Agrippa II (25:13–26:32)

Festus may have wanted to clarify some issues in Paul's case, so he sent Paul to Herod Agrippa II (25:14–21), the grandson of Herod the Great. As Agrippa reviewed the Jewish charges against Paul, he decided to speak with Paul (25:22). Both Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, listened to Paul.

Paul's address before Agrippa is his longest defense in Acts. It centers on the gospel and Paul's conversion. Paul placed little emphasis on the charges against him. Since he had already appealed to Caesar, he did not need to argue his legal case further. So he took advantage of the opportunity and shared the gospel before the dignitaries. He stressed his own Jewishness and the promises of God in Scripture (26:6, 7), his personal conversion testimony (26:8–22), the resurrection from the dead (26:23), and his desire for Agrippa's conversion (26:28, 29). Both Festus and Agrippa acknowledged Paul's innocence (26:31, 32).



RESOURCE: Display resource 15. **ASK:** List ways in which Paul was steadfast throughout his arrest and trials. (Q14) *He did not compromise the gospel. He spoke the truth with confidence. He did not whine about his situation. He trusted God was working behind the scenes. He took advantage of opportunities to witness to dignitaries instead of angling for favors or bribing them for his release.*

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Responses to Unfairness

ASK: How do Christians' typical responses to unfair treatment compare to Paul's steadfastness in extremely unfair circumstances? (Q15)

ASK: Summarize in a sentence or two your response to unfair circumstances in life? Does your response to unfair circumstances please God? (Q16)

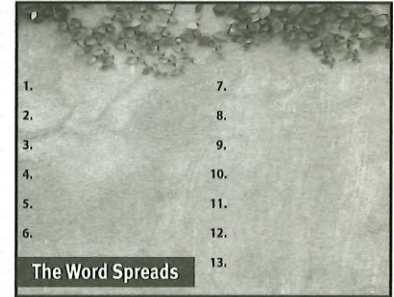
Change in Response

ASK: How could you be more steadfast when facing unfair treatment. List two or three changes to your attitude or actions. (Q17) *Change in attitude from feeling to a helpless victim to living as a protected child of God. Change from a sense of hopelessness to a true hope in God. Change in action from ungodly behavior to a godly witness to those who know not God. Change in using the tongue as an instrument of hate and vengeance to one of praise and prayer.*

Encourage your learners to include specific tasks, dates, individuals, or perspectives that make these changes observable and measurable. Further encourage your learners to share their responses with someone who can help hold them accountable for the desired changes.

Review Resource

Use resource 1 to review the response for this lesson: Trust God steadfastly in all circumstances.



Paul's Voyage to Rome



Topic

God's faithfulness

Theme

God's faithfulness to His church as seen in Acts extends to believers today.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will rejoice in God's faithfulness.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 16

Scripture Focus

Acts 27; 28

Summary

Lesson 13 focuses attention on Paul's journey to Rome and his ministry there. Special attention is given to his meeting with the Jews and their reaction to Paul's words. The lesson concludes with a brief summary of Acts.

Outline

- I. Paul's Voyage to Rome (27:1–28:12)
 - A. Voyage to Fair Haven (27:1–8)
 - B. The storm at sea (27:9–26)
 - C. The shipwreck at Malta (27:27–44)
 - D. Paul's ministry at Malta and trip to Rome (28:1–12)
- II. Paul in Rome (28:13–31)
 - A. Paul's arrival at Rome (28:13–16)
 - B. Paul's ministry at Rome (28:17–31)
- III. Paul's Ministry after His Release (2 Timothy; Titus)
- IV. Conclusion

Memory Verses

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 1:8; 28:28).