

THE ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

Chapter 27:1 – 28:31 Paul reaches Rome

*How did Paul and his companions escape a storm on the sea and a shipwreck?

*What should give us encouragement during difficult times?

*How was Paul treated in Rome?

Introduction

All the way at the beginning of Paul's series of trials, Christ comforted him by telling him he would be able to spread the word in Rome. Paul would have considered this a great blessing (see Romans 1:9-15). He was going to be granted the opportunity to preach his beloved gospel in the capital of the known world! But it would take a long, difficult, and strange voyage to reach Rome...

Acts 27:1-8 The ship departs

When it was time to transport Paul to Rome so that he could stand trial before the emperor (Acts 25:12), he and other prisoners were placed on a ship. Paul's friends Luke (notice that the word "we" means that the author, Luke, is present) and Aristarchus were allowed to accompany him. Before heading off to sea, the ship made a quick stop a little farther north on the Palestine coast in Sidon. The commanding official, Julius, was kind enough to let Paul see his friends there during the stay.

They left despite bad weather, which was only a foretaste of things to come. At Myra, they boarded a ship bound for Italy, perhaps carrying a load of grain from Egypt. This ship also had trouble, but finally made it to Crete, an island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea.

Acts 27:9-26 Storm-tossed on the sea

After the group spent a while in the port, Paul grew concerned. It was very late in the season for sailing, so there would certainly be storms awaiting them. Not only that, but ships were notoriously dangerous in ancient times. Without modern technology, even the best ship in Paul's time would not be considered seaworthy by today's standards. Paul voiced his concerns to Julius, but the pilot convinced the commander that it would be better to winter in the port of Phoenix, not far from where they were.

But as soon as they left the safety of the harbor, they were blindsided by a huge storm, a northeaster, and could not even sail a few miles to Phoenix. The best they could do was let the storm blow them wherever it wanted. The shelter of a small island allowed them to gain momentary control, just long enough to secure the small emergency boat. Afraid of running aground, they let down the anchor.

Now the crew was in desperation mode. In the open sea and in a violent storm, they began to toss out anything that wasn't absolutely necessary for the ship in order to lighten it. As day after day went by without the storm lessening even enough to let the sun or stars peek through the clouds, the sailors lost hope of any rescue.

At his moment of despair, Paul stood up and addressed the group. He first reminded them that they should have heeded to his advice back on Crete. In other words, he was saying that they should learn from experience to trust him. Now, he was bringing a message of hope for them to trust in. God had told him that not only he, but everyone on the ship would escape this dire situation with their lives. He predicted that they would run aground on an island.

Note: The difference between opinions and God's will

Before, Paul stated that the voyage would result in human lives being lost

(27:10). Now he says that all would survive. Isn't it strange that Paul is changing his predictions now? Not when we consider that Paul's first statement came from his own perception, or opinion. His second prediction came straight from an angel of God. Paul knew the difference between a man's own opinion and the will of God, and we should, too. Human opinions, even if they come from a wise man like Paul, are short-sighted and fallible. God's will, revealed to us today in his word, is never wrong.

Acts 27:27-44 Shipwreck

Two weeks into the storm, the sailors discovered that they were finally approaching land. And they were approaching it very quickly! The crew quickly dropped anchor so that they wouldn't run aground, and waited until the sun rose to show them where they were.

The sailors saw their opportunity to escape with their lives. Pretending to work with the anchors, they were getting ready to make for shore in the small boat. But Paul saw them and warned Julius. The centurion was ready to listen to Paul this time! The soldiers cut away the small boat.

No one had eaten any food for the whole two weeks. They were far too distressed. But Paul, perfectly confident that God would spare them all, encouraged them to take bread. He openly gave thanks to God and began to eat himself, and soon everyone else was doing the same. After eating, they tossed out the last of the wheat to lighten the ship one last time.

At daybreak, they attempted to drive the ship onto a beach. But before they could reach it, they ran into a reef. They were stuck, while the pounding waves were breaking up the ship little by little. Surely the deck was a chaotic scene, with the prisoners ready to jump in the water and make for land and the soldiers ready to kill them to keep them from escaping. But the centurion, wanting to keep Paul safe, instead commanded that everyone should jump overboard. Swimming or floating on planks, everyone made it to shore.

Note: The impact of just one man

Paul, through his confidence in God's promises, turned despair into hope among the men on the ship. Can we not do the same? Be willing to stand out, just as Paul prayed to thank God in the sight of everyone.

Acts 28:1-10 The natives of the island

The inhabitants of the island, called Malta, treated the shipwrecked sailors and prisoners with great kindness, starting a fire to receive the nearly 300 men. As Paul helped to bring wood, a viper sprang out and embedded its fangs into his arm. The natives assumed that Paul must have committed a terrible crime, since fate was punishing him even after he escaped from the sea. But their opinions quickly changed when, instead of falling over dead, Paul simply shook off the snake from his arm and carried on. They decided that he was a god. This was not the first time that people thought that Paul was a god (see Acts 14:11-12), but of course, this was just another misguided conclusion. The occasion rather showed Jesus' word fulfilled and His gospel confirmed (Mark 16:17-18). Paul further proved that he was a messenger of the true God by healing all those with diseases, including the father of the head of the island. In response, the people showed great kindness and respect towards Paul and his companions.

