

~ Lesson 91 ACTS ~

Destination: Rome

Acts 28:1-16

Last week we looked at chapter 27 in the book of Acts and we saw God's faithfulness in the storm as He providentially carried all 276 passengers to safety on the little island called Malta. Malta means sweet honey in Greek, and how sweet it was to come to this island. Now today we begin chapter 28 and we will end at verse 16 as Paul's long awaited desire to come to Rome is finally fulfilled.

But before they can come to Rome, they have to wait out the winter season on this island. And during these three months we will see God continue to work in miraculous ways through His Apostle.

Acts 28:1) Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.

You remember in 27:39, as the sailors approached this island in the storm, Luke says "they did not recognize the land." But now that they have come safely to the land, they realize this is the island of Malta. On the north side of Malta was a major sea port called Valletta, but since these sailors had come upon this island from the east in such distress they didn't recognize where they were.

Happy to be alive, the sailors, the soldiers, the prisoners and Paul, Luke and Aristarchus all swim and float to shore. The NKJV says, **when they had escaped**, but this word is a passive participle διασωθέντες, meaning, "having been thoroughly saved." They didn't save themselves; God had thoroughly saved all 276 people on board, and we will continue seeing God's hand of protection saving and guiding Paul to Rome. Because little did they know that at the same time, in the port of Valetta, there was another Alexandrian grain ship docked for the winter, waiting to set sail to Rome in the Spring, v. 11. God brought them safely to Malta and He even provided the ship to get them to Rome.

When these men came to the shore, they were wet and cold. It was day, but the storm hadn't stopped. It was still raining and miserable, but notice God's favor in verse 2...

Acts 28:2) And the natives (βάρβαροι- non-Greek speaking people) showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.

They brought them under shelter from the rain, kindled a fire and made them all welcome... for 276 people! That is unusual kindness.

Acts 28:3) But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

This verse continues to show us the character of Paul. It is raining and cold. It was because of Paul that everyone was alive. He could have easily had other people gather the firewood, but notice he is doing this himself. Such an amazing act of humility and service. I love Paul's character. He wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. He was a worker, as servant of Jesus Christ. In one aspect, an ambassador of the King that would stand before Emperor Nero himself, but so humble to be gathering firewood for the camp.

And as Paul is gathering this brushwood, a poisonous snake was hiding in the sticks and Paul must have picked up the snake with the sticks. But when Paul threw the wood into the fire, the snake felt the heat and latched onto Paul's hand.

Acts 28:4) So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."

Notice the snake isn't just wrapped around Paul's hand. No, the snake has dug its poisonous fangs into his hand and its hanging there. The natives saw this and knew this was certain death. They had probably seen this type of snake bite kill their people before and now they are waiting for Paul to die. So they instantly revert to their pagan theology by saying, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."

This word justice could be referring to the pagan goddess Justice because Luke writes, ἡ Δίκη with the article. The natives were sure Paul would swell up and die so their pagan beliefs instantly assumed Paul had to be a murderer and the goddess Justice would not allow him to live. But notice Paul's reaction...

Acts 28:5-6) ⁵ But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Paul, not even worried. He just shakes off the snake and throws it into the fire. He is trusting God and the promise that He was given that he must stand before Nero. God just delivered him from the storm and brought them all safely to land. There is no way he's going to die from this snake bite. Luke says the natives **looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god**. Superstition brings a fickle response just like we saw in Lystra when they began calling Barnabas and Paul, Zeus and Hermes, after Paul healed the lame man, Acts 14:8-13. Luke doesn't tell us Paul's response to this, but I'm sure it was the same as in Lystra, Acts 14:14-18.

God performs two types of miracles on this island: 1) He heals Paul from this snake bite and 2) in the next few verses we will see God working through Paul, His chosen Apostle, to heal all the people on the island, v.7-9. I believe Luke is recording these two specific miracles to coincide with his former account, the Gospel of Luke, and the authority God grants His Apostles, **Luke 9:1-2; 10:1, 8-9, 17-19**. Luke is making the point that God gives His chosen Apostles this authority. And now in the book of Acts, Luke is demonstrating this by giving these examples. We're going to see this with Publius and his father...

Acts 28:7) In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days.

Here is another example of Luke portraying Rome as the "good guys." Publius is a Roman official of this island. He is the **leading citizen of the island**, τῷ πρώτῳ τῆς νήσου, the first rank of the island, probably under the authority of Sicily, Italy. And here we see Publius being very generous to all 276 people because Luke says, **who received us and entertained us courteously for three days**. Publius took them in until they could get settled on the island.

Acts 28:8-9) ⁸ And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. ⁹ So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

These are amazing miracles, much like we saw at the beginning of Acts and even with Jesus in the Gospels. And here in the very last chapter in Acts, God is still performing huge miracles... God saved 276 people in the storm, deadly snake bite, and the entire island healed! And even today, I believe God is still doing miracles, **Mark 16:17-18**. But we have to remember who is doing the healing. It is Jesus. Paul is not the healer, Peter was not the healer, Jesus is the healer through the power of the Holy Spirit and Paul is very clear in 1 Corinthians 14 that these gifts of the Spirit are "as He wills," not as I will. No Apostle ever did on-demand miracles. It is the work of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit as He wills. This is very evident, even in Paul's life, because in 2 Timothy 4:20 he says, "Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick." If Paul was the healer, he would have healed Trophimus, not left him in Miletus sick, but for reasons we do not understand, God did not heal Trophimus... at least at that point in time. And I have seen people in my own personal life that have died from an illness and gone home to be with the Lord, and I have also seen people be healed physically healed of deadly diseases. I don't have all the answers why God chooses to heal some and not others on this side of heaven. But this I do know, that all who have faith in Jesus will be healed and gain a perfect glorified body that will live forever and never get sick be with Jesus in perfect wholeness FOREVER.

