

The Book of Acts

Journey to Rome

Lesson #13 for September 29, 2018

Scriptures: Acts 27-28; Romans 1:18-20.

1. This lesson will cover that incredible final journey of Paul and his associates from Caesarea Maritima to Rome and his initial encounters in Rome. Paul had long planned to make a journey to Rome. But, he certainly had not planned for it to be under these circumstances.
2. Unfortunately, soon after arriving in Jerusalem, he yielded to peer pressure from the Jewish Christian leaders, and against God's will he agreed to participate in that Jewish ceremony that resulted in his arrest. (AA 405) Repeatedly, the Jews tried in every way they could think of to get Paul into their hands so they could kill him. They failed until Paul finally appealed to the emperor. As a Roman citizen, he had that right. While still a prisoner in Palestine, God had promised Paul that he would testify in Rome. (Acts 23:11)
3. If we faithfully serve God, it does not necessarily mean that there will not be any problem, even persecution and martyrdom. Ultimately, in Rome Paul actually was able to testify to and convert some "important figures in Caesar's household." (Philippians 4:22) Do you think you could have done that? How did he do that? Christianity was illegal!
4. Based on the first person pronouns used in the last two chapters of Acts, it is almost certain that Luke and Aristarchus accompanied Paul while he was under the jurisdiction of the Roman centurion, Julius, on this journey. Do you think that Timothy was with them as well? The ancient boats were usually not large. How large a boat do you think it took to carry 276 passengers? That was a very large boat for those days.
5. It is a well-known fact that severe weather can sweep down from Turkey into the Aegean Sea and the northeastern Mediterranean from late October until at least March. Even today, severe weather can stop flights and ships from traveling to or from islands in that area. They had reached a small port on the southern coast of Crete known as Fair Havens.
6. **Acts 27:9-12:** ⁹ We spent a long time there, until it became dangerous to continue the voyage, for by now the Day of Atonement was already past. So Paul gave them this advice: ¹⁰"**Men, I see that our voyage from here on will be dangerous; there will be great damage to the cargo and to the ship, and loss of life as well.**" ¹¹But the army officer was convinced by what the captain and the owner of the ship said, and not by what Paul said. ¹²The harbor was not a good one to spend the winter in; so most people were in favor of putting out to sea and trying to reach Phoenix, if possible, in order to spend the winter there. Phoenix is a harbor in Crete that faces south-west and north-west.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Acts 27:9-12). New York: American Bible Society. [Bold type is added.]
7. Unfortunately, as we know from what follows, they were soon blown far off course. They were at serious risk of sinking and even of having the boat break apart. Things got so bad that "they finally gave up all hope of being saved." (Acts 27:20, *NIV**)
8. If Paul and his friends had not been on that ship, do you think it would have gone down? Or, do you think Satan sent that storm to try to kill Paul and his companions?

9. **Acts 27:21-27:** ²¹ After those on board had gone a long time without food, Paul stood before them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have sailed from Crete; then we would have avoided all this damage and loss. ²²But now I beg you, take heart! Not one of you will lose your life; only the ship will be lost. ²³For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship came to me ²⁴and said, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul! You must stand before the Emperor. And God in his goodness to you has spared the lives of all those who are sailing with you.’ ²⁵So take heart, men! For I trust in God that it will be just as I was told. ²⁶But we will be driven ashore on some island.” ²⁷It was the fourteenth night, and we were being driven about in the Mediterranean by the storm. About midnight the sailors suspected that we were getting close to land.—*Good News Bible*.* (Acts 27:21-27).
10. While it is possible that the entire ship was saved because of Paul’s presence, it is also true that he tried to encourage those who were on the boat to do what they could to save themselves.
11. God is planning to take us to a wonderful kingdom where there will be no troubles, no death, no crying, no disease, and no pain. So, why do we have to go through all these troubles now before we get there? Is it really necessary for God’s faithful people in the end time to suffer under the attacks of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet? (Revelation 16-17)
12. Paul and his friends were blown far off course by the wind until no one on the boat had any idea where they were. Two weeks had passed. One night, they heard sounds that made them think they were approaching land. (Acts 27:27) They sounded the depth of the ocean and determined that the water was getting shallower, suggesting that they were getting closer and closer to shore.

