

## **Paul Preaches in Rome (Acts 27-28)**

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

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### **I. Background and Introduction**

- a. Paul was imprisoned as a result of a riot that erupted in Jerusalem while he was in the temple area.
- b. The Romans sent Paul to Caesarea, where he remained under guard for two years: first under Felix, and then under Portius Festus.
  - i. In the prior message, we discussed the message Paul preached to Felix and King Agrippa, which included Paul recounting the story of his own conversion.
- c. Rather than have his trial transferred to Jerusalem, Paul (a Roman citizen) exercised his right to appeal his case to Caesar.
- d. The remaining two chapters of **Acts** cover Paul's journey by sea to Rome and his preaching the message of the kingdom to Jews and Gentiles there while under guard and awaiting trial.

### **II. From Caesarea to Malta, by Sea**

- a. First, as we read a lengthy and detailed account of Paul's voyage, I would like us to consider an insight by Irenaeus regarding Luke, the author of both the third gospel and the book of **Acts**. Bear in mind that Irenaeus in his youth was taught by Polycarp, who in turn had been a disciple of the apostle John in Asia Minor. Writing c. 180 AD, Irenaeus stated the following:
  - i. "But that this Luke was inseparable from Paul, and his fellow-laborer in the gospel, he himself clearly evinces, not as a matter of boasting, but as bound to do so by the truth itself...
  - ii. "And all the remaining [details] of his course with Paul he recounts, indicating with all diligence both places, and cities, and number of days, until they went up to Jerusalem; and what befell Paul there, how he was sent to Rome in bonds; the name of the centurion who took him in charge; and the signs of the ships, and how they made shipwreck; and the island upon which they escaped, and how they received kindness there, Paul healing the chief man of that island; and how they sailed from thence to Puteoli, and from that arrived at Rome; and for what period they sojourned at Rome.

iii. “As Luke was present at all these occurrences, he carefully noted them down in writing, so that he cannot be convicted of falsehood or boastfulness, because all these [particulars] proved both that he was senior to all those who now teach otherwise, and that he was not ignorant of the truth. That he was not merely a follower, but also a fellow laborer of the apostles, but especially of Paul....”

1. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 3, chapter 14; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 437–438)

iv. Therefore, as we read all the details of Paul’s journey to Rome, as written down by Luke, let us notice the number of times Luke uses the term “we” or “us”.

1. Let us also notice the extraordinary level of detail in this part of Luke’s account (names of people, geography, description of the ships they sailed on, events, etc.).

2. That is a reminder to us that in this part of **Acts**, we have a detailed first-hand account provided by someone who was accompanying Paul on his trip!

b. Read **Acts 27:1-12**

i. It is helpful to visualize the route of Paul’s journey by sea from Caesarea to Rome on a map that outlines the route, such as is found in the back of many modern Bibles.

ii. Storyline:

1. Paul and other prisoners are traveling under the guard of a Roman centurion named Julius, who treated Paul well.

2. Aristarchus, a disciple from Thessalonica (in Macedonia), was mentioned in **Acts** (including in the riot over Artemis/Diana in **Acts 19**) as a traveling companion of Paul (also mentioned in **Colossians** and **Philemon**).

3. The sea route:

a. Depart Caesarea.

b. Sail northward along the Syrian coast, stopping in Tyre.

c. Sail westward along the coast of Turkey (Asia Minor) and to the north of Cyprus.

- d. Stop in Myra, in Lycia (southern Turkey), where they board an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy.
  - i. Problems on this leg of the trip.
  - ii. They are delayed too long in Fair Havens, waiting for favorable winds.
  - iii. Paul warns that a disaster will befall the ship if they depart at this time.
  - iv. However, the centurion sides with the ship's helmsman and owner and continues on this ship. They hope to reach a safe harbor on Crete before the bad weather of winter arrives.
- c. Read **Acts 27:13-26**. They now encounter a great storm at sea.
  - i. Storyline
    - 1. Shortly after departing Fair Havens, they encounter a terrible storm wind called a *Euroclydon*. (Some English language translations render this a "northeaster" or "nor'easter".)
    - 2. Things get desperate. On the third day, they throw the ship's tackle overboard. They do not see the sun or stars for many days and lose all hope of surviving.
    - 3. Paul says, "I told you so. You should have listened to me!" However, he encourages them to take heart; an angel had told him that Paul would be brought before Caesar and that "God has granted you all those who sail with you."
      - a. I assume from this that Paul had been praying for the deliverance of all the people on board his ship. (**Acts 27:24**)
  - ii. This story of a ship endangered at sea reminds me of a figure of the church put forward by Hippolytus, writing c. 200 AD:
    - 1. "...But we who hope for the Son of God are persecuted and trodden down by those unbelievers. For the wings of the vessels are the churches; and the sea is the world, in which the Church is set, like a ship tossed in the deep, but not destroyed; for she has with her the skilled Pilot, Christ. And she bears in her midst also the trophy (which is erected) over death; for she carries with her the cross of the Lord.

