

Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. <sup>24</sup> Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. <sup>25</sup> They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

<sup>26</sup> “Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” <sup>27</sup> For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’

<sup>28</sup> “Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” <sup>[29]</sup>

<sup>30</sup> For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. <sup>31</sup> He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

1. What might have been encouraging about Paul’s initial encounter with the Jewish leadership in Rome?
2. Why does Paul say that he is in chains (v. 20)?
3. What does Paul mean by “the hope of Israel?”
4. What must have been encouraging about Paul’s second encounter with the Jewish leadership?
5. What is the heart of Paul’s message in his second encounter with the Jewish leaders (v. 23)?
6. How would you describe the “Kingdom of God” as it is presented in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles?
7. How would Paul’s understanding of the kingdom been different from the traditional Jewish understanding?
8. What are some of the ways Jesus is revealed in the Law of Moses and the Prophets?
9. How did the Jewish leaders respond to Paul’s message?
10. What does Paul’s closing statement reveal about their response (vv. 25-28)?
11. Why were they unable to hear and respond to the gospel?
12. What is a little bit discouraging about the last two verses of Acts?
13. What is encouraging about the final two verses in Acts?



## THE STORY CONTINUES

### JOURNEY'S END | ACTS 28

When we come to Acts 28, we come to the end of a journey. But Luke wants us to know the story is far from over. The gospel has made its way from Jerusalem to Rome and is poised to go much further.

Some might consider the conclusion of Acts to be a bit anti-climatic. Paul has survived a harrowing journey by sea, spent a long winter on Malta, and his defense of the gospel is met with a mixed response in Rome. While many respond favorably to Paul, and some are intrigued by his argument, we are left wondering if anyone actually comes to faith in Christ.

Paul is enjoying a great deal of favor from Rome, but he still spends his waking hours chained to a Roman soldier. Paul’s friends are allowed to come and go, but Paul is not.

Luke knows far more than he is willing to tell us. He knows that Paul will remain in Roman custody for two “whole” years. He knows whether or not Paul was able to present his case before Caesar. He knows the outcome of Paul’s appeal. He may even know what eventually happens to Paul. But he leaves us guessing.

Luke’s story was never about Paul, or Peter, or John, or Philip or Stephen. From beginning to end, Acts is a story about the progress of the gospel. Luke wants us to know that while Paul is in chains the gospel is not.

The final stage of Paul’s journey is marked by unusual kindness in Malta, encouragement from believers on the way to Rome, and a mixed response in Rome.

#### UNUSUAL KINDNESS ON MALTA (vv. 1-10)

<sup>1</sup>Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup>The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. <sup>3</sup>Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself

on his hand. <sup>4</sup> When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has not allowed him to live.” <sup>5</sup> But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. <sup>6</sup> The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

<sup>7</sup> There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. <sup>8</sup> His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. <sup>9</sup> When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. <sup>10</sup> They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

1. Our English translations obscure the fact that Luke refers to the islanders as *barbaroi*, a word often translated “barbarians.” The term refers to those who did not speak Greek or embrace Greek cultural values. They were considered backward and superstitious. They also had the reputation of being inhospitable to strangers.
  - a. How do the islanders live up to the stereotype?
  - b. How do they shatter the stereotype?
2. Conspicuous by its absence is any reference to Paul sharing the gospel or anyone responding positively to his message.
  - a. What do you think the chances are of Paul spending three months on the island of Malta without sharing the gospel?
  - b. Why do you think there is no mention of anyone responding to the gospel by placing their faith in Christ?
3. How does Paul demonstrate the power of the gospel and extend the kindness of Christ to the islanders?
4. What kind of impression do you think Paul and his companions left with the islanders?
5. What are some ways we should demonstrate the power of the gospel and extend the kindness of Christ to those around us?
6. Why is this an important step in sharing the gospel?

#### **ENCOURAGEMENT ALONG THE WAY (vv. 11-16)**

<sup>11</sup> After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. <sup>12</sup> We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days.

<sup>13</sup> From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. <sup>14</sup> There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. <sup>15</sup> The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged. <sup>16</sup> When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

1. The twins (Castor and Pollux) were considered to be the guardians of seafarers. It was always a good omen to spot their constellation (Gemini) during a storm at sea. Do you find any irony in the fact that Luke takes time to note this otherwise extraneous fact?
2. While Paul has never visited this region, he finds “brothers and sisters” in the port city of Puteoli (about 170 miles from Rome).
  - a. What does this tell us about the progress of the gospel?
  - b. How did they encourage Paul?
3. Two different groups of believers come from Rome to greet Paul and accompany him on his journey back into Rome. Some came as far as Forum of Appius (about 43 miles from Rome) and others as far as Three Taverns (about 33 miles from Rome). How did they encourage Paul?
4. What are some ways you have been encouraged by other believers?
5. What are some additional ways we can encourage each other in the faith?

#### **A MIXED RESPONSE IN ROME (vv. 17-31)**

<sup>17</sup> Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. <sup>18</sup> They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. <sup>19</sup> The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. <sup>20</sup> For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

<sup>21</sup> They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. <sup>22</sup> But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

<sup>23</sup> They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the