

July 29-August 4, 2019

Acts 22–28

“A Minister and a Witness”

Summary: *Paul recounts the story of his conversion and also tells of seeing Jesus in a vision—He is accorded some privileges as a Roman citizen.*

Paul is smitten at Ananias’s order—The Lord again appears to Paul—Forty Jews plot his death—He is delivered over to Felix.

Paul is accused of sedition—He answers in defense of his life and doctrine—He teaches Felix of righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come.

Paul, before Festus, appeals unto Cæsar—Agrippa desires to hear Paul.

Paul recounts his former persecution of the Saints as a Pharisee—He testifies of the appearance of Jesus on the Damascus road—Paul bears his testimony to King Agrippa.

Paul, in a perilous voyage, travels toward Rome—An angel comforts him—He uses the gift of seership—He is shipwrecked.

Paul is unharmed by a viper’s bite—He heals the sick in Melita—He preaches in Rome, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

How can bright light open your insight?

The insights in this lesson include how Paul, a former

Pharisee, violates the temple precinct (according to the Pharisaic rules), after “he saw the light.” It continues with a look at Paul’s dialogue with King Agrippa resulting in the famous statement by the King (possibly a believer), “almost thou persuadest me . . .” Paul responds with an Apostolic right and challenge, “I wish you were such as “I am.”

What did Herod’s Temple really look like?

Like the Biblical Temples, the Herod’s Jerusalem temple precinct had three courtyards. The outer courtyard circumscribed about forty acres, approximately the area of four-square Salt Lake City blocks. On the insistence of the

Herod who rebuilt the temple, the outer courtyard was available for any visitor, including Gentiles. Within the outer courtyard was a raised complex, several steps up, under the administration of the Jewish priests that included two major areas. In ancient times, the first raised area was under the administration of the twelve High Priests and the innermost area was a little higher, again, several more steps up, and under the charge of the High Priest of the Temple

What was the penalty of entering the Priestly Courtyard without permission?

The priests of the temple posted signs carved in stone and written in four languages--Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin and Greek--that announced a death penalty for anyone going into the priestly compounds without their express permission. Apparently, it was the only death penalty the Jewish priests were

allowed to administer. It would have been by stoning, hurtling a person to his death and casting stones to cover and bury the body. (See the lesson of **(April 29-May 6 2019)**, "I Am the Good Shepherd" for an explanation of stoning).

How can physical blindness open the spiritual eyes?

After Paul's miraculous conversion, which included blindness as he "saw the light," Paul boldly returned to Jerusalem and preached in the temple. He escaped stoning at the hand of the Jewish priests and escaped scourging at the hands of the Roman soldiers because he invoked his Roman citizenship. Still under arrest, he appealed to the higher court of Caesar in Rome. Awaiting transport from Caesarea to Rome to appeal his Roman arrest (thus saving him from murderous plans that Jewish priests had for him), Paul was invited to speak to Herod Agrippa II and some other Roman dignitaries at Caesarea. Paul, taking every opportunity to witness of Jesus and the resurrection, tells his conversion story, giving us some powerful doctrinal guidelines. "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)** Understanding God must be with inner spiritual eyes that can see Him and inner spiritual ears that can hear Him. Paul had to be blinded in order for him to open his "inner, spiritual eyes."

What reason was Saul protected from the physical brilliance?

"Saul of Tarsus saw Jehovah, the glorified Christ, and heard his voice and conversed with him. Even partially protected as he was from the brilliance of light from

heaven greater than the noonday sun, Paul collapsed to the earth trembling, shocked. The voice said: "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest . . ." **(Acts 9:5)** So intense was the light that even with protection he was blinded. He said: "And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus." **(Acts 22:11)** A priesthood miracle restored sight to Paul after three days of total darkness." **(Spencer W. Kimball, Faith Precedes the Miracle, p.90)**

How does Paul "abbreviate" the Gospel Plan in three statements?