2. “For her prow is the east, and her stern is the west, and her hold is the south, and her tillers are the two Testaments; and the ropes that stretch around her are the love of Christ, which binds the Church; and the net which she bears with her is the laver of the regeneration which renews the believing, whence too are these glories. As the wind the Spirit from heaven is present, by whom those who believe are sealed: she has also anchors of iron accompanying her, viz., the holy commandments of Christ Himself, which are strong as iron.
  3. “She has also mariners on the right and on the left, assessors like the holy angels, by whom the Church is always governed and defended. The ladder in her leading up to the sailyard is an emblem of the passion of Christ, which brings the faithful to the ascent of heaven. And the top-sails aloft upon the yard are the company of prophets, martyrs, and apostles, who have entered into their rest in the kingdom of Christ...”
    - a. (Source: Hippolytus, *Treatise on Christ and Antichrist*, chapter 59; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, pp. 216–217)
- d. The ship runs aground on the island of Malta. Read **Acts 27:27-28:1**.
- i. A fathom is a measure of depth: about 6 feet (or 1.85 meters). Therefore, the depth soundings went from 120 feet (20 fathoms) to 90 feet (15 fathoms), indicating that the sea was getting shallower and they were approaching land (and rocks).
  - ii. Sailors let down the skiff and secretly try to escape in the smaller boat; Paul warns the centurion that if these men do not remain on the ship, they will not be saved. The centurion orders that the ropes holding the skiff be cut, to thwart the attempted escape.
  - iii. Paul encourages all to eat, gives thanks to God in prayer, and assures them that all of the 276 people on the ship will survive. He also tells them that none of them will perish from the storm.
  - iv. After they eat, the remaining cargo (wheat) is thrown overboard to lighten the ship.
  - v. They try to run the ship aground on a beach, but the prow (= bow or front) of the ship gets stuck while the stern is being broken apart by the waves.
  - vi. The soldiers want to kill the prisoners to prevent them from escaping. However, the centurion keeps them from doing that. All grab floating debris and make their way to land on the island of Malta.

### III. From Malta to Rome

#### a. Read **Acts 28:1-10**.

- i. More miraculous signs from Paul on the island of Malta.
- ii. A viper, driven out by the heat of the fire lit to keep the people warm after emerging from the sea, bites Paul in the hand and does not want to let go.
  1. Paul shakes the viper off into the fire.
  2. The people of that island, recognizing the snake as deadly, first assume that Paul, a prisoner, must have done something terrible and therefore is receiving justice through this.
  3. When Paul shakes the deadly viper off into the fire and miraculously survives, the people switch and assume he must be a god!
  4. This story reminds me of what Jesus said after His resurrection, as recorded in **Mark 16**. Note that this passage in **Acts** is the only place in the New Testament (that I am aware of) where we have an account of someone recovering from the bite of a poisonous snake.
    - a. “And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; *they will take up serpents*; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; *they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.*’” (**Mark 16:15-18**, NKJV)
    - b. Note also that Paul next lays hands on and heals the father of Publius. Paul then heals many other sick people on the island who come to him.
- iii. Tertullian used this story to remind Christians that we also have the ability to overcome the deadly (spiritual) bite of a serpent: *Satan*.
  1. “We have faith for a defense, if we are not smitten with distrust itself also, in immediately making the sign and adjuring, and besmearing the heel with the beast. Finally, we often aid in this way even the heathen, seeing we have been endowed by God

with that power which the apostle first used when he despised the viper's bite."

