



## **Imprisonment**

*Pages 443–447*

Paul was under arrest, but the Lord appeared to him and told him he would testify in Rome.

3. Summarize how things worked out that Paul would set sail to Rome, where God wanted him to testify (Acts 22–26, pages 443–447 in *The Story*).

4. What can we learn about how God can use hardship from this section?

## **To Rome**

*Pages 447–452*

Paul sailed to Rome as a prisoner.

5. What stood out to you most about Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27–28, pages 447–450 in *The Story*)? Why?

6. What stood out to you most about Paul's house imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28, pages 451–452 in *The Story*)? Why?

## **Letter to Ephesus**

*Pages 452–458*

Paul didn't let imprisonment stop him from ministering. He used prison time to dictate letters to churches.

7. What is something you can put into practice this week from Paul's letter known as Ephesians (pages 452–456 in *The Story*)?

8. If possible, briefly describe a way you were able to minister amidst hardship.

## Persevering to the End

Pages 439–452

Acts ends with Paul's release from prison (AD 62/63).

Initially, Rome considered Christianity a Jewish sect. Judaism was an authorized Roman religion and exempt from the otherwise universal mandate to worship the emperor. Rome tolerated Judaism's monotheism partly because Jews seldom converted Gentiles.

But Christians preached the gospel to Gentiles everywhere. Many Gentiles converted, causing social upheaval as shrines lost supporters and idol makers lost income.<sup>356</sup> Idol worshippers detested the Christians' insistence that manmade gods were not gods at all. They bristled over hearing their lifestyles considered sinful.

By the 60s, Jews and Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire despised the Christians. Jewish leaders convinced Rome Christianity wasn't a Jewish sect, and Rome declared Christianity a new, unauthorized religion that called an executed criminal Lord instead of the emperor.

In AD 64, the Great Fire of Rome burned much of the city, and rumors quickly spread that Emperor Nero had started the fire to facilitate a building project.<sup>357</sup> Needing a scapegoat, he blamed the now reviled Christians. Imprisonments and grisly executions quickly followed for anyone bearing the name of Christ. Some he burned on posts to light the night sky; others he covered in animal skins and threw to dogs; and still others he crucified—including the Apostle Peter.

In AD 66/67, Paul sat chained in a damp, dark dungeon in Rome. Knowing his execution neared, he wrote a letter to strengthen Timothy, a pastor whom he'd mentored.

9. What stands out to you the most from Paul's letter known as 2 Timothy (pages 456–458 in *The Story*)? Why?

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<sup>356</sup> Acts 19:23–29.

<sup>357</sup> The fire's real cause is unknown.

Paul persevered to the end. The testimony of the man who once persecuted the church, and then claimed to have encountered the living Jesus Christ, stands through the ages, for he boldly testified to having seen the resurrected Lord, no matter what it cost him in this life, for he looked forward to the life to come.

In AD 67/68, Rome beheaded Paul.<sup>358</sup>

10. Consider what you've read about Paul's willingness to endure hardship for God, his boldness in preaching to his persecutors, and the way God used him even in dire circumstances. What can we learn from this?

By the end of the first century, most of the apostles gave their lives for the gospel: Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Bartholomew were crucified; Thomas, speared; James the son of Alphaeus and James the brother of Jesus, stoned; James the son of Zebedee and Paul, beheaded.<sup>359</sup>

All of these were willing to die, and even watch their loved ones die, for their conviction that they saw Jesus raised from the dead and exalted to God's right hand.

Some people may die for a lie they believe to be true. But these men claimed to have seen the risen Jesus with their own eyes. If they had not, they would have died—and watched those dear to them die—for what they knew was a lie. And who dies for what they know is a lie?

The Holy Spirit's work did not end with the death of Jesus' first followers. Many were convinced by their eyewitness testimony and willingness to suffer rather than recant. Despite persecution, the church grew and the gospel spread.

In the midst of these tribulations, Jesus appeared to the Apostle John with words of encouragement and a vision of the end times. We'll read that next week.

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<sup>358</sup> Paul was a Roman citizen and could not be subjected to the crueler executions.

<sup>359</sup> Hippolytus (second century church leader) and other historians recorded these martyrdoms. John was not martyred. Traditions (though insufficient early historical evidence) suggest the other apostles were martyred too.