First, the great Messiah should suffer. This is somewhat of an antithesis to Judaism which anticipates a Messiah who would redeem Israel from suffering. "In traditional Judaism, the Messiah will be a human being --- albeit it a perfect one --- who will come and bring harmony to the world. He will not have a divine aspect other than having been chosen by God for his task. The Hebrew word for Messiah, *mashi'ah*, means "anointed" and indicates that the Messiah has been chosen by God. The coming of the Messiah therefore has come to mean the redemption of the Jewish people and an end to its suffering and tribulations." **(Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)** **Second**, there truly is life after death. The resurrection was started by the Messiah. This doctrine was easier for Paul to accept because he already came from a Pharisaic background. The Pharisees believed in life after death whereas the Sadducees did not. **(Isaiah 26:19) (Ezekiel 37:12) (John 11:25)** "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. For the

Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.” (Acts 23:6-8) **Third**, God’s instructions to man apply to everyone--the Jews and the Gentiles. Judaism seems to differentiate between the laws for Israel and the laws for others. “Noachide Laws (are) seven laws which were supposed by the rabbis to have been binding on all mankind even before the revelation at Sinai. They are referred to as “Noachide” because of their universality, since the whole human race was supposed to be descended from the three sons of Noah, who alone survived the flood. Exegetically derived from statements made by God to Adam and to Noah, six of them are negative: not to 1) worship idols; 2) blaspheme the name of God; 3) kill; 4) commit adultery; 5) rob; 6) eat flesh that had been cut from a living animal. One is positive: 7) to establish courts of justice. These seven laws are binding on all non-Jews even today. Whoever observes them is considered to be among the “Righteous Gentiles.” “A convert must observe all the precepts that bind Jews. The sages interpret the statement “There shall be one law for the citizen and one for the stranger (*ger*) that dwelleth amongst you” (Exodus 12:49) to mean that converts have the same rights and obligations concerning Torah precepts as Jews by birth.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How are God’s commandment the same for different people?

The Gospel plan is for everyone, not just the Jews. The transition from “the times of the Jews” to include “the times of the Gentiles” was socially difficult for many members at that time, even though as Jesus had chosen His disciples, He sent them to teach first the Jews and then the Gentiles. To this day, Jews feel that the Torah (law) was for them and that Gentiles had a different standard (the Noahide laws). The true doctrine of

salvation for all was lost. Sometimes, the term used for the Jews or Children of Israel was “the people” and non-Jews (Israelites) were referred to as “the Gentiles.”

How can we tell that Agrippa II was a believer, almost?

Paul was surely aware that King Agrippa II wished to have a better life and better relationship with his subject than his predecessor Herod Agrippa I, who died being eaten of worms (Acts 12:23). Agrippa II must have studied the Law and the Prophets as well as the language of his subjects. He may have been a “believer,” but without commitment.

“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me . . .” (Acts 26:27-28)

“Personal integrity is vital in the living Church. We forget that Korihor actually believed but was possessed of a lying spirit. (Alma 30:42). Agrippa believed the prophets, but when it mattered, he lacked the courage to say so. (Acts 26:27). How sad that so many cannot see that to be put out of the secular synagogues for one’s belief in Christ is the first step toward being let in the kingdom of God! (John 9:22). How ironic to see so many so-called free spirits imprisoning themselves in roles that, like Korihor’s, cause them to be at cruel war with themselves. How lamentable that when all tongues will confess that Jesus is the Christ in that not-too-distant Judgment Day, there will be so many who were, in mortality, undeclared believers, who were actually persuaded and “almost” so acknowledged openly.” (Neal A. Maxwell, Things as They Really Are, p.62)

How’s my “almost, being like the Great “I Am”?”

“Almost” may work in horseshoe pitching, yet in an eternal scope we must be fully committed, or as Paul said, “altogether.”

“And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.” (Acts 26:29)

In his statement, Paul teaches a powerful doctrine of following the Lord’s anointed. He is saying that Agrippa, as well as everyone - Jews and Gentiles - should strive to be as “I AM,” (the name of the Lord). Paul also has the right to say, “Be like I am,” because Paul was one of the Lord’s chosen. His eyes had been opened to see the Lord. His ears heard the Lord. His heart had been touched and he was purified and then he was called by the Lord to be an apostle and prophet.

Who are the today leaders, like the “Great I Am?”

The same lesson was repeated some time ago in Jerusalem, as Elder Russell M. Ballard was being introduced to the Jerusalem Branch and the BYU students at a fireside. As the young student leader became at a loss for words in announcing an apostle and prophet in Jerusalem, Elder Ballard leaned over and said, “Just tell them I’m one of the good guys.”

Apostle Ballard then spoke about the guidelines and instructions of following the Savior. He bore a humble witness of the Lord. Elder Ballard’s last statement included the humble instruction to follow the brethren, because they will lead you to the Lord. In a beautiful chiasmas he sandwiched his testifying of a risen Lord between the beginning statement, “Tell them I’m one of the good guys” and the counsel to “Follow the brethren.” As an apostle, he had the right and the responsibility, like Paul of old, in saying, “Be like “I am” and as the “Great I Am.”