



Paul Arrives in Rome Acts 28

Introduction

The account of Paul's voyage to Rome is a testimony to the providence of God. Paul had waited in prison for over two years after the Lord had promised that he would witness for Him in Rome (Acts 23:11), but God was faithful to His promises in His own perfect time. After using Paul to deliver the gospel message to governors and kings, God moved him on toward the capital city of the Roman Empire.

The sailing was not smooth, but God was in control. The winds of the storm blew Paul's ship in the direction of Rome. Every man on board the ship was in the hands of God as they battled the storm (Acts 27:24). Even when the crew abandoned hope of being saved, God was in control and used Paul to bring encouragement to both passengers and crew. By the providence of God, the ship was guided to a safe haven and every man on board made it safely to shore.

After bringing Paul through the fourteen day ordeal on the rough seas, God continued to protect and provide for him as he waited on the Island of Malta with the ship's crew for springtime and fair sailing weather to continue on to Rome. God cared for Paul by giving him high regard in the eyes of the islanders and providing for his material needs. Later, as Paul traveled on to Rome, God encouraged him through the loving actions of Christians he had never met.

It should be comforting and encouraging for all believers to know that even as we battle the storms of life, God is protecting us and providing for our needs. Just as He was in control of Paul's destiny, He is in control of yours and will carry out His perfect plan for your life as you surrender to His will and continue to serve Him.

Outline of Acts 28

- I. Three Month Stay on Malta - Acts 28:1-10
- II. Traveling on to Rome - Acts 28:11-16
- III. Turning from the Jews to the Gentiles - Acts 28:17-31

I. Three Month Stay on Malta - Acts 28:1-10

As they swam and drifted to safety, the crew and passengers of the shattered ship had no idea where they were. Some of the crew had probably been at the large harbor of Valletta on the island of Malta before but they didn't recognize the sandy bay where they had

landed.

A. Finding refuge - Acts 28:1

All two hundred and seventy-six men on board the ship made it safely to shore just as God had promised (Acts 27:24). Exhausted and soaked to the bone, they finally stepped onto solid ground for the first time in over two weeks. They learned from the natives that they were on the small island of Malta, about 60 miles south of Sicily. In ancient times, the island was called Melita which means "a place of refuge." It was certainly a welcome refuge for the weary travelers.

B. Finding welcome - Acts 28:2-7

Luke describes the hospitality of the *natives* of the island. The word *natives* is literally "barbarians," a word used to refer to any non-Greek speaking people. It does not mean that they were uncivilized, but that their language and social customs were foreign to those of the Greek and Roman world.

1. Kindling a fire - 28:2-4

Their society was not Greek-oriented, but the natives knew how to show *extraordinary* (NASB) kindness to strangers. They welcomed the castaways with a warm fire to help make them comfortable.

Paul was always ready to help with a job that needed to be done. As a humble servant following the example of the Jesus, he pitched in to help gather wood for the fire. Apparently a venomous snake, stiff and motionless from the cold, was among the sticks Paul picked up. As he laid the bundle on the fire, the snake was revived by the heat and fastened itself onto Paul's hand, either by its fangs or by coiling. The implication is that the snake bit Paul, although Luke does not say so explicitly. When the natives saw the snake hanging from Paul's hand, they jumped to the conclusion that Paul was a murderer who had escaped the stormy sea and shipwreck but would now meet his inevitable doom. No one could survive the bite of a viper. *Justice* would not allow the guilty to escape.

2. Calling Paul a god - 28:5-6

Although Paul was able to shake the snake off into the fire, the natives kept expecting him to swell up from the venom or to suddenly fall down dead. Miraculously, he suffered no ill-effects from the snake so they decided he

must not be a murderer but a god instead. This is reminiscent of what had happened to Paul in Lystra (Acts 14:11-20), although with a reverse twist. At Lystra, his healing of a crippled man had convinced all the people that he was a god. They had even attempted to offer sacrifices to him. However, they were easily persuaded by unbelieving Jews that Paul was nothing more than a man who deserved to be stoned to death.

Both the Lystrans and Maltese exhibited pagan superstition and fickleness of mind, traits which are common among godless people. True wisdom and stability of mind come only from God. See Job 28:28; Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10.

3. Being entertained by Publius - 28:7

Publius may have been either a local magistrate or the Roman governor of Malta, appointed by the emperor. He invited Paul and his companions to his estate and entertained them courteously for three days.

4. Returning kindness - 28:8-9

Publius' father was sick with a fever and dysentery and this gave Paul an opportunity to return kindness to the islanders for the hospitality they had shown. Dr. Luke, the eyewitness, describes how Paul went to the ill man, prayed for him, laid his hands on him, and healed him. When they heard about the healing, other islanders who were suffering from illnesses also went to Paul for healing.

It should be noted that the Greek words translated *healed* in verses 8 and 9 are different. Luke used two different Greek words to distinguish between the divine healing of Publius' father and curing the islanders by medical treatment. Clearly, Luke had the opportunity to use his medical skills while stranded on Malta. God can use those who desire to serve regardless of where they are. Are you serving God where you are right now?

