

PAUL'S TRIP TO ROME

Lesson Aim: To follow the Lord through stormy seas or still waters so that His will is done by us.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson; then ask the following questions for class discussion

Paul's trip to Rome as a prisoner provides an interesting study showing how God leads His children. Immature Christians often have the mistaken notion that they have missed God's leading if they have troubles in their lives. Troubles and trials may be the outcome of a wayward life, but it is not always so. Even godly Christians, who are led of the Lord like the Apostle Paul, can go through much tribulation. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim 3:12). Even so, "He calls His own sheep by name, and leads them out" (Jn 10:3b). "

Is it possible for Christians to know the will of God? Acts 27:10, 25-26, 31, 34-35; Eph 5:17

Paul knew the will of God and four times on his trip to Rome he told others the will of God (see the verses in Acts 27 above). They did not always believe him, but he was confident that he knew God's will and was not afraid to tell them what it was. It is one thing to know God's will privately, but quite another to make it known publicly. Paul later wrote to the church in Ephesus and commanded them not to be unwise, but to understand the will of the Lord (Eph 5:17). Not only ministers, but also lay people are commanded to know the will of the Lord.

How can we know the will of God? Acts 27:10, 25-26, 31, 34-35; Rom 12:2

First, we can know the will of God by experience (Acts 27:10). Paul was an experienced traveler on the sea. He knew the dangers and difficulties of sea travel from personal experience. In his last letter to the Corinthians he wrote as follows: "... thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep" (2 Cor 11:25b). Therefore, when the ship arrived at The Fair Havens on Crete, he perceived that it was too dangerous to continue their trip to Rome until the winter storms were past and thus he warned the sailors and the centurion of this fact. However, they did not listen to his warning and tried to sail to a more commodious haven on the island for the winter season. The Lord led in this rejection of Paul's warning, but it was not so pleasant for him to have this kind of leading.

Second, we can know the will of God by a message from Him through an angel (Acts 27:21-26). Usually we get our messages from God in the Scriptures (Mt 2:1-6), but in some cases He reveals His will through dreams, visions, angels and the Spirit (Mt 2:12-13, 19-20; Acts 10:1-6, 9-20). Paul knew the will of God three times by one of these supernatural means. God sent an angel to Paul in the midst of the storm to tell him that all would be saved from the sea, but not the ship. Paul boldly showed his faith in God's message by telling it to all the men on the ship and encouraged them to cheer up.

Third, we can know the will of God by knowing what the Scriptures say about the wicked hearts of men (Acts 27:30-32). Some sailors were going to escape to the island by a small boat, but Paul knew their wicked hearts and told the centurion except they stay in the ship, all would be killed. The centurion believed Paul and he commanded the ropes be cut and the boat dropped into the sea.

Fourth, we can know the will of God by His word and circumstances (27:21-26; 33-36). God had already told Paul that the ship would be destroyed but all the men would be saved. Now Paul realized the circumstances fit God's previous word and he knew God's word was about to be fulfilled. Paul again showed his faith in his Savior by reminding each of them that not one hair would fall from the head of any of them. Then he took some food, gave thanks to God for it in the presence of all of them and began to eat. The others followed his example and were encouraged by his faith. He was a good testimony for the Savior before all 275 men on that ship (27:37). The outcome of that experience was exactly as the Lord had told Paul by the angel (27:40-44).

Fifth, we can know the will of God when we are separated from the lusts of the world (Rom 12:2). God is not going to show his will to us when we are living in sin. He does this when we walk a godly life.

Sixth, we can know the will of God when we have our minds transformed by the word of God (Rom 12:2). Our minds are naturally dull about spiritual matters. It takes the word of God to clear our minds so we can think like God thinks. When that happens, we can understand the will of God.

How does God open doors for us to minister to people? Acts 28:1-10

God allowed Paul to be bitten by a poisonous snake while gathering firewood for a fire to warm the shipwrecked men. When the islanders saw this, they thought that he was being judged for some sin he had done. However, when he did not die, they thought he must be a god (vv. 4-6). They were wrong about Paul in both cases, but God used it to open the door for Paul to have a fruitful ministry among them. Paul healed the father of Publius and several others who came to him. God uses unusual and sometimes unpleasant experiences in our lives to open doors for us to be a witness for Him. We must be alert to see these open doors and be bold to walk through them. They are doorways that open up great blessings for us.

What is the hope of Israel? Acts 28:20

"The hope of Israel" was Paul's reference to the resurrection of true believers in Israel so they could be in the Messianic Kingdom, which will be on earth (Zech 14:9; Rev 19:15-16). He defended this hope when he appeared before the council (Sanhedrin) in Jerusalem (Acts 23:6) and before Felix in Caesarea with his Jewish accusers present (Acts 24:15, 20-21). He also spoke of his hope in the resurrection before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 26:6-8). So what is the significance of this hope? The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of all faithful Jews so they could be in Messiah's Kingdom, when He would rule over all nations of the earth (Dan 12:13). Paul learned by experience that only those Jews that trusted in Jesus' death and resurrection would be worthy to be in His Kingdom. Before Paul's conversion, he believed in the resurrection, but denied that Jesus had risen from the dead and persecuted those that spoke of it. However, when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was convinced that He was resurrected from the dead and was his Messiah. Paul spoke of the resurrection as the hope of Israel when he spoke to Israelites, but he proclaimed this message among the Gentiles as well (Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 15:1-58). The resurrection of Israel will occur after the Tribulation. That is when Christ will establish His Kingdom on earth. The resurrection of the Church believers will occur before the Tribulation (1 Thes 4:13- 5:10). That is when Christ will marry the Church in Heaven. He has a resurrected body and His Church will have a resurrected body. At the end of the Tribulation, Christ will return with His Bride to rule the earth together in His Kingdom for one thousand years (Rev 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4, 6). There is no need for the resurrection of the body to go to Heaven. All believers receive a body eternal in the heavens when they die (2 Cor 5:1-3). However, all believers of the Old Testament or New Testament must have a resurrected body to live in Christ's Kingdom on earth. The resurrection is the hope of all true believers that believe Christ's Kingdom is on earth.

How should we respond to people when they reject our message? Acts 28:17-31

When Paul presented the gospel to the Jews, some believed, but most of them rejected his message about Jesus Christ being their Savior. It was unpleasant for Paul to renounce his own countrymen for their unbelief and hardness of heart, but he had to do it and tell them that he was going to go to the Gentiles and they would listen to the gospel. The Lord kept him in prison for two years but gave him a generous amount of freedom as a prisoner because He had so much work for him to do in Rome. We must not complain when we experience hard times. The Lord wants us to accept cheerfully whatever circumstances come our way and He will give us all the grace we need to do His work.