

Rome

Acts 28:6–31

All 276 passengers and crew survived the shipwreck on the island of Malta. The natives welcomed them to their island and help them as much as they could. Publius was the leading man of the island and he warmly welcomed the survivors. Publius' father had become sick and Paul went in to see him, prayed, and laid his hands on him to heal him. This led to all the people of the island seeking out Paul to get healed of whatever ailed them. This is interesting because Luke was the doctor on the island, but Paul was doing all the healing. As with all people who had the spiritual gift of healing, everyone who came to Paul were completely and instantaneously healed. Anyone claims to be a faith healer but is unable to heal all people completely and instantaneously is not from God.

At the end of three months, after the weather changed, they set sail for Rome on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered on the island of Malta. Luke gives us an interesting tidbit, that the ship had the twin brothers, Castor and Pollux, for a figurehead. This is a testament to the prevalence of idol worship, but very similar to people putting a statue of a saint on your car or buried in your yard, or around your neck for good luck. We have advanced in technology, but the heart remains the same.

From Malta to Rome

The rest of the trip from Malta to Rome was quite uneventful. They left Malta and sailed to Syracuse, a city approximately 100 miles north located on the eastern shore of Sicily. After staying there for three days, they set out for Rhegium (now Reggio Calabria) on the southern most tip of Italy, about 70 miles north of Syracuse. The next day, a southerly wind came up making for perfect conditions to continue up the coast of Italy to Puteoli (Pozzuoli), just west of Naples, Italy. Paul was given much freedom and was allowed to visit with some Christians brothers there for seven days. This was a great encouragement for Paul, and an example of how God is able to encourage and strengthen us through the ministry of other believers.

The last 120 miles of their journey north brought them to Rome. Instead of being locked up in prison, Paul was allowed to rent a house with a soldier standing guard. Three days after arriving at Rome, Paul calls together the leading men of the Jews to explain to them why he was being accused by the Jews in Jerusalem.

Paul's defense

Paul called the leading Jews of that area together so that they could hear firsthand what he was being accused of and his defense of the accusations. He tells them briefly how had come to be in Rome, averring that he had done nothing wrong against the Jewish people nor had he broken any of the customs of the fathers of Israel. In spite of his innocence, he had been taken prisoner by the Romans and carted out of Jerusalem. He continued by telling them that even though he was thoroughly examined by the Romans, they could find no reason for him to be condemned to death, and that they were even willing to release him. Paul explained that it was necessary for him to appeal his case to Caesar because of the Jews, not because he had done anything wrong.

Paul was explaining his situation to the Jewish leaders of that region so that they would understand why he was there. However, they had heard absolutely nothing about his case. Since the Jews in Rome had no communication from the Judaeans, they were interested in hearing what Paul had to say about his situation. They were especially curious about this new "sect" of Christ followers that he had spoken of (Acts 24:14). To date, they had heard only negative things about "the Way."

The day came for Paul to explain his situation and defend himself. Since he was speaking to a crowd of non-believing Jews, he puts it in terms that they can relate to. He spoke about the Kingdom of God and built the case that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the Old Testament, and that He came and died for Israel. He spoke with them at his house from morning until evening trying to convince them.

As usual, some were being swayed by Paul's words, but probably most did not believe. Before they left, Paul quotes from the book of Isaiah 6, giving the Holy Spirit the credit for giving this to Isaiah. Isaiah speaks of Israel hearing but not understanding and seeing but not perceiving. What Isaiah said 700 years previous to this was just as apropos at the time Paul was speaking to them. The unbelieving Jews had closed their eyes to the truth and were unwilling to understand what Paul was saying.

Salvation sent to the Gentiles

After preaching to the unbelieving Jews from morning to evening, and since most had rejected Jesus Christ, Paul declares that the "salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles." There are those who use this quote from Paul to mark the beginning of the Church, the Body of Christ. Prior to this, they see Paul preaching to the Jews and including the Gentiles, giving them an opportunity to become saved and go into the Millennial Kingdom. This is often viewed by Acts 28 dispensationalists as a separate dispensation. The earlier books of Paul are seen as being written to Israel, while Paul's later books, the ones written after the events in Acts (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon), are the only books written directly to us today. Most of the proof for this idea comes from circumstantial evidence, pointing out how many times Paul was speaking to Jews, using Jewish terminology, and speaking in synagogues. They also use Paul's declaration in Acts 28:28 as the delineation between Paul's ministry to the Jews with the Gospel of the Kingdom and his ministry with the Gentiles (found in the Old Testament prophets) with the Gospel of Grace (the Mystery).

Believing this position requires one to close their eyes to the many passages of Scripture that show Paul was given the Mystery doctrine well before the end of Acts. Paul's ministry was distinct from the Disciples (Romans 11:13; Galatians 1:11–12; 2:7–9). Paul's doctrine never included the Law (Romans 3:21–25; Galatians 2:16). Israel was already blinded (Romans 11:7, 25–27; 2 Corinthians 3:14). A new creature, the Body of Christ, was already formed (Romans 12:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Corinthians 12:27). There was no longer a distinction between Jew and Gentile (1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:29). Water baptism had been removed from Paul's ministry (1 Corinthians 1:17). Also, Paul visited the Philippians in the middle of the book of Acts (chapter 17) and then writes to them while imprisoned in Rome thanking them for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (Philippians 1:5). They were preached the same gospel from day one and had continued in that doctrine meaning Paul had been preaching the same thing throughout his ministry.

One of their proof verses is Acts 28:28 which is used to show a change in Paul's ministry. However, Paul makes it clear that salvation had already been sent to the Gentiles, not that he was now going to begin preaching Grace to the Gentiles. This verse must be read alongside Acts 13:46 and Acts 18:6 and viewed as a geographic progression, not as a change in doctrinal focus. Paul was required to preach the Gospel of Grace to the Jews, making sure that the Jews heard his gospel, but not at the expense of the Gentiles (Romans 1:16; Acts 13:46). The Jewish nation had lost the opportunity to receive the Kingdom at that time, which Romans 12:12 describes as their loss. Some translations say that it was Israel's diminishing and that the nation then diminished throughout the book Acts. I believe this is a gross misunderstanding of the word diminishing. The diminishing of Israel happened quickly when they stoned Stephen. At that point, God put Israel aside to begin His work with the Church, the Body of Christ, through the Apostle Paul. The book of Acts shows how they fell and the resultant raising up of Paul with the Grace doctrine.

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