

“Thou Hast Testified of Me”

Lesson
38
Summary

Acts 21–28

Scripture Summary:

Acts 21: Paul journeys to Jerusalem—He is persecuted, arrested, and bound. Acts 22: 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. Acts 23: Paul smitten at Ananias' order—The Lord again appears to Paul—Forty Jews plot his death—He is delivered over to Felix. Acts 24: 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. Acts 25: Paul, before Festus, appeals unto Caesar—Agrippa desires to hear Paul. Acts 26: Paul recounts his former persecution of the saints as a Pharisee—He testifies of the appearance of Jesus on the Damascus road—Agrippa is 'almost persuaded' to be a Christian. Acts 27: Paul, in a perilous voyage, travels toward Rome—An angel comforts him—He uses the gift of seership—He is shipwrecked. Acts 28: 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 Holy Land and Jewish insights:

What's it all About? 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.”

Forty Acre Temple Site: The outer courtyard of the three courtyard temple included approximately the area of four square Salt Lake City blocks. Although under the administration of the Jewish priests, the outer courtyard was available for any visitor, including Gentiles. Within the outer courtyard was a raised complex under the administration of the twelve High Priests and the innermost area was even higher and under the charge of the High Priest of the Temple

Violators Punishable by Death: Signs carved in stone and written in Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin and Greek warned of a death penalty for anyone going into the priestly compounds without express permission. Apparently, it was the only death penalty the Jewish priests were allowed to administer. It would have been by stoning, hurling a person to his death and casting stones to cover and bury the body. (**Lesson 10: “Take My Yoke upon You and Learn of Me”**)

After Paul’s miraculous conversion, which included blindness as he “saw the light,” Paul boldly returned to Jerusalem and preached from the second courtyard of the temple without “priestly permission.” He escaped Jewish stoning and escaped Roman scourging because he invoked his Roman citizenship. 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 other Roman dignitaries. Taking every opportunity to witness of Jesus and the resurrection, Paul tells his conversion story, giving us some powerful doctrinal guidelines.

The Gospel in a Sentence: “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) In order for Paul to open his inner eyes,” Paul had to be blinded first. “Saul of Tarsus saw Jehovah . . . A priesthood miracle restored sight to Paul after three days of total darkness.” (Spencer W. Kimball, Faith Precedes the Miracle, p.90)

Countering Jewish Thought, Paul Taught That the 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.)

Paul Taught That 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. “. . . For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.” (Acts 23:6-8)

Paul Transcends Surrounding Cultures – God’s Instructions Apply to 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.)

“Almost Thou Persuadest Me” 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). The second Agrippa 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.” “. . . Almost thou persuadest me . . .” Agrippa answered Paul. (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)

Almost or Altogether? “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 purified and then he was called by the Lord to be an apostle and prophet.

“Tell them I’m one of the good guys” 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 chiasm, 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 responsibility, like Paul of old, in saying, “Be like “I AM” and as I Am.”

Daniel Rona, born in Israel and living in Jerusalem has authored Old & New Testament and Book of Mormon Supplement Study Materials to be used in conjunction with the weekly LDS Gospel Doctrine Lesson study. NOTE: Three versions of the supplemental study materials are available FREE at www.HolyLandsRevealed.com. (Just click “LDS SUPPLEMENTS”)

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