

## Paul's Arrival in Rome

### Acts 28

Acts 28:1-10: *"Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. <sup>3</sup> But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. <sup>4</sup> So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."<sup>5</sup> But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. <sup>6</sup> However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.*

*<sup>7</sup> In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. <sup>8</sup> And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. <sup>9</sup> So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. <sup>10</sup> They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary."*

### Background Notes

Acts 27 records Paul's voyage and shipwreck on the Mediterranean Sea. By the way, Acts 27:27 says that they were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea. This is not a mistake in the text – it's actually a very accurate description of their voyage! The Adriatic Sea is the body of water between Greece and Italy, and it is considered to be part of the Mediterranean Sea.

In line with Paul's message from the Lord, all 276 passengers on the ship, including the crew, survived the shipwreck and made it safely to the island of Malta, which is about 600 miles west of Crete. In two weeks, the storm had carried the ship a very long way. It was quite a storm! The inhabitants of Malta had built a big fire on the beach to help the shipwreck survivors warm up and dry out, and they welcomed the survivors with kindness. The Greek word that's used for the people of Malta is "barbarians" (v2&4). This doesn't mean that they were barbaric, spear-carrying savages! No, this Greek term was used for any non-Greek speaking peoples.

While Paul was gathering wood for the fire, he was bitten by a venomous snake. The islanders who saw this suspected that he must be a murderer who was being punished by "the gods," and they expected him to drop dead at any moment. But Paul survived - and then the people thought that he must be a god himself! This reaction is similar to Barnabas and Paul's reception at Lystra on their first missionary journey (Acts 14).

Publius, a wealthy Roman official, welcomed Paul and his team, and in turn Paul brought a miraculous healing to Publius' father. God used this event to spread the word around the island. As a result, sick and diseased people from the entire island were brought to the apostle Paul and were cured - and I'm sure they heard the gospel as well!

After three months on the island of Malta, the winter storms were over, shipping lanes were again open, and thus the soldiers and Paul's team made ready to sail for Rome. The people of the island honored Paul and his group with respect and supplies (v10). God always supplies his people with what is needed, for whatever He calls them to do!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Paul arrived in Rome, but not in the way he had planned.

Acts 28:11-16: *"After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. <sup>12</sup> And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. <sup>13</sup> From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, <sup>14</sup> where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. <sup>15</sup> And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. <sup>16</sup> Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him."*

These verses describe the last stage of Paul's voyage to Rome, and it's easy to follow these places on Bible maps. Syracuse was the capital of the island of Sicily, which was about 80 miles north of Malta. At the seaport of Puteoli, on the mainland of Italy, they found some believers. Christianity had already made it to Rome, and from Rome to the outlying cities. From Puteoli, they traveled overland to Rome.

Word of the apostle's arrival preceded them, and believers from Rome came out to meet them, traveling as far as the outlying locations as the Appian Forum and the Three Inns. This welcome encouraged Paul, and he thanked the Lord. *"When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage"* (v15). Remember, Paul was arriving in Rome as a prisoner of Caesar, and even the great apostle Paul needed a boost for his courage! This little verse reminds us that we should be sensitive to the need of others, and ready reach out with comfort and encouragement when our fellow believers need our help.

This was not the way Paul had planned to arrive in Rome. In his letter to the Romans, written from Corinth on his third missionary journey, Paul told them that he intended to come to Rome as part of a missionary journey: *"I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often plan to come to you but was hindered until now, that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles"* (Romans 1:13).

Well, Paul finally made it to Rome - but it was not in a way that he had planned. He had not planned to come to Rome as a prisoner. He had not planned to come to Rome with soldiers guarding him (v16). He had not planned to come to Rome and remain under house arrest for two years (v30). But God's purposes were being accomplished.

Changes in plans can take place in our lives well. As believers, we may have good plans for how we're going to serve the Lord. This is a good thing, and the Lord may lead you just the way you planned. But God may choose to change your plans - for any number of His good and perfect reasons. So if your good plans are changed - rest assured! ***Changes in our plans are always part of God's greater plan!***

## **2. Paul accomplished in Rome a work he had not perceived.**

Acts 28:17-31: *"And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,"<sup>18</sup> who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.<sup>19</sup> But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.<sup>20</sup> For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."*

<sup>21</sup> Then they said to him, *"We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.<sup>22</sup> But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."<sup>23</sup> So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.<sup>24</sup> And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.<sup>25</sup> So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,"<sup>26</sup> saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive;"<sup>27</sup> For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'" <sup>28</sup> "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"<sup>29</sup> And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.*

<sup>30</sup> Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,<sup>31</sup> preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him."

The Lord accomplished His purposes through the testimony of the apostle Paul, both on the ship voyage and on the island of Malta. In Rome, even as a prisoner, Paul was given quite a bit of freedom, and he used it to accomplish much.

First of all, he invited the leading men of the Jews to his rented house. A large number of Jews gathered in his house, and Paul shared the gospel with them. Paul assured them that he was innocent of the charges made against him – he had done nothing against Israel and the Jewish people. Notice that he said the reason he was a prisoner was for “the hope of Israel” – meaning the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies to Israel (v20). Paul wanted to talk to them about Jesus, the fulfillment of the prophecies - not about his release from imprisonment. Would we have done that? Or would we have tried to persuade the prominent Jews who were listening to tell Caesar that we were innocent?

When Paul explained about the new “Christian sect” and that Jesus was the promised Messiah, there were mixed reactions from the group – just as there are always mixed reactions when the gospel is presented. Some of the Jews who showed interest may have returned many times to speak with Paul (v30).

A lot of ministry was being accomplished, even though Paul was a prisoner. Paul witnessed to his Roman guards, and Philippians 1:13 says that the gospel reached even into Caesar’s household! Even though Paul couldn’t leave his rented house, he received many visitors. People were free to come for Bible study and to hear Paul teach. Furthermore, Paul wrote four books of Scripture from this Roman imprisonment, the “Prison Epistles”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Information in those epistles indicates that Paul directed numerous mission trips, sending co-workers to a variety of locations to disciple and encourage believers in the young churches.

So Paul accomplished a lot for the Lord in Rome – even more than he had previously perceived - including the writing of four books of the Bible! Even though Paul was imprisoned, God’s plan was being carried out and completed. Paul accomplished in Rome a work he had not perceived.

## **Practical Application**

### **Don’t hide the bad news of the message.**

When the Jewish people were reluctant to believe the gospel, Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 to them (v26-27). This is certainly not a “soft-sell” Scripture that gently encourages people to believe, is it? In fact, it’s a scathing Scripture that denounced their refusal to accept the truth, and warned of the consequences that would follow their rejection of the message. Paul did not hide the bad news of the message.

We too must tell those who refuse to receive the truth of Christ that consequences will follow rejection of God’s mercy and love. There is a final judgment, and there is a hell. Don’t hide the bad news of the message!