

Acts 28:1-31 ~ Teacher's Lesson Unhindered in Rome

Draw: Map of Italy, Sicily, and Malta with relevant cities.

Introduction: Arriving in Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, Paul was arrested and falsely accused by the Jews of inciting a riot. Since he was a Roman citizen, he was tried in a Roman, rather than a local Jewish, court. He had two trials. He should have been set free after each trial due to lack of evidence. However, he had become a political pawn; the Roman governors wanted to keep him in jail as a favor to the Jews. Paul realized that his only way out was to appeal his case to Caesar, which he did. Thus, one of the governors declared, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go." The year was around A.D. 60.

Navigation: After a miserable 2,000 mile trip, Paul's ship sank and they were all washed up on a beach of Malta, a small island in the Mediterranean, south of Sicily.¹ Remember the old Humphrey Bogart movie, *The Maltese Falcon*? Featured in the movie was a statuette of a falcon from Malta. What this section of Acts emphasizes is God's divine protection of Paul.²

******What convinced the islanders³ that Paul was a god (28:1-6)?** Paul supernaturally survived a deadly viper bite.

Mystery: Why did it not seem odd to the islanders to see a god under arrest?⁴ Considering the freedom and deference accorded him, perhaps they did not realize Paul was one of the prisoners.

Application: Though considered a god by many, Paul the apostle did not consider himself too important to gather firewood! New Testament church leadership is servant leadership:

ESV **Mark 9:35** [Jesus]: "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.

1. What did Paul have that you don't which allowed him to survive when you wouldn't have? See 23:11, 26:16-18, 27:23-24. Paul had a promise from Jesus that he would be divinely protected so that he could bear testimony before kings, and specifically in Rome. Paul was a man on a divine mission. God was sovereign over the storm, the snake, and the shackles. God was in complete control over everything.

2. Why did Luke record this incident about the snake (28:1-6)? The snake bite was not a freak accident, but a divinely arranged event in which God displayed His power.⁵

¹ The kindness shown by the islanders was "unusual" (28:2). Evidently, aid for people in distress was uncommon in the ancient, pre-Christian world.

² Marshall, 422.

³ "Native people" (28:2) is from *barbaroi* (basis for "barbarians"); this referred to anyone who could not speak Greek. It was not a pejorative term (Kistemaker, 947).

⁴ Kistemaker, 949.

3. What is ironic about the islander's superstition (28:4)? Their general premise about life was incorrect, but assuming its truth, the reason Paul survived was precisely because he was a righteousness man on mission from God with a unique promise of protection!⁶

4. How did Paul earn the appreciation of the islanders (28:7-10)? See *Mark 16:17-18*. He healed the ruler's father and then any sick people who came to him. Paul's actions on Malta fulfilled Jesus' words:

ESV **Mark 16:17-18** And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name . . . they will pick up serpents with their hands; and . . . they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.

5. Why do you suppose that God does not often give evangelists around here these powers (28:7-10)? God seems to empower evangelists more in frontier areas.

******6. What happened on the way to Rome that encouraged Paul (28:11-16)?** See *Romans 1:9-10, 15:30-32*. He was encouraged that two groups of brothers from the church in Rome went out to meet him, 28:15. This was especially encouraging to because he had written to the church in Rome about three years previous and expressed a desire to go see them:

ESV **Romans 1:9-10** . . . I mention you always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you.

ESV **Romans 15:30-32** I appeal to you, brothers . . . strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf . . . so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.

7. Paul spent three months on Malta (28:11). Why didn't he leave sooner? See *27:12*. The same bad winter weather that sank his ship kept all other ships in port.⁷

Navigation: Leaving Malta, they first sailed to Sicily. Syracuse (28:12) is a city on the eastern coast of Sicily, the largest island of the Mediterranean, only sixty miles due north of tiny Malta. After three days in Syracuse, Paul left for the city of Rhegium (28:13), a city at the very bottom of Italy.

⁵ Kistemaker, 949.

⁶ "Justice" was probably a reference to the Greek goddess Justice (Marshall, 437).