- a. (Source: Tertullian. *Scorpiace (Antidote to the Scorpion's Sting)*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 633)
2. This reminds us of the curse put on Satan, who was in the form of a serpent, in **Genesis 3**. It also calls to mind other passages that discuss our spiritual battle against Satan, the serpent.
  - a. "He (the offspring of the woman) shall bruise your head, and you shall be on guard for His heel". (**Genesis 3:15**, LXX, OSB)
  - b. "Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.' And He said to them, 'I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, *I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy*, and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.'" (**Luke 10:17-20**, NKJV)
  - c. "For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore, I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and simple concerning evil. *And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly*. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen." (**Romans 16:19-20**, NKJV)
3. **Takeaway:** Let us be reminded that if we walk with the Lord, He will give us the ability to defeat Satan our deadly enemy, to crush him under our heel and shake him off into the fire, as well!

b. Voyage to Rome. Read **Acts 28:11-15**.

- i. The ship they sailed on was from Alexandria and had the figurehead of "the Twin Brothers".
  1. The Greek word rendered "*Twin Brothers*" here is *Dioscuri*. It refers to the twin sons of Zeus under Greek mythology, better known to us by their Roman names: Castor and Pollux.
  2. These are the 'Gemini twins' that the constellation is named after. Pagans believed they could help those in distress on the

sea. From Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher, written down c. 108 AD:

- a. “Remember God: call on him as a helper and protector, as men at sea call on the Dioscuri in a storm.”
- b. (Source: Epictetus, *Discourses*, vol. 2, chapter 18)
- ii. The ship stops in Syracuse, a port in Sicily, for three days. Then they continue north to Puteoli, on the west coast of Italy near Naples. Paul continues from there to Rome, encouraged by the disciples from the region who come out to meet him.
  - 1. This is another reminder that the gospel spread to Italy before Paul arrived there. Also, recall that Paul wrote **Romans**, his letter to the Christians in Rome, before ever visiting them.

#### IV. Paul Preaches in Rome

- a. Read **Acts 28:16-24**.
  - i. Paul first preaches in Rome to the Jews there.
  - ii. Storyline:
    - 1. Paul in Rome is still under guard but is permitted to dwell in his own residence, but apparently is still bound with a chain. He is not confined to a prison cell.
    - 2. First, Paul reaches out to the Jews, following a pattern we have seen throughout his ministry.
      - a. The Jews were unaware of Paul’s situation and his legal challenges.
      - b. However, they were aware of the Christians as a controversial group that was causing problems.
        - i. The Christians are described as the “sect” that “is spoken against everywhere”. (**Acts 28:22**)
      - c. Paul sets a day to have the Jews come to his dwelling to hear his message regarding “the hope of Israel”. His message (compare with how the gospel is preached today) is:
        - i. Testifying of the kingdom of God.

- ii. Persuading them from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.
  - 1. Recall that this approach was exactly what Jesus had instructed the apostles to do after His resurrection, in **Luke 24** and **Acts 1**.
- 3. The response to Paul's message:
  - a. Some were persuaded by what Paul spoke
  - b. Others disbelieved.
- b. Read **Acts 28:25-31**.
  - i. Paul next turns his attention to the Gentiles.
  - ii. He rebukes the hard-hearted Jews who do not believe the gospel with the words of **Isaiah 6:9-10**.
    - 1. Paul's clear picture of the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit.
      - a. "The *Holy Spirit* spoke rightly *through* Isaiah the prophet".
      - b. Today, we hold to the divine inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit because Jesus and the apostles did.
        - i. This is a 'hill to die on', something we must be ready and equipped to defend at any time.
        - ii. This is not 'circular reasoning' (one book testifying about itself). The Bible is a collection of several books written by multiple authors over the span of many centuries.
      - c. Why I have full confidence in the divine inspiration of the Scriptures:
        - i. Jesus is the Son of God, the Christ, confirmed by His rising from the dead in fulfillment of prophecies and seen by eyewitnesses who went to their death spreading this message. After His resurrection, Jesus explained to the apostles that "all authority" had been given to Him by the Father.



1. "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" (**Matthew 28:18**, NKJV)
- ii. Jesus said that the apostles would be given "all truth".
  1. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come." (**John 16:13**, NKJV)
- iii. Peter also affirmed that the prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit. He also said that Paul wrote with the wisdom that God gave him.
  1. "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (**2 Peter 1:19–21**, NKJV)
  2. "Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." (**2 Peter 3:14–16**, NKJV)
2. **Bottom Line:** An unshakeable faith in the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit is essential to the Christian faith. It is "a hill to die on", the very foundation of our faith. We need to

be ready to give logical and rational proof for why we believe this, and to persuade others who are wavering.