C. Being honored - Acts 28:10

Because of their humble service among the people, Paul and Luke (*us*) gained the favor and respect of the islanders. The natives honored them in *many ways*, probably with gifts and special treatment. When it came time to move on toward Rome, they supplied them with material necessities for the trip.

II. Traveling on to Rome - Acts 28:11-16

Three months passed as the castaways enjoyed the hospitality of Malta. Winter turned to early spring, and the west winds began to blow. It was time to continue the voyage to Rome.

A. Sailing to Puteoli - Acts 28:11-14

They set sail on a ship from Alexandria, Egypt which had spent the winter in the large harbor of Valetta. It was probably another grain ship, like the one that had been lost. The figurehead was the Twin Brothers who, according to Greek mythology, were Castor and Pollus, twin sons of Zeus and patron deities of sailors.

1. Via Syracuse - 28:12

The first stop was at Syracuse, the most important city in Sicily. They stayed there three days.

2. On to Rhegium - 28:13a

Because the winds were not favorable, the ship had to circle around in order to reach Rhegium which is located on the "toe" of Italy.

3. Stopping over in Puteoli - 28:13b-14

After spending a day in Rhegium, a gentle south wind began to blow making for smooth sailing to Puteoli, located in the Bay of Naples, 152 miles south of Rome. Puteoli was the principal port of Rome where the grain ships from Egypt were unloaded.

There was an important Jewish colony at Puteoli, so it is not surprising that there were Christians there. They invited Paul and his companions to stay with them for seven days, probably while the centurion responsible for Paul completed business in the city. It is always great to meet Christians when you are far from home. There is a common bond in Christ which draws believers together and is a source of encouragement and joy wherever one may be. Have you ever met other Christians while on a vacation or business trip and immediately felt that oneness in Christ? There is nothing quite like the union believers have through the Holy Spirit!

B. By land to Rome - Acts 28:15-16

During the seven days spent at Puteoli, news traveled to Rome of Paul's arrival.

1. Meeting the Roman Christians - 28:15

The Roman Christians had never met Paul, and it had been at least three years since they had received their letter from him (*Paul's Epistle to the Romans*). They showed their love and support by traveling down the Appian Way to meet him and accompany him into the city. Some traveled as far as Three Inns, a town about thirty-three miles from Rome. Others continued on another ten miles to greet him at Appii Forum. How far would you go to give encouragement to someone? The warm welcome from the Christians was a great

encouragement to Paul. Now he could see the tangible evidence of their faith in Christ and care for him. God had answered his prayers (Romans 1:9-10) and Paul gave thanks. Do you always remember to thank God for special moments of refreshment and reassurance?

2. Being put under house arrest - 28:16

When they arrived in Rome, the centurion turned Paul over to the captain of the guard. Instead of being kept in prison, Paul was permitted to stay in his own rented house (28: 30) with a soldier who guarded him. This gave him some personal freedom, allowing him to entertain guests and preach the gospel to those who visited (28:31). However, he was always chained by the wrist to a Roman soldier (28:20). Because the soldiers guarded Paul on rotating shifts, Paul and his message became well known to *the whole palace guard* (Philippians 1:13).

III. Turning From the Jews to the Gentiles - Acts 28:17-31

Now that he was in Rome, Paul was eager to speak to the Jews, but being confined as a prisoner, he could not go to the synagogues as was his custom. Therefore, he invited the Jewish leaders to come to him.

A. Paul presents his case to the Jewish leaders - Acts 28:17-20

There were five main points Paul made in his address to the Jewish leadership.

1. *I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers* - 28:17

Paul began by proclaiming his innocence. He had done nothing to offend the Jews or Jewish tradition. In spite of the fact that he was a strict Pharisee and continued to honor the Jewish law, he had been *delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans*. Actually, Paul had been rescued by Roman soldiers from the angry Jewish mob, but Paul did not want to make a complaint against the Jews (28:19).

2. *The Romans wanted to let me go* - 28:18

The Roman authorities had repeatedly found Paul innocent of any wrongdoing against the Roman Empire. King Agrippa had said that Paul might have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar (Acts 26:32). There was certainly no reason to put him to death as the Jews had demanded (Acts 25:15-16).

3. *I was compelled to appeal to Caesar* - 28:19

Paul had been forced to appeal to Caesar when the Jews

continued to insist upon his guilt.

4. *Not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation* - 28:19

Paul had nothing against the Jewish nation or people. He was not making any accusations against them but merely seeking to be acquitted.

5. *For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain* - 28:20

Paul had called for the Jewish leaders to explain that he was innocent of all charges. The reason he stood before them as a prisoner was because of *the hope of Israel* - because Israel's hope of bodily resurrection from the dead as promised by the Old Testament prophets had been fulfilled in Jesus, proving that He was their Messiah. Paul had expounded this hope many times before as had the apostle Peter. (See Acts 5:30-31; 24:14-15; 26:6-8, 23.)

B. The Jews respond - Acts 28:21-22

The Jews were noncommittal and evasive. They were also open to hear what Paul had to say.

