A NEW KIND OF COMMUNITY

By 1631, Puritans who were fleeing religious persecution in England were established thriving colonies along the coast of America. These Puritans set about establishing a theocratic form of government, envisioning that they would be a new Israel. Their early laws demanded regular church attendance and tithe paying. Lawmakers declared blasphemy, witchcraft, adultery, homosexuality, worship of other gods, and declining infant baptism punishable by death. People suspected of speaking ill of pastoral leadership or expressing different views from those being preached were arraigned before church tribunals and received civil punishments. Roger Williams, a fellow Puritan immigrant who was initially invited to preach, was condemned and banished by one such trial for advocating for the complete separation of church and state and had to rely on the nearby Native American tribes to survive the harsh winter. Evidently, the Puritans had come to America looking for religious freedom for themselves but not for others. The persecuted had again become the persecutors.

After surviving his banishment, Williams secured a charter from the English monarchy to found the colony of Rhode Island where the state would never require a religious test of its citizens or leaders. All were equal under the law in this new colony that welcomed all kinds of religious outcasts such as Baptists, Quakers, and Jews. This week’s lesson will focus on how the apostle Paul urged civic leaders to leave religious matters alone, and how his commitment to the gospel drove him to sometimes defend his rights, sometimes surrender them depending on the situation.
Write out Acts 25 and 26 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Acts 25:17–22. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the passage.
Go back to your scribed text and study the passage.

Circle repeated words/ phrases/ideas

Underline words/phrases that are important and have meaning to you

Draw Arrows to connect words/ phrases to other associated or related words/phrases

What special insights do your marks seem overall to point to?

Memorize your favorite verse. Write it out multiple times to help with memorization.

In what way did Festus recognize the distinction between civil and religious law, whether consciously or not?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/RL08-3
After looking at your scribed and annotated text, what special insights do your marks seem to point to overall?

What questions emerge after studying this passage? What parts are difficult?

What other principles and conclusions do you find?

What was Paul’s purpose in using his Roman citizenship if not merely to protect himself?

Does citizenship today afford certain rights that can help us advance God’s work? Maybe it depends on the country?

Read more at www.inversebible.org/RL08-4
What relationship do the following verses have with Acts 25, 26?

Acts 16:16–40
Acts 18:12–17
Acts 22:22–29
Acts 23:23–30
Acts 27:24
Acts 28:16–30
Romans 15:22–33
Philippians 1:12–14
Philippians 4:22
2 Timothy 4:6–18

What other verses come to mind in connection with the primary passage?

Considering Paul strove to imitate Jesus, what insights do his submission and defense give us about Jesus?

How do you see Jesus differently or see Him again?

What is He saying to you personally through the text of the week?

Prayer Response:

Meditate on the primary passage again and look for where Jesus is.

Read more at
www.inversebible.org/RL08-6
Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week’s study of the passage, what are some personal applications you are convicted of in your life?

What are some practical applications you must make in your school, family, workplace, and church life?

Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/RL08-7
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Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

Why did Festus and Agrippa want to free Paul?

Why didn’t Festus and Agrippa set Paul free?

Why did Paul appeal to Caesar?

What motivated Paul to defend his rights?

What motivated Paul to surrender his rights?

What can we learn from when Jesus defended Himself and when He remained silent?

How can we know when we should surrender our rights silently and when should we defend them?

Which is more natural, surrendering our rights or defending them?

How can we gain the discernment and courage to go against our inclinations when needed?