Acts 27:30-44: ³⁰Then the sailors tried to escape from the ship; they lowered the boat into the water and pretended that they were going to put out some anchors from the front of the ship. ³¹But Paul said to the army officer and soldiers, “If the sailors don’t stay on board, you have no hope of being saved.” ³²So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the boat and let it go.

³³ Just before dawn, Paul begged them all to eat some food: “You have been waiting for fourteen days now, and all this time you have not eaten anything. ³⁴I beg you, then, eat some food; you need it in order to survive. Not even a hair of your heads will be lost.” ³⁵After saying this, Paul took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, broke it, and began to eat. ³⁶They took heart, and every one of them also ate some food. ³⁷There was a total of 276 of us on board. ³⁸After everyone had eaten enough, they lightened the ship by throwing all the wheat into the sea.

The Shipwreck

³⁹ When day came, the sailors did not recognize the coast, but they noticed a bay with a beach and decided that, if possible, they would run the ship aground there. ⁴⁰So they cut off the anchors and let them sink in the sea, and at the same time they untied the ropes that held the steering oars. Then they raised the sail at the front of the ship so that the wind would blow the ship forward, and we headed for shore. ⁴¹But the ship hit a sandbank and went

aground; the front part of the ship got stuck and could not move, while the back part was being broken to pieces by the violence of the waves.

⁴² The soldiers made a plan to kill all the prisoners, in order to keep them from swimming ashore and escaping. ⁴³ But the army officer wanted to save Paul, so he stopped them from doing this. Instead, he ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and swim ashore; ⁴⁴ the rest were to follow, holding on to the planks or to some broken pieces of the ship. And this was how we all got safely ashore.—*Good News Bible*.* (Acts 27:30-44).

13. How many prisoners do you think were on that ship? It would be interesting to see how the relationship between Paul and Julius, the Roman centurion, developed through those days of terror. Paul had warned them before leaving Fair Haven that it would be a mistake to do so. But, the ship's owner and captain thought they knew better. Early in the morning as they approached that unknown coast, Paul urged the people on board to eat something. Why do you think they had not eaten anything for two weeks? Were they all seasick? Everyone was encouraged by the words of Paul and did, in fact, eat something.
14. Probably, according to a typical pattern in dealing with Roman prisoners, the soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners lest they get free. But, considering centurion's relationship with Paul, the centurion forbade them from doing that. Do you think the centurion believed that Paul and Paul's God were responsible for saving their lives? Was the centurion becoming a believer?
15. After arriving on shore—being very wet and cold—they learned they were in Malta, a small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. They had traveled about 475 miles across the Mediterranean from Crete. But, the weather was clearly too bad to even think of going further. And the boat had been completely destroyed.
16. Read Acts 28:1-10. The local people came and built a large fire to try to help warm the wet and freezing passengers. As they were gathering firewood, a poisonous snake, probably of the adder family, bit Paul on the hand. Because of his shackles, recognizing that he was a prisoner, the local people said: "This man must be a murderer, but Fate will not let him live, even though he escaped from the sea." (Acts 28:4, *GNB**) But, when Paul did not suffer any problems from that snakebite, they began to think that he must be a god!
17. We do not know how the islanders of Malta managed to accommodate all of those travelers; but, apparently, they did somehow. Paul was welcomed into the palace of Publius, the chief officer of the island. We do not know if he was an official appointed by Rome or if he was a local chief.
18. When Paul found that Publius's father was in bed sick with fever and dysentery, he went to the room of the father, prayed, placed his hands on him, and healed him. You can imagine what the response was from that! Sick people from all over the island came and were healed. The people of Malta had never had such a visitor. They heaped gifts upon Paul and his associates. Why did Paul do the healing when Luke was a doctor?
19. Luke did not spend a lot of time talking about what happened on Malta. We can be sure that Paul took advantage of every opportunity to speak about the gospel.
20. We do not know why Luke did not detail the results of Paul's visit to the island. Were there many converts to Christianity? Did Paul establish any churches there? We simply do not know. What we do know is that Paul met the needs of the local people where they were. (Acts 20:35; Titus 3:14)

