

Acts 23:12-35; 24; 25; 26

## Aim of Lesson

To show how Paul, with conviction and courage, witnessed for Christ before many different people.

## Background study

Matthew 5:11-12; 10:24-33; Philippians 3:5-6. Consult a commentary for factual information about the Roman administration during this period, and the historical characters involved in this lesson.

## Suggested outline of lesson

To prevent this lesson from becoming a rather tedious recounting of trials and speeches, extract highlights from these events and do not attempt to give a detailed chronological resume. Spend some considerable time in preparation for this lesson by studying and assimilating the text. Moreover, if the children are to understand and remember the sequence of events, the main characters and the essence of the defence, the lesson must be simplified and accompanied by some visual representation.

Begin the lesson with a dramatic account of the plot by the Jews to kill Paul. Convey the speed with which Paul's nephew gained access to the prison, and how the information was gravely received first by Paul, then by the centurion and finally by Claudius Lysias. This officer made immediate plans to have Paul transferred secretly at night to Caesarea, where the Roman governor of Judaea was to be found.

Remind the children that the Romans held sway over the Jewish nation, and that this particular area was controlled by a governor called Felix, who had been appointed by the emperor in Rome. It is suggested that, in order to differentiate between the main characters, puppets or cut-out figures might be produced. The one representing Felix could be given an expression of severity to indicate his cruelty. He presided over the trial at which the elders of the Jews again accused Paul of being a trouble-maker and a heretic. Paul was allowed to speak in his own defence, and he did so boldly and truthfully. He denied the charge of having instigated a riot but confessed to being a follower of Jesus and declared his belief in the resurrection. The case was adjourned. Though Felix listened to Paul's testimony on many occasions he postponed making any judgement, for fear of incurring the wrath of the Jews and hoping to receive financial gain in the form of a bribe. Meanwhile Paul was detained in prison. Consider his frustration at being prevented from continuing God's work. He accepted the situation, however, as being under God's control.

After two years, Felix was recalled to Rome and Festus was appointed in his place. Illustrate this by removing the figure of Felix and introducing the more kindly representation of governor Festus. Even after all this time the Jewish leaders were still actively plotting to kill Paul, but their conniving merely succeeded in drawing the attention of Festus to Paul's case. He lost no time in resuming the proceedings, during which Paul appealed for his trial to be taken to the highest court in Rome, before the Emperor Nero himself.

At this point introduce the third character - the richly-attired, and proud king Agrippa. Stress that Paul had to speak for himself yet again in front of both of these men, and many other prominent officials. Describe the pomp and ceremony, although Paul was not overawed by the occasion. Eloquently he recounted his early life and his conversion to Christianity, and professed his loyalty to God throughout. His judges were impressed with his integrity, his sincerity and religious fervour. They judged that he was innocent of the charges, and that had he not insisted on being tried at Rome they could have released him.

## Relevance to the children's lives

In this lesson we have seen how Paul used every opportunity to tell people what he knew to be the truth about Jesus. He was so glad to know this that he wanted to share his happiness with any who would listen. Can we do the same?

## Worksheets

The solution to the code is 'Never be afraid to tell others about our Lord'.

## Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for the faithful and courageous witness of Paul before all kinds of people. Help us to tell our friends about what we know to be true. Amen.

## Memory verse

"Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).