



BAND of BROTHERS

SPRING SERIES 2026 – WEEK 9

The Plot Thickens

That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, “Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well.”

– Acts 23:11 NLT

- **God’s sovereign hand on display**

- Rome was at the height of its power
- Nero was on the throne
- Felix was the governor of Judea
 - o Festus succeeds him
- Agrippa II is ruling Rome

- The Roman Empire spans the known world
 - o Decades of dominance
 - o Military strength and political control

And yet...

He changes times and seasons;

he removes kings and sets up kings... - Daniel 2:21 ESV

there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. – Romans 13:1 ESV

I declare the end from the beginning... My purpose will stand. – Isaiah 46:10 ESV

- Nero reigns because God permits it
- Felix governs because God permits it
- Agrippa rules because God permits it
- Rome dominates because God permits it
 - o Into this world Paul goes

The following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome.” – Acts 23:11 ESV

- We learn a lot in this verse
- Paul needs to “take courage”
- “You have testified” shows obedience
- “You must testify also in Rome”
 - o Despite the danger, he obeys
 - o He believes in God’s sovereignty
 - o This produces **BOLD** obedience

When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. – Acts 23:12 ESV

- Paul had been arrested
- Nearly beaten to death
- Plot to assassinate him
- More than 40 Jews vow not to eat until Paul was killed

- **Sovereignty in Motion**

Then he called two of the centurions and said, “Get ready two hundred soldiers, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go as far as Caesarea at the third hour of the night. Also provide mounts for Paul to ride and bring him safely to Felix the governor.” – Acts 23:23-25 ESV

- The next step towards Rome
- God surrounds Paul with 470 soldiers on his way to Caesarea
- He gets an audience with Felix the Governor
 - o Paul’s day in court arrives

And after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders and a spokesman, one Tertullus. They laid before the governor their case against Paul. – Acts 24:1 ESV

- Many important people in one room
 - o Ananias (the High Priest)
 - o Tertullus (Jewish Lawyer)
 - o Felix (Governor of Judea)
 - o Drusilla (Felix’s wife)

- Antonius Felix
 - o Former slave who rose to power
 - o Known for cruelty and corruption
 - “Felix exercised the authority of a king with the mind of a slave.” – Tacitus, *Histories*

- Drusilla
 - Daughter of Herod Agrippa I, Great-Granddaughter of Herod the Great
 - Jewish upbringing
 - Left her previous husband to marry Felix

“I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets, having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.” – Acts 24:14-15 ESV

- God’s sovereignty produces confidence in Paul
 - He stands firm on the scriptures
 - He doesn’t trim the truth to gain favor
 - He frames his faith as hope
 - While on trial, he speaks boldly of God
 - He knows the risks
 - Yet he cannot keep quiet
 - He understands the cost and speaks anyway

After some days Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, and he sent for Paul and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus. And as he reasoned about righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment, Felix was alarmed and said, “Go away for the present. When I get an opportunity I will summon you...” So he sent for him often and conversed with him. When two years had elapsed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. And desiring to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul in prison. – Acts 24:24-27 ESV

- God is still sovereign over an unwanted response
 - Felix is convicted
 - Speaks with Paul often
 - But only sought a bribe
- The scene does not improve for Paul
 - He isn’t given freedom
 - Remains in prison for two years
 - This seems like failure
 - But God is in control
- Felix is replaced by Festus
- The Jews renew their charges against Paul
- Festus suggests a trial in Jerusalem
- Paul appeals to Caesar
 - The trip to Rome finally begins
 - Not the way Paul thought it would
 - God gives him on more audience

- **Paul Before Agrippa and Bernice**

So on the next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp, and they entered the audience hall with the military tribunes and the prominent men of the city. Then, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. – Acts 25:23 ESV

- Agrippa showing up is a public spectacle
 - Royalty
 - Military commanders
 - Prominent men of the city
 - This is power on display
- Paul stands in chains
 - But is emboldened to share the gospel
- He speaks to his former life
 - A Pharisee
 - *“According to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee.”*
 - A persecutor
 - *“I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the named of Jesus of Nazareth.”*
 - He was zealous for the law
- He speaks of his encounter with Christ
 - He was blinded
 - *“I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me.”*
 - Turning to God
 - *“O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”*
 - Proclamation of Christ
 - *“To this day I have had the help that comes from God, and so I stand here testifying both to small and great, saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass: that the Christ must suffer and that, by being the first to rise from the dead, he would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles.”*

