

ACTS

Chapter 28

Ashore on Malta

Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³ Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴ When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” ⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶ The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god. ⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. ⁸ His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

28:1 *Malta*. Known as Melita by the Greeks and Romans. It was included in the province of Sicily and is located 58 miles south of that large island.

28:2 *islanders*. † Lit. “barbarians”; all non-Greek-speaking people were called this by Greeks. Far from being uncivilized tribesmen, they were Phoenician in ancestry and used a Phoenician dialect but were thoroughly Romanized. An incidental indication that Luke, a Greek, wrote Luke-Acts, since a Greek would refer to a non-Greek as a *barbaros*, which basically means “foreigner” or “non-Greek,” not necessarily equivalent to “barbarian.” A Jew would not call these Semitic people (Phoenicians) “foreigners.” *raining and cold*. It was the end of October or the beginning of November. – Their native language was related to the Aramaic which Paul spoke, and it was possible for them and the apostles to understand each other. (PBC)

28:3 *a viper*. Must have been known to the islanders to be poisonous.

28:6 *to swell up*. The usual medical term for inflammation; it is used only by Luke in the NT (see Introduction to Luke: Author). – They based their assumption on their belief that justice would take a life for a life. The capitalization of Justice in the NIV reminds us that the Greek-Roman world regarded justice as a goddess. The expected did not happen. We recall Jesus’ words: “They will pick up snakes with their hands” (Mark 16:18).

said he was a god. Parallel to the Lystrans' attempt to worship Paul and Barnabas (14:11–18).

28:7 *Publius.* A Roman name, but the first name and not the family name. It must have been what the islanders called him. – The later church father Jerome records a tradition that Publius was converted. (LL)

chief official. † The “first man” of Malta, a technical term for the top authority. Luke’s designation is accurate here, as elsewhere, even though the Greek term used is not a common one. Cf. also “proconsul” (Greek *anthypatos*, 13:7), “magistrates” (Greek *strategoï*, 16:20), “city officials” (Greek *politarchai*, 17:6), “officials of the province” (Greek *Asiarchai*, 19:31).

28:8 HEALED – This miracle, like all the miracles of Jesus and his apostles, was to further the cause of the gospel. God used the circumstances of the storm and shipwreck for his good purpose and brought great blessings to the inhabitants of Malta. (PBC)

28:10 WHEN WE WERE READY TO SAIL – Any further progress toward Rome would have to await the new sailing season in early March. During the three months that followed they would have the opportunity to learn from Paul the life-giving message from the only true God. (LL – PBC)

Arrival at Rome

¹¹ After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹² We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³ From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴ There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. ¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

28:11 *After three months.* They had to remain here until the sailing season opened in late February or early March.

Castor and Pollux. The two “sons of Zeus” (Greek *Dioscuroi*), the guardian deities of sailors. – In Greek mythology they were twin sons of Zeus and Leda. There may be a bit of irony in Luke’s mention of them, because sailors regarded them as their guardian or patron deities. Those who had been rescued by the God to whom Paul belonged and whom he served would know that a power higher than “the twins” is the ruler of wind and wave. (PBC)

28:12 *Syracuse.* The leading city on the island of Sicily, situated on the east coast.

28:13 *Rhegium.* A town on the coast of Italy, near the southwestern tip and close to the narrowest point of the strait separating that country from Sicily, opposite Messina.

Around the promontory north of the town was the whirlpool of Charybdis and the rock of Scylla. Coming from his triumph in Judea, the general Titus landed here on his way to Rome.

Puteoli. Modern Pozzuoli, almost 200 miles from Rhegium. It was situated in the northern part of the Bay of Naples and was the chief port of Rome, though 75 miles away. The population included Jews as well as Christians.

28:14 *spend a week.* As at Troas (20:6) and Tyre (21:4), Paul was with them for one or perhaps two Sundays to observe the keeping of the Lord's Supper and to teach and preach. Either the centurion had business to care for or he was free to delay the journey at Paul's request (see 27:42–43; see also 27:3). – In an extraordinary concession Julius allowed Paul a week in Puteoli, unquestionably a favor in return for his crucial services on the shipwreck voyage. (LL)

Rome. See map of "Rome".

