

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 22

Day One: Miracles on the Road to Rome

At the conclusion of the book of Acts, Dr. Luke tells his readers that Paul's life would be threatened by tumultuous seas, by soldiers, and by a snake; but God delivered him from them all, fulfilling His will. Paul remained under house arrest for two years in Rome before his case was heard. During this time he received all who came to him—no one forbidding him, the gospel was completely unhindered.

Dr. Luke would end his book before Paul's trial took place. We have every reason to believe that Paul was released and enjoyed a season of ministry that took him perhaps as far as Spain—his desire early on in his travels. Wherever he went, Paul's goal was to bring Jews and Gentiles alike into a relationship of faith in Jesus Christ.

Around the year 67, Paul would be arrested again. This time winter was approaching and Paul asked his protégé Timothy to bring him the two things in life he valued most: his well-worn cloak, stained from the years of beatings and travels, and the coveted parchments containing the scriptures. This time the outcome would be different, Paul would remain in prison till his death, and those he witnessed to in Rome would all desert him. But it was not the end of the story; in fact it was only the beginning. The book of Acts is still being written to this day. It is God's story—the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Christians all over the world today have the privilege of playing a part—it truly is the never-ending story!

Read Acts 28:1–31.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord.

Memory verse: 2 Timothy 4:2 Write out the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

*Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season.
Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

The NASB translation of Acts 28:1 tells us that “when they had been brought through . . .” It accurately conveys the meaning that they had not escaped, but rather that God had brought them safely through. The island was called Malta, meaning place of “refuge.” It was an appropriate name for the culmination of a divine deliverance. Once on dry land, the natives warmly welcomed all 276 of them!

1. As the natives built a warm fire, what happened to Paul? What did the natives think of him because of it? v. 4
 - a. Once they all watched for a while and no harm came to him, what did they think? v. 6

Luke’s point is that God protected his servant. There was at that time a man in the region who no doubt heard about the remarkable fact that Paul survived a serpent’s bite. Once Publius, the chief official or “first man” of the island heard about Paul, he invited the team to his home where they resided for three days.

2. During Paul’s stay, what was he able to do for his gracious host?
 - a. What further blessing came to the people of this island that had become a refuge for Paul and his men?

This missionary team spent three months on the island of Malta, continuing to heal the sick and, although we don’t read of Paul preaching there, we know he did wherever he went.

3. In response to all that Paul and his men did for the Maltese people, what did the people do for them as they departed? v. 10

In spite of what it took to get to Malta, Paul and his men had many reasons to praise God! A great deal of ministry was performed there throughout their stay.

Take a moment to look at your maps to check out the final stages of Paul’s journey to Rome. Leaving Malta, the party sailed to Syracuse where they stayed for three days. Then it was on to Rhegium and from there to Puteoli, where they stayed with some fellow believers for seven days. And from Puteoli they made it on foot to Rome (Vv. 11–15).

Selah ~ (Pause and think about it . . .)

Note a highlight from your study in the book of Acts. How did it become a “refuge” for you?

Day Two:

Paul's Ministry at Rome

Read Acts 28:16–31 for review.

Once Paul arrived at Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners over to the captain of the guard but Paul was allowed to dwell by himself and the soldier guarding him (v. 16). Right up to the end, Paul would continue the pattern he set long ago for sharing the gospel—first to those of the synagogues, then to the people of the city. While under house arrest, Paul called for the Jewish leaders of the synagogues in Rome to come to him and hear his case.

1. Initially with the leaders present, how did Paul speak of his innocence? Vv. 17–18
 - a. Why did Paul tell them he was in Rome? Vv. 19–20

From everything we read in these verses, Paul had not come to Rome to die. He no doubt expected to be released and enjoy the liberty to share the gospel at Rome as he had throughout his missionary journeys. Surprisingly, the Jewish leaders did not know of the events surrounding Paul's appearance in Rome.

2. What was their response to him? Were they willing to listen? Vv. 21–22
3. What did Paul use as the basis of his text in preaching about Christ? v. 23 What do you recall from your earlier study about why this tactic would be a wise one?

