

To The Ends Of The Earth

LESSON 27: PAUL IN PRISON, PART 6 (ACTS 28:1-31)

After appealing to Caesar, Paul had now been transported by ship in the direction of Rome. Due to difficult sailing conditions, they were now shipwrecked on an island. Yet God provided protection for all those on board through this difficulty.

ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA (ACTS 28:1-10)

28:1-6. Everyone on board during the shipwreck made it safely to the shore, to the island called Malta (a small island south of Italy). The islanders demonstrated extraordinary kindness to the shipwreck survivors (276 people, Acts 27:37), including kindling a fire and taking them in because of the rain and cold. As Paul was gathering wood to lay on the fire, a viper (poisonous snake) came out from the bundle because of the heat (perhaps brought out of a dormant state) and fastened onto Paul's hand. The islanders expected him to soon swell up and die. They initially concluded that Paul must have been a murderer who, though he survived the shipwreck, could not survive justice (perhaps the name for the Greek goddess of justice, who they believed executed justice on the guilty) now due to this snake (Job 4:7-11; John 9:1-2). However, after Paul (who had miraculous gifts of the Spirit, Mark 16:17-18) shook the snake from his hand and was unharmed, the people began saying he was a god (Acts 14:8-18).

28:7-10. The leading man on the island was Publius, who had graciously hosted Paul and his companions for three days (perhaps even arranging hospitality for all the survivors). In this time, Paul discovered that Publius's father was seriously sick (perhaps with "Malta Fever"). Paul went to him, prayed, and laid hands on him so that he was healed! Afterwards, many others brought those who had diseases to Paul so they would be healed. Remember, these miraculous gifts were used to confirm the message of God's word (Mark 16:19-20; Hebrews 2:4). The islanders showed great appreciation and gave the travelers what they needed when they sailed away.

ARRIVING IN ROME (ACTS 28:11-16)

28:11-16. They had spent three months (perhaps November-January) at Malta before setting sail on an Alexandrian ship that had wintered there. This ship

had the twin gods (Castor and Pollux, sons of Zeus; considered gods who protected sailors) as the figurehead on the front of the ship. They sailed north to Syracuse (a port on the eastern side of Sicily, capital of Sicily; about 90 miles). After three days, they sailed along the coast to Rhegium (on the tip of Italy). After a day, they were able to catch the wind they needed to sail through the channel between Sicily and Italy and arrive at their final harbor in Puteoli (Italy, about 180 miles). The gospel had already reached this town, and brothers and sisters hosted Paul and his companions for seven days (allowing them to be there on the first day of the week, Acts 20:7). From there, they traveled by land to Rome (about 150 miles north). Christians from Rome heard they were coming and went to meet Paul. Some came as far as the Forum/Market of Appius (about 45 miles from Rome), others as far as the Three Taverns/Inns (about 33 miles from Rome). Paul was encouraged by these brothers and sisters and thanked God for getting to see them. After entering Rome, Paul was permitted to live by himself in a rented house along with a soldier guarding him (v. 30; chained, v. 20). Perhaps he was granted this privilege because of Festus's declaration about Paul's innocence (Acts 25:24-25) or the centurion's (Julius) influence. In this place, Paul was able to receive visitors (vv. 23, 30).

PAUL MEETS WITH ROMAN JEWS (ACTS 28:17-29)

28:17-22. After three days, Paul invited the Jewish leaders (perhaps from the various synagogues) to come to him (perhaps using Christians in Rome as messengers). When they gathered, Paul asserted his innocence and explained the situation that brought him to Rome as a prisoner. Despite no reason for the death penalty being found (Acts 23:26-29; 24:22-27; 25:24-27; 26:30-32), the Jews had objected, and Paul appealed to Caesar. However, he made it clear that his appeal was not for the purpose of making charges against the Jews. Paul had now asked to see them so that he could explain the facts of the case. Ultimately, he wanted them to know that he was in this situation because of his devotion to the hope of Israel, Jesus of Nazareth (the Messiah)! The Jewish leaders, however, had not received any negative communication from Judea about Paul (by letter or in person). They, then, expressed the desire to hear Paul's views, as they knew that people everywhere spoke against Christianity (referred to as a sect, likely the sect of the Nazarenes, Acts 24:5, 14).

28:23-29. At an appointed time, many came to Paul and listened to him all day. Paul explained and gave testimony (e.g., eyewitness testimony) concerning the

rule of God through Jesus the Messiah. He tried to persuade them about Jesus by using the Law of Moses and the Prophets (demonstrating Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures, Luke 24:25-27, 44-49; Acts 17:2-3). Some were persuaded, while others did not believe Jesus is the Messiah. As there was disagreement among themselves (between those who believed and those who did not), they started to leave after Paul gave a parting word of judgment against the unbelievers. He said the Holy Spirit was right in the message given to the unbelieving ancestors of these unbelieving Jews (Isaiah 6:9-10). They had rejected God's message and grown callous to it so that they would not be able to accept it (thick heart, shut ears, shut eyes). It now applied to the Jewish people who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah (Matthew 13:14-15; John 12:40; Romans 11:8)! So, Paul declared that the salvation of God had been sent to the Gentiles, who would be more receptive to it!

PAUL'S CONTINUED PREACHING (ACTS 28:30-31)

28:30-31. For two years, Paul stayed in his own rented house (likely paid through the support from Christians, Philippians 4:18). During this time, he welcomed visitors and continued preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ boldly and without being hindered. Paul's writings indicate he likely wrote four letters during this time (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Also, Paul said that what happened to him through his imprisonment had actually advanced the gospel through various opportunities and emboldening others to preach (Philippians 1:12-14)! So, despite a four-year imprisonment, God was with and used Paul to accomplish great good! Although the book of Acts ends at this point, it is commonly believed that Paul was later released (when he wrote letters to Timothy and Titus). Perhaps he was able to complete his planned journey into Spain (Romans 15:22-29). Later (during the time of 2 Timothy), it appears he was imprisoned again in Rome. This time, it is commonly believed he was executed by being beheaded.

CONCLUSION

God kept His promise to bring Paul to Rome, although under the circumstances of being a prisoner. There, Paul continued preaching the kingdom of God! Now, as Acts closes, we must embrace that the story continues until the end of time – that followers of Jesus continue spreading the message of God's kingdom throughout the world in every generation!

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What did the people at Malta think about Paul?

What did Paul do while he was at Malta?

How was Paul received by the disciples in Rome?

What were Paul's living conditions in Rome?

What did Paul tell the Jewish leaders about his case?

What did Paul conclude about the unbelieving Jews?

How did God use Paul's imprisonment to accomplish good?

How does the story of Acts continue today?

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