⁷ When Pau finally left, it was on a ship from Alexandria, just as his previous ship had been (28:11). The twin gods were Castor and Pollux, twin sons of Zeus. Why Luke tells the reader this tidbit of information is unknown.

8. Paul waited in Rhegium for a day until a south wind sprang up, then he went to Puteoli (28:13). What did the south wind have to do with leaving Rhegium? A nearby whirlpool, along with the rock of Scylla, endangered navigation. Ships only attempted passage headed north if there was a favorable south wind.⁸

Puteoli (28:13): Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) is further up the western coast of Italy, near Naples and Pompeii, and just 120 miles from Rome. It was Rome's port city. Paul unexpectedly found some brothers there! Evidently the centurion had business there lasting a whole week, which allowed Paul to spend an extended time with the church.⁹

9. After a week in Puteoli, Paul finally made it to Rome (28:14).¹⁰ How far did the brothers from Rome have to travel to meet Paul (28:15)? One group made it to the market of Appius, which was about 28 miles south-east of Rome, on the Via Appia.¹¹ The other group made it to the Three Taverns, a place about 31 miles south-east of Rome, further out along the Via Appia.¹²

10. Why did Luke point out Paul's preferential treatment by the government (28:16)?¹³ His relative freedom was doubtless due to Julius' report, which probably stated that **1)** Paul had done nothing wrong, **2)** Paul had appealed to Caesar, and **3)** his imprisonment concerned a Jewish religious dispute, and **4)** Paul's conduct on the voyage was exemplary.¹⁴ All this combined to show Theophilus that Paul was innocent of wrong doing.

Divine Providence: Paul was under house arrest. Although a soldier was assigned to Paul to keep him from escaping, considering how the unbelieving Jews elsewhere had tried to kill Paul, in all probability the guard saved his life—personal protection paid for by the Roman government!

******Why did Paul ask to see the local leaders of the Jews (28:17-22)?** He wanted to explain to them that he was in chains not because of any wrong done, but because of the hope of Israel, 28:17-18, 20.

11. Why did Paul mention in 28:19 that he had no charge to bring against his nation? He wanted the local Jews to know that he had no accusation against the Jews as a nation; he was not there to cause them trouble with Rome.¹⁵

⁸ *New Bible Dictionary*, 1030.

⁹ Bruce, 527.

¹⁰ It was normally a five-day journey (Kistemaker, 954).

¹¹ *New Bible Dictionary*, 394.

¹² *New Bible Dictionary*, 1166.

¹³ Luke's last use of the pronoun "we" is found in 28:16. After that, Paul was allowed to live by himself.

¹⁴ Kistemaker, 956.

¹⁵ Kistemaker, 958.

12. What is the hope of Israel (28:20)? See 26:6-8. The hope of Israel was the resurrection of the dead as crystallized in Jesus the Messiah.

13. Why do you suppose no hostile Jews followed Paul to Rome (28:21)? They knew there was little, if any, chance of a successful prosecution.¹⁶ Besides, Paul was too far away, in Rome, to be a threat in Jerusalem.¹⁷

******How did Paul apply truth from Isaiah to the Jews (28:23-28)?** Paul applied a negative statement of condemnation from Isaiah about the Jews, with the further application that salvation would instead go the Gentiles.

14. In 28:23, what shows the amount of interest the Jews had in hearing Paul's views? Great numbers came to hear him from morning till evening. It has been estimated that there were 40,000 Jews living in Rome.¹⁸ It is to Paul's credit as a speaker that he was able to keep their attention from dawn till dusk.

15. What can we glean about Paul's evangelistic method from 28:23? Paul did not merely announce the Gospel; he tried to convince them about Jesus using the Law and the Prophets (fulfilled prophecy).

This long day of evangelism must have been fulfilling to Paul. Years previous he had written:

ESV **Romans 1:15** I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

16. What is the significance of Paul's pronoun shift from "our fathers" (28:17) to "your fathers" (28:25)? They had the same physical fathers, but not the same spiritual fathers.

