

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Paul Arrives in Rome

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Paul's Work on the Island of Malta ([28:1-6](#))

...We then learned that the island was called Malta: Experienced sailors certainly should have known the island of Malta, but perhaps not this side of the island. Almost all the traffic to Malta came to the main port, on the other side of the island. “Malta” means “refuge”, a very appropriate name for our traveler-ship-wreckers!

When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks: Paul being Paul pitched in to help, even though his former shipmates were also no doubt awed that what he had told them in fact came to pass. No doubt there were plenty of able bodied men from the 276 passengers and crew more suited for the job. But here we see Paul's pastoral, servant heart manifesting itself in service to his new shipwreck family.

A viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand: The viper didn't just nibble at Paul - it fastened on his hand, hard and fast enough that many witnessed it. Rather than let it bother him, Paul literally shook it off. The way Luke writes this makes Paul's reaction seem positively nonchalant. He clearly knew that no matter what trials he encountered, God would be faithful to His promises to Paul.

Yet justice does not allow to live: This is an understandable reaction from the natives of Malta; this fellow cheated death by surviving the shipwreck, but the gods weren't going to let him get away! “Justice” here is almost certainly a reference to the Greek goddess of justice, Δίκη (“Di-kay”). Knowing Paul was a

prisoner, it would be easy to assume he has committed some great crime, and so the goddess of justice would not permit Paul to escape unpunished.

And suffered no harm: God didn't preserve Paul from the storm just to let him perish by a snake, of course; we already know Paul is protected. So why does this happen at all? 'Tis pious speculation, but I think it's because Paul is also a powerful witness to and messenger of the grace, power, and faithfulness of God.

By extension, we also see here that so-called "divine justice", "karma", or whatever modern notions we have of "what goes around comes around" or "you get what you deserve" have no claim against Paul, despite the tremendous amount of sin on his "ledger" all of Paul's sin was punished and satisfied by Jesus' death on the cross. Incredibly, the same is true of us!

Said that he was a god: This is a typically human reaction. For these Maltese natives, Paul must have been seen as an extreme case. Either he was terribly evil, or he was to be considered a god. In truth, Paul was neither a criminal deserving punishment nor a god. But he'd received the "god" treatment before (Acts 14:12), and knew that it could be used as an opportunity to bear witness to the One True God.

Paul Heals the Father of Publius and Many Others ([28:7-10](#))

Sick of fever and dysentery: Ugh! Some think that the sickness Publius' father had was a malady known as Malta fever, which comes from a microorganism found in the milk of Maltese goats. Its symptoms can last for months, and can be fatal to the elderly and weak. This was a serious condition. Until it met Paul and his God, that is!

The rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed: The word for "healed" here is not the variation of the word for "saved" that we've seen before. Here the word is *θεραπεύω* (thera-pew-oh, from which we get "therapy", "therapeutic", etc.). This word simply means, "to receive medical attention." So it's of course possible that miraculous healing happened to more than Publius' father, but it may be that our good Dr. Luke was functioning as a "medical missionary" on Malta.

TripTik: The Journey (Finally!) to Rome ([28:11-15](#))

And so we came to Rome: These verses record the trip northward up the Italian peninsula, until they are finally greeted outside Rome by Christians who have come to meet them.

Syracuse was a well-regarded city in the ancient world, being the capital city of the island of Sicily. Archimedes, the prolific inventor, mathematician, physicist, engineer, and astronomer, lived there, and died during the Siege of Syracuse, where he was killed by a Roman soldier despite orders that he should not be harmed. According to Plutarch, Archimedes was contemplating a mathematical diagram when the city was captured. A Roman soldier commanded him to come and meet General Marcellus but he declined, saying that he had to finish working on the problem. The soldier, enraged by this perceived insolence, killed Archimedes on the spot with his sword.

...The brethren... came to meet us as far as the Appii Forum and Three Inns: Paul obviously did not bring Christianity to Rome; it was firmly in place already. The Christians in Rome would have received Paul's letter to them a few years before, so they probably felt a strong spiritual affection and respect for him even before he arrived. They honored him by greeting Paul just as emperors were greeted when they arrived at Rome: they went out to meet him as he came into the city, traveling some 50 miles to do it!

