

## PAUL IN MALTA AND ROME

### **TEXT: ACTS 28:1-31**

#### **INTRODUCTION:**

1. Acts 27 ends with the ship being wrecked on a "certain island," just as Paul had predicted (27:26, 41-44).
2. In Acts 28:1 we are told this "certain island" was Melita, i.e. Malta.
3. Malta is located in the Mediterranean Sea, about sixty miles south of Sicily. It is about twenty miles in length from east to west, and twelve miles in width from north to south.
4. I was not surprised to discover that the Roman Catholics built a church in Malta called "the Church of St Paul's Shipwreck."
5. I doubt they preach the same Gospel Paul preached!

#### **I. THE ARRIVAL AT MALTA**

1. Luke did not use the word "barbarian" in a pejorative way (28:2, 4). The Greeks called people who did not speak their language barbarians, and that is how Luke uses the word.
2. Paul wrote in I Corinthians 14:11, "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice (language), I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me."
3. Albert Barnes said, "It does not denote, as it does sometimes with us, people of savage, uncultivated, and cruel habits, but simply those whose speech was unintelligible."
4. W. Graham Scroggie said, "The heathen are hospitable, and show that *kindness* is universally a human quality" (*The Acts of the Apostles*).
5. The people kindled a fire because of the present rain (the continuance of the storm), and because of the cold (28:2).
6. Paul helped out by gathering a bundle of sticks and laying them on the fire, but when he did that a viper (poisonous serpent) came out of the heat, and fastened onto his hand (28:3). The people were hospitable but also superstitious. They supposed that every calamity is a judgment for some particular sin (28:4).
7. They understood the snake attack as divine vengeance. They were certain ("no doubt") Paul was murderer who managed to survive the shipwreck but now was going to die from a deadly snake bite (28:4).
8. This incident reminds us that the law of divine retribution is written on the hearts of all people. Even unsaved heathen understand that there is a God of justice, and that the guilty will be punished.

9. The Greek lexicon says the word translated "vengeance" means, "the goddess Justice." Albert Barnes says, "*Justice* was represented by the pagans as a goddess, the daughter of Jupiter, whose office it was to take vengeance, or to inflict punishment for crimes."
10. The Bible teaches that all sin will be punished at some time, but it does not teach that all calamities are the direct judgment of God.
11. When the pagans saw no harm come to Paul, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god (28:5, 6). Scroggie said, "It's a long stride from '*murderer*' to '*god*,' but these people easily took it" (*Acts*).
12. This reminds us of our Lord's words in Mark 16:18 -- "They shall take up serpents...and it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."
13. Paul laid his hands on the father of Publius, who lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux, and healed him (28:7, 8).
14. Publius was "the chief man (probably the governor) of the island" (28:7). His father lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux (dysentery).
15. After he was healed, "others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed" (28:9). In gratitude, they honoured Paul and Luke "with many honours," and when they departed, they laded (loaded or provided) them "with such things as were necessary" (28:10).

## **II. AFTER THREE MONTHS THEY LEFT MALTA (28:11).**

1. Paul and the others stayed in Malta for three months (28:11).
2. They remained there for three months because there was no favorable opportunity for them to leave and go to Rome. By the time they left for Rome it was probably January.
3. They departed in a ship of Alexandria (cf. 27:6), which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux (28:11). These men were considered "demigods," the mythical offspring of a god and a mortal.
4. Castor and Pollux were believed to be the twin sons of the god Jupiter and Leda, the mortal wife of the king of Sparta. After their death, they are fabled to have been transported to heaven, where they were supposed to watch over sailors, and serve as their protectors. In Paul's day it was not uncommon to place their image on ships.
5. After leaving Malta, the ship stopped off at Syracuse, the capital of the island of Sicily, situated on the eastern coast (28:12). Syracuse was in the direct course from Malta to Rome. They stayed in Syracuse for three days (28:12).

6. "We fetched a compass" (28:13) means they circled around and sailed along the eastern side of Sicily until they reached Rhegium, a town situated on the southwest of Italy. If you picture Italy as a boot, Rhegium is the toe.
7. It is across the Sicilian Straits from the Sicilian town of Messina.
8. And after one day the south wind blew, and they came the next day to Puteoli, a seaport about 8 miles northwest from Naples (28:13).
9. In Puteoli, Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus found some Christians and were invited to stay with them for seven days. Then they left for Rome (28:14).
10. When Christians in Rome heard about Paul's impending arrival they went to meet him (28:15). They came to meet Paul, Luke and Aristarchus as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns.
11. The Appii Forum was a city about 56 miles south of Rome. Albert Barnes said, "The city was built on the celebrated Appian Way, or the road from Rome to Capua. The road was made by Appius Claudius, and probably the city was founded by him also. It was called the forum or market-place of Appius, because it was a convenient place for travelers on the Appian Way to stop for purposes of refreshment. It was also a famous resort for peddlers and merchants."
12. The Three Taverns (28:15) was about 8 or 10 miles closer to Rome than the Appii Forum. It undoubtedly received its name because it was a place of refreshment on the Appian Way.
13. The Christians at Rome had heard much of Paul because his epistle to them had been written a few years before this time.
14. When Paul saw these Christians from Rome he was greatly encouraged (28:15). He had been eager to meet them for several years (cf. Romans 1:9-12; 15:22-24).