17. What present application does the word "never" (28:26) hold? See *Romans 11:1, 5, 7, 11, 13-14, 26*. I would argue that there never will be a time when the Jews, en masse, accept Jesus as the Messiah. That which is predicted in Romans 11 is that in every generation a remnant of Jews would come to faith in Jesus; the rest are hardened.

ESV **Romans 11:1** . . . has God rejected his people? By no means! For I myself am an Israelite [Paul gave his own salvation, in the first century, as an example of the truth that God had not utterly rejected his people]

ESV **Romans 11:5** . . . at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace.

ESV **Romans 11:7** Israel failed to obtain what it was seeking. The elect obtained it, but the rest were hardened . . .

¹⁶ Marshall, 444.

¹⁷ Kistemaker, 960.

¹⁸ Kistemaker, 957.

ESV **Romans 11:11** So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous.

ESV **Romans 11:13b-14** Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order somehow to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them.

ESV **Romans 11:26** And in this way all Israel will be saved . . .

Did the Jews depart (28:25) because of what Paul said in 28:26-28 or simply because he was finished? Regardless of which it is, there is little doubt they were offended at the news of salvation going to the Gentiles.

Positive Note: Paul ended his presentation with the positive statement that the Gentiles would accept God's offer of salvation, 28:28.

What did Paul do for the next two years (28:30-31)? Under house arrest, he boldly and freely taught everyone who came to him about Jesus.

18. How is 28:30-31 an answer to the prayer request of Ephesians 6:19-20? That he was free to evangelize boldly and freely was an answer to prayer:

ESV **Ephesians 6:19-20** [pray] for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.

19. What is the difference between proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ (28:31)? Luke himself did not explain the difference, because there is no difference. To teach about God's kingdom is to teach the Gospel.¹⁹

Paul made good use of his time of house arrest by evangelizing. He was also busy writing to the churches.²⁰ What books of the Bible did Paul write during these two years?
Epistles Paul Composed (in) Prison = Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon.²¹

So What?

20. The book of Acts concludes with Paul under house arrest for two years, awaiting trial. Why did Luke not record the outcome of Paul's court case? Luke finished writing before the outcome was known; you can't write about what hasn't happened yet!

¹⁹ Kistemaker, 961.

²⁰ Today, those who home school obviously use the home to train a future generation in the things of the Lord. Homes are also a great place to host visiting ministers, to entertain lost neighbors, for wedding and baby showers, as a good place for counseling, for a home Bible study, to host an international student, etc.

²¹ It is thought that 2 Timothy was written during a different imprisonment.

21. What do you suppose happened to Paul? See *Philippians 1:12-19*, *Philemon 1,22*. Based on 28:30, it is quite possible that his accusers never appeared. In the letters he wrote during his time, Paul expressed his confident expectation that he would be released:

ESV Philippians 1:12-19 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear . . . for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance . . .

ESV Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus . . . To Philemon . . .

ESV Philemon 1:22 . . . prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

It is generally supposed that Paul was eventually released and resumed his travels, but was later jailed again, then martyred. In 2 Timothy 4:6 he wrote that his execution was imminent.

One fact that is known is that some of Caesar's servants became Christians:

ESV Philippians 4:22 All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.

For Us, Too: Paul wrote to specific churches, yet the Holy Spirit inspired what he wrote so that it would benefit the church universal. So too, the Holy Spirit led Luke wrote to Theophilus that he might have certainty, with the plan all along to use it to also benefit the church universal.

Purpose: Acts shows the relentless spread of the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Luke's final word in the Greek is "unhindered" (ESV: "without hindrance"). Remember the book by Louis Zamperini, *Unbroken?* Acts could have been entitled, *Unhindered*.

ESV Acts 1:8 . . . you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

ESV Romans 1:8 . . . your faith is proclaimed in all the world.

ESV Romans 16:25-26 . . . my gospel . . . has been made known to all nations . . .

ESV Colossians 1:23 . . . the gospel . . . has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven . . .

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at SermonAudio.Com/NTRF.

Stephen E. Atkerson NTRF.org Revised 09/09/2018