Paul's Stay as a Prisoner in Rome ([28:16-24](#))

When we came to Rome: When Paul & Co. came to Rome, the city had already existed for nearly 800 years. The Coliseum had not yet been built, and the most prominent buildings were the palaces of Caesar, the temple of Jupiter, and the temple to Mars, the Roman god of war. At the time, Rome had a population of about two million, half slave, half free. Roman society was divided into roughly three classes: a small, powerful upper class, a large class of the poor, and slaves.

The soldier who guarded him: In Philippians 1:13 (written from this Roman imprisonment), Paul speaks of how his message is getting through to the palace guards of Rome. He was the prisoner, but he had a “captive” audience!

Paul called the leaders of the Jews together: Even in these circumstances, Paul followed his consistent practice of going to the Jews first in every city he came to.

We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you: Paul wanted to know what they had heard from Jerusalem about him. But all that the Jews in Rome were willing to say they knew about Christianity was that it was spoken against everywhere. “We neither received letters...” shows that the religious leaders who accused Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea knew their case was hopeless. They made no effort to send ahead documents confirming their case against him.

He explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God... from morning till evening: This would be a great Bible study to have a recording of! Paul spoke of the kingdom of God, and gave an exhaustive study of how the Old Testament spoke of Jesus, from morning ‘til evening. Based on reading earlier in this book, we can be sure we know the heart of what Paul taught and preached. Paul taught exactly what Jesus taught: That now, God was bringing a spiritual kingdom that would take root in men's hearts before it took over the governments of this world. The Jews of Jesus' day and of Paul's day were looking for a political kingdom, not a spiritual kingdom.

The Jews Reject the Gospel [Again!] ([28:25-29](#))

When they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: Paul understood that Isaiah prophesied of the hardness of heart these people would have. Certainly, Paul was thankful that some received the gospel, but he was distressed every time even one person rejected Jesus. Essentially, Isaiah is saying: "If you reject Jesus, you can hear, but never understand; you can see but never perceive. Your heart is, and will be, hard, your ears closed, and your eyes shut - because you really don't want to turn to God and be healed of your sin." This is a message just as true today as it was when Isaiah first said it, and when Paul quoted it.

Paul must’ve had a keen sense of this truth, and felt a profound sense of obligation to it. He wrote about this in his second epistle to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 2:15-16), *“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?”*

When he had said these words, the Jews departed: It would be just a few years after Paul's heartbreak over Jewish rejection of Christ, starting ca. AD 68, that the people of Judea would be slaughtered, and Jerusalem destroyed. We have no indication that Paul has a specific revelation from the Holy Spirit about that, but the urgency in his desire to see the Gentiles and "all of Israel" saved is ever-present in his epistle writings.

Another 2-Year Wait ([28:30-31](#))

Then Paul dwelt two years: In the earlier case of Felix's imprisonment of Paul, the protracted delay was due to Felix's corruption and evil intent. We have no indication that this was the case in Rome. Rather, it's likely on account of congestion in the Roman legal system. There is tremendous *benefit* of this extended delay to Christians. His letters to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians were all written from Rome while Paul was working, preaching, and teaching – all under house arrest!

Received all who came to him: One example of someone he "received" in Rome was one of his converts, a runaway slave named Onesimus, who Paul writes about in Philemon.

Paul certainly had his appearance before Caesar as God promised, but the proceedings of it are not recorded in Acts. It is likely that church tradition is accurate, that Paul was acquitted of the charges against him and enjoyed a few more years of liberty until he was once again arrested, imprisoned, condemned, and finally executed at the command of Nero. Why did Luke not record Paul's appearance before Caesar? Because the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts were composed as a "friend-of-the-court" brief to be used in Paul's trial before Caesar.

Perhaps it's fitting that we are not given the "end of the story" of Paul and the spread of the Gospel here. Variations on Paul's and the other Apostles' story are repeated again and again throughout the history of the church.

In Acts, God reminds and vividly demonstrates for us, through this detailed retelling of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem, to Paul's arrival in Rome, that His will is "law", or really, objective reality. Despite all the different kinds of difficulty that appear to get in the way, Romans 8:28 is *true*. It was for Paul. It is for us. And it always will be.

The Book of Acts, truly, is a never-ending story!