21. Three months later, Paul and his companions found a place on a boat traveling from Alexandria in Egypt to Rome and proceeded on their journey. They spent three days in Syracuse and then went to Rhegium and, finally, reached Puteoli in the Bay of Naples. (Acts 28:11-16) There were already Christians there who begged Paul to stay with them for a week. Finally, they reached Rome. Believers from Rome had already heard that Paul was coming. They walked several miles out of Rome to the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet the weary travelers. As you can imagine, Paul was encouraged by this wonderful reception. See Acts 28:11-16.
22. As we know from Romans 15 written about six years earlier, Paul knew a number of Christians in Rome. Those were the days when people said, "All roads lead to Rome." They had been coworkers, maybe converts, or even relatives that he had known elsewhere but who had moved to Rome. Those people, of course, still loved Paul.
23. Read again Acts 25:24-27. Not only Felix, but also Festus and Agrippa, had agreed among themselves that Paul was not guilty of anything for which he should receive the death penalty or be sent to Rome. We do not know exactly what kind of a letter Festus sent to Nero; but, apparently it did not arouse any great suspicions with the Roman government. Did that letter from Festus actually survive the time in the waters off Malta? Paul was allowed to rent a private dwelling where he was basically under house arrest—chained to a soldier, probably day and night.
24. Read Acts 28:30. Why does the book end so suddenly? Did Luke plan to write a third volume? How did Paul manage to pay for a house for himself for those two years? Was he able to work while in prison? Did he continue to make tents?
25. Try to imagine yourself as one of the soldiers who had to be chained to Paul for lengthy periods of time. Obviously, they would have to listen to anything that Paul said to any of his visitors. As a result, and as we know, members of Nero's inner circle of workers became Christians. (Philippians 4:22)
26. Despite being a prisoner and potentially being called by Nero even to martyrdom at any moment, Paul was still busy, trying to spread the gospel!
27. **Acts 28:17-22:** ¹⁷ After three days Paul called the local Jewish leaders to a meeting. When they had gathered, he said to them, "My fellow-Israelites, even though I did nothing against our people or the customs that we received from our ancestors, I was made a prisoner in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸After questioning me, the Romans wanted to release me, because they found that I had done nothing for which I deserved to die. ¹⁹But when the Jews opposed this, I was forced to appeal to the Emperor, even though I had no accusation to make against my own people. ²⁰That is why I asked to see you and talk with you. As a matter of fact, I am bound in chains like this for the sake of him for whom the people of Israel hope."
- ²¹ They said to him, "We have not received any letters from Judea about you, nor have any of our people come from there with any news or anything bad to say about you. ²²**But we would like to hear your ideas, because we know that everywhere people speak against this party to which you belong.**"—*Good News Bible*.* (Acts 28:17-22). [Bold type is added.]
28. Clearly, Paul could not go to the synagogue; but, the synagogue could come to him. As usual, he tried to speak first to the Jewish people of Rome. Some of them were convinced,

and others were not. Paul was somewhat surprised that they had not received any information from Jerusalem about him. So, a large group of Jews came to hear Paul. (Acts 28:22-31) After giving a very powerful and convincing autobiographical talk followed by powerful proof from the Old Testament Scriptures, Paul realized that some were still not convinced. So, he quoted Isaiah 6:9-10 from the Septuagint translation in Greek.

29. I am sure he was seriously disappointed that not everyone saw things as he did.
30. Paul remained in Rome under house arrest for two years. Many people came to encourage him and to hear his gospel message.
31. Why do you think the book of Acts ends abruptly at this point? Is it possible that some pages have been lost from all the copies that we have available to us? Is it possible that Luke intended to write a third book? Or, did Luke feel that having reached Rome and having preached to a wide variety of people there, Paul's mission was accomplished?

