

ACTS

Chapter 28

Paul on Malta

After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. 2 The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. 3 When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. 4 When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live.” 5 He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. 7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. 8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him, healed him. 9 And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. 10 They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever 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. (CSB)

28:2 *native people*. † 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. (CSB)

Lit, “bearded ones.” They were of Phoenician descent and spoke a Phoenician dialect. (TLSB)

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. (CSB)

A venomous snake. (TLSB)

28:4 *murderer*. The natives concluded that Paul must have been guilty of a serious crime, and that he was now being punished with certain death. (TLSB)

Justice. Among the Gk gods and goddesses, Justice was the daughter of Zeus who exacted revenge on humans. However, the natives might possibly be speaking of “justice” in the general sense of the word. (TLSB)

28:6 *to swell up*. The usual medical term for inflammation; it is used only by Luke in the NT). 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). (CSB)

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

Since Paul overcame a bite from a deadly snake, the people figured he was more than human. Paul had faced a similar misconception in Lystra (14:8–13). Most likely Paul corrected their false notions. (TLSB)

28:7 *Publius*. A Roman name, but the first name and not the family name. It must have been what the islanders called him. (CSB)

The later church father Jerome records a tradition that Publius was converted. (LL)

Perhaps a prominent citizen or benefactor of the island, or someone operating under the authority of the Roman official of Sicily. (TLSB)

chief an of the islands.† 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 *strategoi*, 16:20), "city officials" (Greek *politarchai*, 17:6), "officials of the province" (Greek *Asiarchai*, 19:31). (CSB)

28:8–9 With God's power, Paul healed Publius's father from his sickness. Hearing of this miracle, sick people from all over the island came to Paul and likewise were healed. It is likely Paul preached the Gospel as he healed. (TLSB)

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 about 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)

28:1–10 At Malta, Paul amazes the native people by surviving a snakebite, and they believe he is a god. As he heals many sick people, they will learn that his power comes from the one true God, not from Paul himself. By God's miraculous power in Christ, He rescues His people from sin, death, and ignorance. • Thank You, Holy Spirit, for showing us the true God! Keep our faith in Him, that we may always know His forgiveness and life. Amen. (TLSB)

Paul Arrives at Rome

11 After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead. **12** Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. **13** And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium. And after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. **14** There we found brothers[e] and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to

Rome. 15 And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. 16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him.

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

Castor and Pollux. The two “sons of Zeus” (Greek *Dioscuroi*), the guardian deities of sailors. (CSB)

Castor and Pollux, sons of the Gk god Zeus, were believed to be the patrons of sailors. The constellation Gemini was associated with them. (TLSB)

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. (CSB)

28:13 *made a circuit.* In sailing, this is known as tacking, the changing of direction by bringing the bow into the wind. (TLSB)

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. (CSB)

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. (CSB)

28:14 *stay with them for seven days.* 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). (CSB)

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)

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. (CSB)

. C 33 and 43 mi from Rome, respectively. Both were located on the Appian Way. (TLSB)

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. (CSB)

thanked God and took courage. Luther: “When a plague and other misfortunes assail us, we, too, should say that ... Satan is raging and is angry, but that God is merciful and is kindly disposed toward us because we believe in His Son. And in this manner the saintly martyrs overcame death and all dangers; for they were sure that God was kind to them.... Therefore they even rejoiced in their adversities and scoffed at Satan” (AE 3:264). (TLSB)

28:16 *stay 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). (CSB)

Paul was allowed a certain level of freedom, being placed under house arrest with a guard chained to him (cf v 20). (TLSB)

He was kept under house arrest, in a residence rented for him for that purpose. (PBC)

Paul in Rome

17 After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. **18** When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. **19** But because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—though I had no charge to bring against my nation. **20** For this reason, therefore, I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” **21** And they said to him, “We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. **22** But we desire to hear from you what your views are, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.” **23** When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. **24** And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. **25** And disagreeing among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet: **26** “Go to this people, and say, “You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive.” **27** For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ **28** Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.” **30** He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, **31** proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