- **The Responses of Festus and Agrippa**

- Festus calls Paul insane
 - “Paul, you are out of your mind.” – Acts 26:24 ESV*
- Agrippa thinks Paul is trying to convert him
 - “In a short time would you persuade me to be a Christian?” – Acts 26:28 ESV*
- Paul answers:

“Whether short or long, I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might become such as I am—except for these chains.” – Acts 26:29 ESV

- Paul wants the king to be saved
 - He wasn't intimidated by power
 - He literally spoke truth to power

- Paul knows exactly what is at stake
 - Nero may eventually hear his case
 - Nero is not known for showing mercy
 - Agrippa was familiar with the Jewish law
 - Yet Paul presses the gospel
 - Because he knows Acts 23:11 is still true

"You must testify in Rome." – Acts 23:11 ESV

- *"Dei"* – must - consistently signals divine necessity
- Luke uses it of Jesus

"The Son of Man must suffer..." – Luke 9:22 ESV

"The Son of Man must be delivered..." – Luke 24:7 ESV

- Christ's suffering unfolded according to divine plan
- Now Paul's mission unfolds according to divine plan
 - Paul understands something profound
 - His circumstances are not accidental
 - His chains aren't random
 - His audience is exactly who it was supposed to be

- This was God's sovereignty at work
 - Paul's life was governed by Christ
 - Not rulers or councils

"It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death." – Philippians 1:20 ESV

- This is sovereignty lived out
- Paul knew God controlled his future
 - Not Nero, Agrippa, Festus, or Felix
 - Paul was exactly where he needed to be
 - Knowing his gave him the confidence to speak the gospel
 - Despite the consequences

- **What this means for us today**

- If God is sovereign, then we have to let our light shine
- Our silence is a lack of trust and fear
 - Do we shrink back when conversation turns to Jesus?
 - Do we defer conversations with non-believing family members to another time?
 - Do we adjust our message when it is not culturally popular?
- Paul stood before Kings and spoke plainly of Christ
 - Not because he knew what they would say
 - Not because he was promised success
 - Because he knew who was in control of their response
- When we truly believe that God is sovereign boldness follows
 - Not enslaved to people's reactions
 - Not worried about protecting our image or reputation
 - We just make much of Christ in all circumstances

- **Discussion questions**

If you truly believed God has already ordained your steps, where would you be speaking more boldly about Him right now?

What are you actually afraid of losing when you stay quiet about Christ? Why?

Read 2 Timothy 1:7-8. If we have a spirit of power, what does our hesitation to speak about Christ reveal about what we believe about His sovereignty? What would obedience look like for you this week?



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SPRING SERIES 2026 – WEEK 10 HOMEWORK

WEEK 10 – To Caesar You Shall God

This lesson will cover Paul’s circuitous and far-from-pleasant trip to Rome. In it, we will examine his relentless determination to suffer well while serving faithfully. Even while undergoing deprivations and difficulties that would make most men give up, Paul remained faithful to his calling and determined to trust God with his life and message.

- Read through pages 257-267 of the PDF containing Ken’s Devotional™ on the Book of Acts.
- During the night, while Paul was in the custody of the Romans during his visit to Jerusalem, Paul received a message from the Lord.

“Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.” – Acts 23:11

Not long after that, Paul was placed on a ship bound for Rome. Read Acts 27, then look closely at the following phrases and write down how these less-than-ideal conditions could have been within the will of God.

...the winds were against us... – 27:4

...we sailed slowly...and arrived with difficulty... – 27:7

...the wind did not allow us to go further... – 27:7

...the voyage was now dangerous... – 27:9

...the harbor was not suitable... – 27:12

...a tempestuous wind...struck down from the land... – 27:14

...the ship was caught and...driven along – 27:15

...we were violently storm-tossed... – 27:18

...all hope of our being saved was abandoned... – 27:20

- Now read Acts 28:1-10. Look at the last verse of Chapter 27 as well. What do these passages tell you about the sovereign will of God?

What possible “good” could God have planned for these disastrous outcomes?

How do you tend to react when things don’t go as expected or you encounter difficulties while trying to do the will of God?

Read 2 Corinthians 11:21-33. What was Paul’s perspective on all the terrible things he had experienced throughout his ministry?

- According to Acts 28:11-16, it took Paul over three months to make the trip from Caesarea to Rome.

What possible reason could God have had for delaying Paul’s arrival in Rome?

What did all the trials and travails of the trip teach Paul about God and His sovereignty?