28:15 *Forum of Appius.* A small town 43 miles from Rome, noted for its wickedness. Some Roman Christians came this far to meet Paul. Beyond this they would not be certain of the way he would come.

Three Taverns. A town 33 miles from Rome. Other Roman believers met Paul here. The term "tavern" was used to designate any kind of shop.

28:16 *live by himself.* "In his own rented house" (v. 30). He had committed no flagrant crime and was not a politically dangerous rival. So he was allowed to have his own living quarters, but a guard was with him at all times, perhaps chained to him (Eph 6:20; Php 1:13–14, 17; Col 4:3, 18; Phm 10, 13). – He was kept under house arrest, in a residence rented for him for that purpose. (PBC)

Paul Preaches at Rome Under Guard

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹ But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. ²⁰ For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." ²¹ They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect." ²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to

your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ²⁶“Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” ²⁷ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ ^{a 28} “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” ^{b 30} For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

28:17 *leaders of the Jews.* † The decree of the emperor Claudius (see 18:2) had been allowed to lapse, or the decree automatically lapsed at the death of Claudius, and the leaders of the Jews had returned to Rome. – Paul greeted many Jewish believers in his Epistle to the Romans, written three years before his arrival in the city. (PBC)

My brothers. An epithet that recognized the common Jewish blood he shared with them. Cf. the usage in v. 15, referring to brothers in Christ.

28:20 *the hope of Israel.* See note on 26:6.

28:22 *we want to hear ... your views.* The Jews in Rome were well aware of the dispute over whether Jesus was the Messiah. They wanted to hear Paul’s presentation, and he was eager to present it before the arrival of adverse opinions from the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem.

28:23 *Law of Moses ... Prophets.* The OT Scriptures (see Lk 24:27, 44).

28:27 HEART HAS BECOME CALLOUSED – God’s word, spoken through Isaiah, says that Israel would hear the Scriptures and not understand them. They would see the mighty works of God but not recognize them for what they were. Paul warned his hearer not to let that happen in their case. They did not want Him to control their lives. They wanted Him out of their lives, even while they still used His name and professed loyalty to His law. The result was that God finally did leave them alone, did get out of their lives. Then they couldn’t see or hear or understand anymore. They couldn’t turn to God for healing any longer. That is, they could not repent. The very gospel which was intended to save them would result in their hardening. It is not the gospel’s purpose or God’s intention to harden men’s hearts. But those who refuse to repent and believe are at last hardened. (PBC)

28:28 *God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles.* The main thought of the book of Acts. The gospel is meant for all. And Paul was a chosen vessel to carry the message to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

28:29 See NIV text note on v. 28.

28:30 *two whole years.* Paul served the Lord (v. 31) during the full period of waiting for his accusers to press the trial in Rome. There are a number of indications that he was

released from this imprisonment: 1. Acts stops abruptly at this time. 2. Paul wrote to churches expecting to visit them soon; so he must have anticipated a release (see Php 2:24; Phm 22). 3. A number of the details in the Pastoral Letters do not fit into the historical setting given in the book of Acts. Following the close of the book, these details indicate a return to Asia Minor, Crete and Greece. 4. Tradition indicates that Paul went to Spain. Even if he did not go, the very fact that a tradition arose suggests a time when he could have taken that journey. See further map on “Paul’s Fourth Missionary Journey”. – During the two years in Rome Paul wrote several of his epistles: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon and possible Ephesians. The result of his trial before the imperial court was that he was acquitted: “I was delivered from the lion’s mouth” (2 Timothy 4:17). Thus Paul was free to continue his work, and it is clear that he revisited many of the places where his earlier journeys had taken him. Somewhere, for some reason, Paul was arrested a second time. From prison in Rome he wrote his Second Epistle to Timothy. He expected to be executed this time. Ancient tradition says that he was beheaded at Rome, probably in A.D. 66. (PBC)