28:17 local 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. (CSB)

Paul greeted many Jewish believers in his Epistle to the Romans, written three years before his arrival in the city. (PBC)

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

Here used to address Jews, specifically the local leaders. Paul's innocence under Roman law is again asserted. (TLSB)

customs. The oral law. (TLSB)

28:18 *death penalty.* Paul would have to be found guilty of a crime under Roman law in order to be executed, though he was not guilty. (TLSB)

28:20 *the hope of Israel.* The hope of the resurrection (cf 24:15; 26:6–8), fulfilled in Christ Jesus. Paul's use here could also include the fulfilled hope of the Jews, the kingdom of God (v 23). (TLSB)

28:21 *brothers.* Paul's Jewish listeners refer to fellow Jews. (TLSB)

28:22 *we desire 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. (CSB)

this sect ... is spoken against. The Jewish leaders refer to the Christians whom other Jews denounced. (TLSB)

28:23 *convince them about Jesus.* Paul's message centered on Jesus and His saving work as the fulfillment of the Jews' expectations. (TLSB)

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

28:24 Once more Paul learns by experience that "not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel" (Rm 9:6). (TLSB)

28:25 *Holy Spirit was right.* The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures (2Tm 3:16; 2Pt 1:21); thus what He had spoken through Isaiah was true. (TLSB)

28:26–27 Words taken from God's call of Isaiah (Is 6:1–13). The communication assigned to Isaiah was not a pleasant one. He was to proclaim to an apostate nation that their land would become utterly desolate. Because the people would refuse to heed the call to repentance, only a stump would remain when Israel, the tree of the Lord's planting (cf Jer 11:16–17), was felled by the axe of divine judgment. Paul tells his Jewish audience that this warning of God applies also to them. Chemnitz: "The bondage of the unregenerate man is described.... The statement in Acts 28:26–27 is sad, pointing out that even when God gives His Word, men are not enlightened" (*LTh* 1:240). (TLSB)

28:27 *people's heart has grown dull* – 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)

28:28–31 Luke concludes his account by emphasizing the progress of the Gospel. Paul was later released, may have travelled to Spain (Rm 15:24), and was likely beheaded at Rome in AD 68 under the emperor Nero. See chronology, p cix. Luke may have chosen to break the story here to end on a positive note but more likely he wrote Ac before Paul's death. (TLSB)

28:28 *salvation of God 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. (CSB)

Attained through the work of Christ Jesus (cf Lk 2:30–32). (TLSB)

Gentiles; they will listen. Third time in Ac that Paul makes such a statement (cf 13:46–47; 18:6). He also hopes that such a strong statement of the Law will produce repentance in the hearts of his Jewish listeners. Note that the Gentiles have never been shut out from God's promises (cf Ps 67:2–3; Is 65:1). (TLSB)

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. (CSB)

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)

at his own expense. Some argue this phrase should be "in his own rented quarters" or the like. It is more likely that, being under house arrest, Paul still had to provide for his own needs. (TLSB)

28:31 Completes the story of Ac, outlined in 1:8 (cf Lk 24:47); with Paul's unhindered preaching and teaching in Rome, the Gospel had gone throughout the earth. (TLSB)

proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. Summary statement of Paul's preaching (cf v 23), which was also what Jesus preached (cf 1:3). (TLSB)

28:11–31 Paul reaches Rome safely and peacefully. Although not all of Paul's fellow Jews believe the Gospel, Paul proclaims it without hindrance to the Gentiles, thus fulfilling Christ's promise that the Gospel would be proclaimed to all nations. Today, pray that the Lord would break up the hardness of your heart. Rejoice in the message of forgiveness and life through Jesus Christ that is for all people, including you. • Lord, through Your eternal Word, soften my heart.

Grant me Your salvation so I may be counted among Your faithful people and proclaim Your name. Amen. (TLSB)