The meeting would last all day as Paul shared with his “brethren” a survey of the Old Testament scriptures. His message would be laced with the story of Jesus: His birth, life, teaching, miracles, crucifixion, burial, resurrection, ascension, and promise to return again. Then he would confront them with their need to personally receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Luke's emphasis to the reader in verse 25 is significant: the argument went on but no one began leaving until Paul quoted the words of Isaiah 6:9–10, spoke to the prophet by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had also quoted this passage (Matthew 13:13–15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10) to explain to His disciples why He used parables in speaking to the people. Now Paul also uses it here (and in Romans 11:8) to validate the Jews stubbornness and unwillingness to believe in God's own plan of salvation to the world.

4. Knowing many of the Jews would reject it, what was God's plan all along? v. 28

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and receive 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 (Vv. 30–31). During these two years as Paul ministered, he also wrote four epistles: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. From these letters we learn that Paul anticipated standing trial and being released. It is likely that Dr. Luke finished writing the Book of Acts before Paul's release sometime around A.D. 63, accounting for why Luke did not finish Paul's story. Luke does however end on a high note in verse 31, noting that the gospel of Jesus Christ—God's story—will be preached unhindered throughout the world by courageous messengers willing to give and endure all for the salvation of the lost!

Day Three:

Chained but Unhindered

The Lord Jesus had promised Paul that he would reach Rome, but there was no mention that he would be a prisoner; and yet through Paul's captivity the ministry was expanded and enriched. While he awaited the decision of Caesar, he knew the ruler to whom he bowed and belonged was Jesus Christ. Yes, Paul was a prisoner chained to a guard but he was in bonds for Christ's sake.

Deeper Discoveries ~

Part of the expansion and enrichment of Paul's ministry came through the writing of the prison epistles. In them Paul stated that he was divinely appointed to defend the gospel. Today we'll look at a few of the verses from those writings to see what Paul thought of his chains and what take-away truth he hoped to communicate to the believers.

Take these verses as a personal challenge. As you read each one written in Paul's own hand, try to picture Paul and how he was affected; then consider what he would want you to know and how to apply that knowledge today in what you are facing.

- a. Philippians 1:6–7: What did Paul write about his chains? _____

What do these verses mean to you; how will you apply them? _____

- b. Philippians 1:12–14: What did Paul write about his chains? _____

What do these verses mean to you; how will you apply them? _____

- c. Ephesians 3:1, 6: What did Paul write about his chains? _____

What do these verses mean to you; how will you apply them? _____

- d. Ephesians 4:1–3: What did Paul write about his chains? _____

What do these verses mean to you; how will you apply them? _____

Paul was limited physically by his chains, but the reach of his ministry was not bound. We too will at times find ourselves restricted by time, ability, opportunity, and personal means. The question: will we allow ourselves to be mastered by our limitations or will we allow God to use our circumstances to transform us and others by His power and for His glory? What life lesson would God have you receive from Paul's words in Philippians 4:11–13?

Day Four:

The Invitation

Throughout the book of Acts, we've seen up close and personal the lives of those in the early church that God used to lay a foundation, ignite a work, and unite a body of believers called Christians. We've learned that the message of the gospel—the *Way*—has the power to transform lives wherever it is preached. We've also come to realize that it divides its hearers—some will believe, some will not; eternal issues are at stake. Today, looking back, where do *you* stand? Are you *for* or *against* Him?

In the book of Romans—another of Paul's writing—we find the plan of salvation clearly laid out. These are some of the same words that Paul shared with his fellow countrymen when he stood before them as he made his defense in Rome. Look up each of the references and write them out in the space provided. If you still have never yet walked this road personally, ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to God's plan of salvation.

- Romans 3:10 _____

- Romans 3:23 _____

- Romans 5:12 _____

- Romans 6:23 _____

- Romans 5:8 _____

- Romans 10:13 _____

- Romans 10:9–10 _____

If you have not yet invited Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, He is right now opening the door of your heart. Ask Him to come in, to forgive you of your sin, and be the Lord of your life. And thank Him that you now belong to Him for eternity. Rejoice that the conclusion of your study year has brought your life a new beginning! Give Him thanks and tell someone about the commitment you have just made.

Mark these verses in your Bible so that you have them accessible when sharing God's plan of salvation along with your personal testimony.

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Wherever you are, look upon your circumstances as *your* personal mission field for Christ. Tell Him what you need most to be an effective witness for Him.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