Paul's patience and cheerfulness during his long and unjust imprisonment, his courage and faith, were a continual sermon. His spirit, so unlike the spirit of the world, bore witness that a power higher than that of earth was abiding with him. And by his example, Christians were impelled to greater energy as advocates of the cause from the public labors of which Paul had been withdrawn. In these ways were the apostle's bonds influential, so that when his power and usefulness seemed cut off, and to all appearance he could do the least, then it was that he gathered sheaves for Christ in fields from which he seemed wholly excluded.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 464.2.

32. However, we know that the book of Acts is still not really finished. It is our time to add what we hope will be the final chapter to that book!

Christ has given to the church a sacred charge. Every member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. **There is nothing that the Saviour desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour's love. All heaven is waiting for men and women through whom God can reveal the power of Christianity.**—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 600.1.

Long has God waited for the spirit of service to take possession of the whole church so that everyone shall be working for Him according to his ability. **When the members of the church of God do their appointed work in the needy fields at home and abroad, in fulfillment of the gospel commission, the whole world will soon be warned and the Lord Jesus will return to this earth with power and great glory.**—*Ibid.** 111.1. [Bold type is added.]

33. Remember that Christianity was an illegal religion. While Judaism was tolerated, Christianity was not. And yet, even while under house arrest in Rome, Paul continued to preach the gospel! Why was that? It was probably the only thing he thought about.

Romans 1:14-15: ¹⁴For I have an obligation to all peoples, to the civilized and to the savage, to the educated and to the ignorant. ¹⁵So then, I am eager to preach

the Good News to you also who live in Rome.—*Good News Bible*.*

Ellen White wrote:

To save souls should be the lifework of everyone who professes Christ.
We are debtors to the world for the grace given us of God, for the light which has shone upon us, and for the discovered beauty and power of the truth.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 4, 53.1. [Bold type is added.]

34. What impact has this reading and study of the book of Acts had on you? What have you learned from our studies together? Are you encouraged to reach out and try to spread the gospel where you are? What circumstances can prevent the spread of the gospel? Nothing except your failure to witness or the hardness of someone's heart and his refusal to listen.
35. If you are too embarrassed or feel you are unprepared to speak on behalf of Jesus Christ, what would you say to Paul about your excuses? Are you open to opportunities to spread the gospel? How can we keep our eyes and our minds alert to any opportunity that might come our way? Certainly, none of us have persevered through more difficulties than Paul.
36. There are only two reasons why the gospel is not being spread more vigorously: (1) Our unwillingness to share it; and/or (2) The unwillingness of those to whom we speak to receive it. No combination of life circumstances can stop the spread of the gospel.
37. Paul had the message of the gospel burning in his heart; he could not keep quiet about it. Do you know anyone who has that condition? Paul felt so compelled to speak about the gospel that he described himself, even before he went to Jerusalem that last time, as a "slave." (Romans 1:1; Titus 1:1; Colossians 1:23) While many versions translate these verses with the word *servant*, the actual word in Greek is *slave*.
38. Have you ever felt that you were too much of a sinner—or perhaps, too poorly educated and unfamiliar with the Bible—to be able to share the gospel? Do you sometimes feel unworthy? Do you think Paul ever became discouraged? Imagine how he felt after being basically rejected by the Christian Jewish leaders in Jerusalem!
39. Are we afraid to spread the gospel because of peer pressure? Do we have family members or close friends who are not Christians who might reject us if we tried to witness for Jesus? How does Jesus feel about that?
40. While we have talked about Paul's journey, review once again all the times when Paul witnessed for Jesus Christ under very difficult circumstances. See Acts 27:9-11,21-26,33-36; 28:3-6,7-10.
41. Do the people you work with know that you are a Seventh-day Adventist? Or, perhaps even just a Christian? Does your example stand out before them? What did Jesus say about witnessing to others? And what effect it might have on them? See Matthew 5:16.
42. We know that very difficult times are coming, including the seven last plagues. While those plagues will come after the close of probation, similar things will happen leading up to those days which will make it more and more difficult to witness. Why shouldn't we practice witnessing now when times are fairly easy? What obstacles are preventing us from doing so? Are those problems only in our own hearts and minds? Or, are there real circumstantial obstacles? Would it hurt to try to step out in faith and see how God will work with us?

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Last Modified: July 29, 2018

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