Acts 28:11-15 Arrival at Rome

After the winter, the journey was resumed. At the head of the new ship were the figures of the Twin Brothers, two pagan semi-deities, supposedly the protectors of sailors. But by now it is clear that the true God was the One sparing these sailors from destruction. The ship made quick time to Italy, and at Puteoli, some fellow disciples invited them to stay for a week. Then came time to go to Rome. Brethren, when they heard about Paul's arrival, came to meet him. Seeing these longed-for brethren brought special encouragement to Paul

Note: Caught between storms and an uncertain future

Paul had experienced a particularly stormy period of his life before he reached Rome. A series of unjust trials spanning several years forced him to travel to Rome in the bonds of a prisoner. On the way he passed through a violent storm that destroyed his ship and nearly cost him and his companions their lives. He passed a winter on a foreign island. Ahead of him lay not only imprisonment for an indefinite period of time, but also a trial before the emperor that could end in his execution. What gave Paul encouragement at this time when he was caught between storms and an uncertain future? His brethren. In fact, these brethren walked from places that were 30-50 miles away, just to see Paul. Whatever trials are behind us or before us in life, our brethren are a gift from God to encourage us (2 Corinthians 7:5-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-14; 1 Peter 5:9). We should make a tremendous effort, just like these brethren, to develop close relationships with those who share the same precious faith, and encourage each other.

Acts 28:16-31 The Jews in Rome

In Rome, Paul was still guarded as a prisoner, but was given special liberties, perhaps in consideration of all that he had done on the voyage. Just after getting settled, he called the leaders among the Jews to his living quarters, where he explained why he was there and how he had done no wrong against the Jews. In fact, he said, he was there because he defended the hope of his people. The Jews responded that they hadn't received any warnings about him, but that they did want to hear him speak about Christianity.

So, on an appointed day, Paul reasoned about Jesus with all the Jews that had gathered to listen. Like usual, there was great disagreement afterwards. Paul mentioned one last thing before they left: they were becoming the stubborn people that the prophet Isaiah described. The message was preached to them, but because of their hardness of heart, they rejected it and so God could not heal them. Now God was going to send the message to the Gentiles as well.

For two years, Paul remained in house arrest, able to speak about Christ with perfect freedom to any that came to hear. Thus ends Acts according to the same pattern we have seen throughout the book: though many reject the gospel, God's apostle continues to preach to anyone who will listen, all the while blessed by God.

Note: What happened after Acts?

Although we would love to know all the details about the later lives of Paul, Peter, Barnabas, Timothy, and others that we have met in Acts, we simply don't have a complete record. In fact, Acts itself doesn't give us a thorough picture of how the gospel spread everywhere in the first generation after Jesus. For instance, how did the message reach Rome before Paul ever got there? While Acts doesn't answer all the questions we want to know, it answers all the questions we need to know. God has granted to us all the information we need in His word (2 Peter 1:2-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17), and the examples in the book of Acts — of conversion, of the church's nature, and of how to walk by the Holy Spirit and spread the word — are sufficient for our Christian lives.

At the same time, there are hints in the New Testament of what happened with Paul after the history recorded in Acts. Paul was apparently acquitted in his trial before the emperor, since some of his letters appear to have been written after this imprisonment. Luke may be writing the book shortly after he is released. It seems that then Paul went on another preaching tour, perhaps reaching as far as Spain (see Romans 15:24,28). Ultimately, he was arrested again, and from prison wrote his final epistle, 2 Timothy, in which he anticipates death. According to tradition, he was executed after this trial.

Brief mentions of different locations seem to indicate that Peter also traveled frequently, even to Rome (Galatians 2:11; 1 Peter 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:12; 1 Peter 5:13). Tradition also points to his death around the time of Paul, both several years before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. Both of these men lived lives of service to the Lord, and so could look forward to an eternal reward while on their deathbeds (2 Timothy 4:5-8; 2 Peter 1:13-14).

Will you choose to spend your life in the same way? Just as Peter's last recorded

words state, “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Continue your study of God’s word even beyond the book of Acts.

Write the correct answer

1. What two friends sailed with Paul? (Be sure to note the pronoun used.)
2. What advice did Paul give when they were about to leave Fair Havens?
3. For how many days was the ship lost in the storm?
4. What encouragement did the Lord give Paul during this time?
5. What did Paul prevent the shipmen from doing as they neared land?
6. What did Paul encourage all to do before leaving the ship?
7. Why were the prisoners not killed?
8. Tell of the miracles Paul performed on the Island of Malta.
9. What brought special encouragement to Paul as he neared Rome?
10. With whom did Paul meet after he had been in Rome for three days? What was the purpose of this meeting?
11. For how long was Paul a prisoner in Rome on this occasion? What were his living conditions during the time?

True or false:

1. The opinions of men, no matter how great or special the men are, can be wrong.
2. It is wrong to say public prayers, since it will probably make people around us feel uncomfortable.
3. Since Paul didn’t get hurt by the venomous snake, we should pick up snakes during religious services.
4. We need to look to tradition (outside of the New Testament) to know how to act as Christians or how to form the church.

The person who sent this lesson to you will be happy to correct your answers and discuss any questions you have with you. Send your responses and your contact information to:

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