So here in Acts 28, the reason I believe God heals these people in Malta is because He is using these signs and wonders to validate Paul as His chosen Apostle just as Jesus did to validate Himself as the Christ, John 5:36; 10:37-38. Luke made this clear in Luke 9 and 10. And it is all for the purpose to proclaim the Gospel. Luke doesn't mention Paul preaching in Malta, but I know he did because Paul preached everywhere he went. This is another piece of evidence Luke is including in these trial documents for Theophilus.

After being on the island for three months, Paul had made friends with these natives...

Acts 28:10-11) ¹⁰ They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary. ¹¹ After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.

Paul and all 276 people were at Malta for three months and even though Luke doesn't mention anything else about their stay, you know Paul was preaching the Gospel and people were being saved. This is why the natives are so honoring to them and supplied them with their necessities.

Verse 11 just shows the providential hand of God orchestrating Paul's voyage to Rome. Out of all the islands Paul could have shipwrecked on, this island just so happens to have another Alexandrian grain ship docked for winter, ready to depart for Rome in the Spring. By now they have been on the island three months, from mid to end November through the end of February. Sailing on the Mediterranean was allowed at the end of February, so Julius arranges passage on this ship with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead, Διόσκουροι, literally "sons of Zeus." On the front of this ship were carvings of Zeus' twin sons, Pollux and Caster. Greek gods whom sailors thought protected the seas.

No doubt this ship was wintered in the major sea port of Valleta, and they set sail for Italy.

Acts 28:12-13) ¹² And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. ¹³ From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,

This ship sails north toward Italy and docks at another major sea port in Sicily called Syracuse. They stay there three days, probably unloading grain. From there they continue north to another port called Rhegium. The wind must have been against them because Luke says they had to circle round, περιέρχομαι, come around, probably having to tack against the wind. The sailors are aiming to go through the straights of Messina, in between Sicily and the tip of Italy, and they need a soft wind to guide them through. So they dock at Rhegium and the next day they get just what they needed, **And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli.** This south wind carries them north almost 200 miles in one day to the port of Puteoli in the gulf of Naples. As Paul entered this gulf, he would have noticed the infamous Mount Vesuvius that was soon to erupt in 79ad, and devastate this entire area. Notice who Paul finds there in Puteoli...

Acts 28:13-14) ¹³ and the next day we came to Puteoli, ¹⁴ where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days.

Paul has now set foot in Italy and is only 130 miles from Rome. Everywhere Paul goes, he is always on the lookout for Christians and in Puteoli he finds them. Notice again the favor of God because from this point Julius and the soldiers will take the prisoners by foot into Rome. It has been almost five months since they left Caesarea, 6-8 weeks on the Mediterranean and 3 months in Malta. Now they have finally come to Italy and they are only 130 miles from Rome. This is probably about a week's journey on foot. But notice that instead of travelling these next seven days to get to Rome, Julius stops and allows Paul to meet with his friends for seven days. This is unheard of! But not if Julius and the other soldiers had become Christians themselves. These soldiers have seen the power of God save their lives, heal Paul from the snake bite, and heal all the sick on the island. Not to mention Paul preaching the Gospel these five months. How could they not become believers? This is why I think Julius doesn't mind allowing Paul to stay with the brethren for seven days.

During these seven days, news that the Apostle Paul had finally come to Rome was spreading because along the way, many Christians come to greet them. But notice these words at the end of verse 14...

Acts 28:14) And so we went toward Rome.

This now begins the procession of God's faithful ambassador as he makes his way to Rome. Paul and the company begin walking on the major highway of Rome called the Appian Way which leads directly into the heart of Rome. This was a major Roman road built in 312bc. It was 15' wide x 350 miles long and

laid with huge paving stones that lasted for hundreds of years. In fact, remnants of this road still exist today. So Julius leads this group on this last 130 mile stretch to Rome.

Acts 28:15) *And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.*

As they travel up this road they come to a popular stopping point, Appii Forum. This was a well known rest stop along the Appian Way. It was even mentioned in the writings of Horace, a Roman satirist describing this place as, *“Bursting with boatmen and cheating innkeepers.”* Horace Satire v.1.5 This place was about 40 miles southeast of Rome in which more brethren are coming to meet the Apostle Paul. They travel a little further to another place called the Three Inns now only 30 miles from Rome and more brethren come to meet them. You can just imagine Julius and the other soldiers seeing this love of the brethren displayed. This is the greatest witness to the Gospel, John 13:35. But also notice the joy the Apostle Paul has. **When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.** Finally, Paul meets his brethren in Rome and he is taking courage. Just as Jesus told him three years earlier, *“Take courage, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”* Acts 23:11. This has been Paul’s desire for years. Remember what he wrote in the opening chapter to the Christians in Rome, **Romans 1:8-12.**

Acts 28:16) *Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.*

Finally, Paul has made it to Rome. This is the destination of the book of Acts... from Jerusalem to Rome. The fulfillment of Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8- *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.* To bear witness of the Risen Christ to the whole world. The ends of the earth in that day was the city of Rome. Rome was the heart of the known world. The center of the Roman Empire. You have heard the expression, “All roads lead to Rome.” Well, if that’s true then all roads lead away from Rome. And if Paul can preach the Gospel in Rome, to the emperor himself, then the Gospel can go out to the world.

Again, notice the favor Paul has when he gets to Rome. Julius delivers the prisoners to their prison cells, Aristarchus being one of these other prisoners, but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself only being chained to a soldier who guarded him.

Next week we will finish the book of Acts and see Paul one more time preach the Gospel to the Jew first, and then to the Gentiles.