1. *They knew nothing about Paul* - 28:21

They had received no communication from Jerusalem concerning him, nor had any travelers from Judea spoken against him.

2. *The only things they knew about Christianity were negative* - 28:22

They referred to Christianity as a *sect.....that is spoken against everywhere*. This is a little surprising because there had been a church in Rome for many years, probably started when Roman Jews returned from Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:1-10). Paul had written his letter to the Roman church from Corinth around A.D. 57, and at that time it was already well established and well known to all the other churches. In fact, Paul had written, *your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world* (Romans 1:8b). Surely the Jewish leaders must have known some of the good things which were spoken of the church in their own city!

C. Paul presents the gospel to the Jews of Rome - Acts 28:23-25a

The Jewish leaders set a date to meet with Paul again. This time *many* came to hear him. Paul preached all day long about *the kingdom of God and Jesus*. Everything he taught was backed up by *the Law of Moses and the Prophets*. His message was probably similar to what he

had written earlier to the Roman church about the gospel of God *which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead* (Romans 1:2-4).

As usual, there was a mixed response to Paul's message. Some were impressed but others refused to believe. Since they could not come to an agreement, they decided it was time to leave.

D. Paul condemns the Jews' blind stubbornness - Acts 28:25-29

Before letting them go, Paul spoke the final word. He quoted from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9-10) who had rightly been guided by the Holy Spirit to speak words of judgment against the Jews. Isaiah had originally addressed the words to their Jewish ancestors, but this was *a case of "like fathers, like children"* (Acts, I. Howard Marshall).

1. The prophecy of Isaiah - 28:26-27

In the Isaiah passage, the Holy Spirit prophesied that even though the Jewish people had the opportunity to *hear and see*, they would not *understand and perceive* what God was saying to them. *This was a divine judgment upon them because they themselves made their hearts impervious to the Word of God; they allowed themselves to become deaf and blind for fear that they might hear and see the disturbing Word of God and so receive healing from God. God's Word brings the diagnosis of sin, which is painful to hear and accept, but at the same time it wounds in order to heal once a person deliberately refuses the Word, there comes a point when he is deprived of the capacity to receive it. This is a stern warning to those who trifle with the gospel* (Acts, I. Howard Marshall).

2. The indictment by Paul - 28:28

Just as the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had rejected Jesus as their Messiah and crucified Him, now the Jewish leaders in Rome confirmed that rejection. In fact, Paul had seen the same pattern of rejection in nearly every city where he had preached the gospel. Conversely, Paul and his message of salvation had been eagerly received by the Gentiles. Paul no longer felt obliged to go to the Jews first. His final words to the rejecting Jews were *the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!*

E. Paul continues to preach - Acts 28:30-31

Paul was kept prisoner in his own rented house in

Rome for two years. He preached the gospel with confidence to all who came to visit. As always, his message was *the kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ*. The last word of Acts is the Greek word literally translated *unhindered*. Although he was legally a prisoner of the Roman Empire, Paul was still free in Christ to preach the good news of salvation. That was his calling, and that was his joy.

Epilogue

Most scholars believe that after his two-year imprisonment in Rome, Paul was acquitted and released. After that he continued his ministry, going to Greece (Nicopolis in Titus 3:12), Macedonia (Thessalonica in 2 Timothy 4:10), Crete (Titus 1:5) and Asia Minor (Ephesus in 2 Timothy 1:18; Troas in 2 Timothy 4:13; Miletus in 2 Timothy 4:20). He may also have traveled on to Spain, as was his desire (Romans 15:23, 24, 28).

In A.D. 64, a great fire burned much of the city of Rome. Many believed that it had been started by order of the emperor, Nero. In order to divert attention from himself, Nero placed the blame for the fire on the Christians and incited a vicious and bloody persecution against them. It was in the wake of this persecution that Paul was arrested again around A.D. 66 or 67 and imprisoned, tried, condemned, and executed by order of Nero. Paul was beheaded outside the city of Rome.

For Paul, *to live is Christ and to die is gain* (Philippians 1:21). Being absent from the body, he is now at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). *To Paul now, what are all his sorrows, persecutions, and toils in the cause of his Master? What but a source of thanksgiving that he was permitted thus to labor to spread the gospel through the world? So may we live, imitating his life of zeal, self-denial, and faithfulness, that we may one day participate with him in the glories of the resurrection of the just!* (Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, Albert Barnes).

Application

The teaching and example of Paul is for every person. Before laying down this last lesson of Acts, will you be sure that you have clearly heard and responded to the salvation of God (28:28). Do not be like the unbelieving Jews and close your eyes, ears, and heart to the gospel message which was presented so many times in the pages of Acts. If you need further assurance that you have understood the message of salvation and responded with a change of heart, please ask your discussion leader for a copy of our Disciplers Confidence Letter.

Furthermore, how can you imitate the faith of the apostles as presented in Acts? How can you bring your life more into line with the purity, simplicity, and fervor of the early Christians who lived, not for their own happiness and comfort, but for the love of Christ?