- a. This is not just the belief of those who attend 'fundamentalist churches'. It is a foundation of the faith handed down by the apostles to all future believers.
3. In quoting from **Isaiah 6:9-10** here, Paul is quoting directly from the Septuagint (LXX). That is the old Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, dating to about 200 years before the birth of Jesus. This is the version of the Scriptures that Jesus and the apostles generally quote from in the New Testament.
  - a. You don't need to take my word for it; you can check this out for yourself by comparing the **Isaiah 6** passage from an interlinear Greek LXX with this passage from **Acts** in a Greek New Testament.
    - i. For example, see Van der Pool, *Apostolic Bible Polyglot: Greek-English Interlinear*. Second ed., The Apostolic Press, 2013.
  - b. Paul is quoting from the LXX here, then following up with the statement: "the Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet".
  - c. The wording in the LXX and Masoretic Text are rather similar here. However, there are places where they do differ in more significant ways.
  - d. **Question:** Which version of **Isaiah** (Masoretic Text or LXX) lines up best with what we find quoted in the New Testament? For example, in:
    - i. **Matthew 1:23**, where the gospel writer quotes **Isaiah 7:14** from the LXX, regarding the virgin birth prophecy.
    - ii. **Matthew 15:7-9**, where Jesus quotes from **Isaiah 29:13** following the LXX, notably in the statement: "And in vain they worship me".
    - iii. **Acts 8:32-33**, where the Ethiopian eunuch is reading from **Isaiah 53**, "He was led as a *sheep* to the slaughter, and as a *lamb* before its shearer is silent...", which follows the LXX.

1. In the Masoretic Text, the statements regarding the lamb and the sheep are *reversed* from what we read in the scroll the Ethiopian eunuch was reading from in **Acts 8**.
- iv. Also, here in **Acts 28**, where Paul is quoting **Isaiah 6:9-10** to hard-hearted Jews.
- e. **Questions:** What does that tell us about the attitude of Jesus and the apostles (and even their religious Jewish opponents) regarding the inspiration and reliability of the LXX? Which text of the Old Testament do you think we should be using today?

### iii. Closing Question:

1. What is the message that Paul was preaching, here in Rome?
  - a. "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, *preaching the kingdom of God* and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." (**Acts 28:30-31**, NKJV)
  - b. This was the very message that Jesus was speaking to the apostles about, in the first chapter of **Acts**.
    - i. Read **Acts 1:1-3**.
    - ii. "...to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to *the kingdom of God*." (**Acts 1:3**, NKJV)
  - c. This is the message, the good news of *the kingdom of God*, that Jesus said would be preached to all nations before His return.
    - i. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (**Matthew 24:14**, NKJV)
  - d. This is the same message Paul preached day and night for three years in Ephesus.

- i. “And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone *preaching the kingdom of God*, will see my face no more.” (**Acts 20:25**, NKJV)
- e. **Takeaway:** Today, we need to be preaching the same message to the world: *the kingdom of God*!

iv. **Closing Thoughts:**

1. Life as a Christian can be hard. We must persevere in faith when severe trials come our way.
  - a. As Paul said, underscored by what we have just seen him go through:
    - i. “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.” (**1 Corinthians 15:19**, NKJV)
    - ii. **Challenge:** When you feel that you are having a challenging time as a Christian, read **2 Corinthians 11:23-28** and compare your hardships against what Paul faced! Consider all the trials we have seen Paul and the other apostles endure in **Acts**, for the sake of the gospel.
  - b. Likewise, Peter said that our faith will be refined by trials (**1 Peter 1:6-7**).
  - c. As we are reminded in **Psalm 34:19** (designated **Psalm 33:20** in the LXX), “many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him from them all”.
  - d. Christians can expect to be maligned, hated and persecuted by the world.
    - i. The Christian faith was known as, “the sect...spoken against everywhere”. (**Acts 28:22**)
2. Preach the kingdom of God, the original message that Jesus wanted preached, and that Paul preached wherever he went.
3. Don’t be stopped by circumstances. Paul is preaching even while in chains.
4. Take an unwavering stand on the inspiration of the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit.

5. Let us learn how to use the Old Testament the way that Peter, Paul, Stephen, Philip, and Apollos did; how Jesus taught the apostles to use it.
  - a. Prove the faith to unbelievers from prophecies that were given to the Jews hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus.
  - b. This was how the faith was spread to an unbelieving world in the first century, and it can be just as compelling and effective today!



“The situation of the ship on the fifteenth morning” painted by H. Smartly, engraved by H. Adlard.