

Lesson 24
Acts 27-28
Paul's Final Journey To Rome

Memory Verse "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!" (Acts 28:28 NIV)

Festus arranges for a centurion and a unit of Roman soldiers to take Paul, along with a number of other prisoners, to Rome. Two Christians also go with Paul, his loyal friend Luke and a church leader from Thessalonica named Aristarchus (27:1-2; cf. 19:29; 20:4). They begin the journey on a ship that takes them as far as Myra in Asia Minor. There they change to one of the huge grain ships that sailed between Alexandria and Italy. After several days they come to the island of Crete (27:3-8).

At the port of Fair Havens (Safe Harbours), Paul advises the ship's officers not to sail any further till the dangerous winter season has passed. But they reject Paul's advice and decide to move on to the next Cretan port, Phoenix, which they consider to be a better place to spend the winter (27:9-12).

Soon all were sorry that they have not listened to Paul. A fierce storm strikes, and it seems certain that the ship will sink and all on board would drown (27:13-20). Paul believes otherwise. God has assured him that, although the ship will be lost, all on board will be saved, and Paul himself will eventually reach Rome (27:21-26).

Paul's natural qualities of leadership soon see him take control of the situation, in spite of his being a prisoner. When the ship is about to run aground some sailors try to escape. The Roman guard acting on Paul's advice and stops them (27:27-32). When Paul warns that people were endangering their lives by going so long without eating, the ship's officers likewise heed his words (27:33-38). Only the centurion's respect for Paul stops the soldiers from killing the prisoners when the ship breaks up. In the end all those on board the ship escape safely to land (27:39-44).

The island on which they landed is Malta. The local people are kind and helpful to them all, but again Paul is the one who creates the most interest (28:1-6). Although he is legally a prisoner, he and his party spend three days with the island's chief official as his special guests. In return for the hospitality received from the islanders, Paul and Luke attend to many of their medical needs (28:7-10).

Three months after landing on Malta, when winter is over and sailing is again safe, Paul's party board another Alexandrian grain ship and sail for Puteoli in Italy. From there they go by road to Rome, being met by Christians from Rome at a number of places along the way (28:11-15). In Rome Paul enjoys a limited freedom. He is allowed to live in his own house and people can visit him freely, though a Roman soldier guards him constantly (28:16; cf. 28:30).

Soon after arriving in Rome he invites the Jewish leaders to come and see him. He outlines the events that have brought him to Rome and points out that he has done nothing contrary to Jewish law. He makes it clear that he brought no accusation against the Jewish people; his appeal to Caesar is solely to prove his innocence (28:17-20). The Jewish leaders give the surprising reply that they have heard no reports about Paul, though they knew that people everywhere were turning against the Christians (28:21-22).

As usual Paul preaches his message to the Jews first, showing from the Old Testament that the gospel he preaches is the true fulfilment of the religion of Israel.

But, as in other places, most of the Jews reject his message. This also, said Paul, has been foretold by the Old Testament Scriptures. Therefore, he will once again turn and proclaim the message to the Gentiles and they will believe (28:23-29). Paul proclaims the kingdom of God in the heart of the Empire just as he had proclaimed it elsewhere. And on that triumphant note, Luke concludes his story (28:30-31).

Why would Luke devote such a long section of his book to a description of a voyage and shipwreck? Luke, under God's inspiration was certainly not writing an allegory, but he did use this exciting event to show how one man's faith can make a big difference for him and others "in the storms of life." What an encouragement to our own faith! In Paul's journey to Rome, we see the great apostle in various important roles.

Scriptural Reading: Acts 27: 27-44; 28:11-31

Things to learn: 1) Paul the Counsellor 2) Paul the Encourager and Helper 3) Paul the Preacher

Read the introduction to this study and Acts 27-28

Questions:

1) Review Acts 27:1-20 to see how Paul played his role as a counsellor in the midst of difficult circumstances.

2) In what ways can we learn from Paul's experience as an encourager (Acts 27:21-44) especially in the "storms of life" created by disobeying God's will and be a helper as well (Acts 28:1-10)?

3) What were Paul's concerns at Rome when he used his gift of preaching to witness to the Jews?