### **III. PAUL ARRIVES IN ROME (28:16).**

1. When Paul and the others arrived in Rome, Julius the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was allowed to dwell by himself with a soldier that guarded him (28:16; cf. 27:3). Paul was chained to the soldier (cf. verse 20b).
2. It was while he was imprisoned in Rome that Paul wrote his four "Prison Epistles" -- Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians.
3. He wrote at the end of his epistle to the Colossians, "Remember my bonds" (Col. 4:18).
4. After three days, Paul called the leaders of the Jews together and explained what had transpired (28:17-20).

5. "The hope of Israel"(28:20) refers to the hope that all religious Jews have of the coming of the Messiah; of the resurrection; and of the future restoration of Israel (cf. 23:6; 24:15; 26:6, 7).
6. In Ephesians 6:20, Paul referred to himself as "an ambassador in bonds."
7. On the second meeting with the Jewish leaders, Paul "expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (28:23).
8. The word "expounded" means he exposed the Scriptures. It is the idea behind expository preaching (cf. Acts 18:26).
9. Paul explained the principles of the Christian religion, "both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets" (i.e., the Old Testament).
10. This is precisely what our Lord did on the Emmaus Road with the two disciples. Luke 24:27 says, "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."
11. Paul preached "from morning till evening" (28:23b). "Some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (28:24).
12. And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one final statement. Paul quoted Isaiah 6:9 and 10 (28:25).
13. This is a passage referred to by our Lord in Matthew 13:14 and 15, and by John in John 12:38-40.
14. Paul applied it to his ministry. The Jews rejected the Gospel and so the Gospel would now be preached to the Gentiles, and "they will hear it" (28:25-28).
15. Paul and Barnabas had already declared this to the Jews in Antioch in Pisidia. They said in Acts 13:46, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."
16. And when Paul had said these words, the Jews departed from his lodging "and had great reasoning (dispute) among themselves" (28:29). This was because "some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not" (28:24).
17. Acts 28:30 says Paul dwelt "two whole years in his own hired (rented) house." Undoubtedly he was still guarded by Roman soldiers.
18. Why Paul was not prosecuted before the Roman emperor during this time is not known. Acts 28:21 indicates that the Jews in Rome were not interested in pursuing the case before Nero.

19. It is very likely that they realized they had no hope of winning the case (cf. 18:2).
20. The Bible scholar J.B. Lightfoot claimed that Paul's "accusers, who had come from Judea to lay their charge against him, would be urgent to get their business dispatched, that they might be returning to their own home again, and so would bring him to trial as soon as they could."
21. But there is no evidence to support this claim.
22. We know from II Timothy 4:16 that at on at least one occasion Paul was arraigned before the Roman emperor (cf. Acts 27:24).
23. He wrote, "At my first answer (defence) no man stood with me, but all men forsook me; I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."
24. But no details are given, and the details of Paul's last days are uncertain. We know from II Timothy 4:6-8 that Paul was eventually executed, but Luke says nothing about it.
25. We do know Paul "received all that came in unto him" (28:30) -- Christians, Jews, and anyone interested in hearing the Gospel.
26. And we know he had liberty to freely preach the Gospel "with no man forbidding him" (28:31).
27. We also know from Paul's epistles that many souls were saved during his imprisonment in Rome, including Onesimus the runaway slave (Philemon 10). Philemon 22 suggests Paul was optimistic about a speedy release.
28. In Philippians 4:22, Paul sends greetings from the saints "that are of Caesar's household." These were people he probably won to Christ while he was imprisoned.
29. Charles Ryrie says, "Paul may have been kept out of circulation for these two years, but he was certainly not kept silent" (*The Acts of the Apostles*).

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. One of the curious things about the ending of the Book of Acts, is the fact that nothing is said about the end of the life of the Apostle Paul.
2. However, Luke was not writing a biography of Paul. Luke wrote a history of the Christian church, and how the Gospel reached Rome.
3. The Gospel was preached from Jerusalem "unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8). In Paul's day that was the vast Roman Empire.

4. Nevertheless, Paul dominates the second half of Acts so it is unusual the way Luke ends with Paul being kept "in his own hired house" in Rome (cf. Scofield, p. 1188).
5. Based on statements in his epistles, especially I and II Timothy, extra-Biblical sources, such as Clement of Rome, and some conjecture, this is how commentator Richard Rackham (*Acts of the Apostles*) explains Paul's last days -- after his trial in Rome, Paul was set free and started traveling again. Among other places he visited Spain, Crete, Ephesus, Macedonia, and Greece. On July 19, 64 AD, the great fire of Rome burst out and the emperor Nero blamed it on the Christians.
6. Many Christians were tortured and executed. Rackham says, "The chief scene of execution was the emperor's gardens on the Vatican hill, where the Christians were burnt as torches to illuminate games and festivities."
7. Nero gave orders to arrest Paul, who at this time was in Ephesus. The Christians in Asia Minor abandoned Paul. "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me" (II Tim. 1:15).
8. Only Luke was still with Paul when he returned to Rome.
9. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee; he is profitable to me for the ministry. And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus" (II Tim. 4:10-12).
10. Soon Paul was unfairly condemned, and then beheaded.
11. Much has been said and written about the ending of the book of Acts, but strictly speaking the Acts will not be completed till the Lord returns.
12. That is why A.T. Pierson referred to it as "the Acts of the Holy Spirit."