

## ACTS 28

### Paul's Ministry in Malta and Rome

Paul and all the passengers swam ashore in Malta. The island is “a little over 27 km. (17 mi.) long, 14 km. (9 mi.) wide, and with a shoreline of 137 km. (85 mi.)” and “has often had strategic importance as a base from which to control the Mediterranean narrows” on account of its location between the south of Sicily (93 km from Malta) and the north of Cape Bon, Tunisia (290 km from Malta).<sup>1</sup> Even though the ship had floated on the Adriatic Sea ([Acts 27:27](#)) to the west-south-west direction because of *Euraquilo*, the east-north-east wind ([27:14](#)), it arrived on an island which lay on the east of Crete; this means that the wind changed from the east-north-east direction to the west-north-west direction at one point.

In Malta, Paul and his companions stayed for three months ([Acts 28:11](#)), probably from early November in 59 CE to early February in 60 CE (or late October in 59 CE to late January in 60 CE).<sup>2</sup> In the early spring they departed for Rome, and it took only seven days for them to set sail from Malta to Puteoli (350 nautical km from Rhegium),<sup>3</sup> via Syracuse (120 nautical km from Malta) and Rhegium (130 nautical km from Syracuse); thus, 600 nautical kilometers in total. Then possibly in late February they finally reached Rome (229 km away from Puteoli),<sup>4</sup> one of “the ends of the earth” ([1:8](#)),<sup>5</sup> and the biggest city at that time, having “a population of no less than a million.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [ISBER 3:231](#).

<sup>2</sup> See Schnabel 2012: 1054.

<sup>3</sup> According to [ISBER 4:181](#), the distance between Rhegium and Puteoli is 290 kilometers. Schnabel 2012: 1055 calculates it as 325 kilometers, but this seems to be calculated in a straight line. A cruising distance can be approximately 350 kilometers; so also Keener 2012–2015: 3701.

<sup>4</sup> [ISBER 3:1060](#): “At that time the ordinary route to Rome, along the Via Appia from Capua, was 155 Roman miles (about 229 km., 142 mi.). Later Domitian reduced the distance by laying out the Via Domitia along the coast.”

<sup>5</sup> According to van Unnik 1973: 386–401, the ends of the earth in [1:8](#) refers to the whole world. Hence, Rome can be one of the ends.

<sup>6</sup> Keener 2012–2015: 3721 says that its population can be composed “of about 670,000 free citizens

Hence, Paul's first ministry in Rome could have occurred in March in 60 CE ([Acts 28:17–28](#)); he then seems to have waited until March in 62 CE to be judged by Nero.

### *Paul's Entry to Rome (28:11–16)*

Paul and his companions stayed in Malta for three months, probably from early November in 59 CE to early February in 60 CE (Acts 28:11a). Luke does not report what happened in that period, but it can be surmised by going through what Paul previously had done after his healing ministries. In Lystra, right after the lame man's healing, Paul declared who God is and what He does (14:8–17), and that circumstance is summarized in a single phrase in the previous verse, **they proclaimed the good news (14:7)**. At a later time, Paul returned to Lystra, strengthened the disciples, and appointed elders (14:21–23). In Thessalonica, he made disciples within three weeks (17:1–10). Only considering these records, we can correctly conjecture that during the winter months Paul proclaimed the gospel in Malta, made disciples, and appointed elders to equip the church. Would not Paul have done so in Malta during his stay? The residents of Malta honoring and giving necessities to all the passengers of the wrecked ship (28:10) could be a reflection of their faith.

After wintering and evangelizing in Malta, they departed from the benevolent barbarians possibly on February 8:<sup>31</sup> **After three months we put out to sea in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island, having the Twins as its figurehead (Acts 28:11)**. These “Twins” of Zeus refer to “Castor and Pollux” “often identified with the constellation Gemini and therefore in a position to rescue those in peril on the sea.”<sup>32</sup> This ship also could have been a grain ship bound for Italy, just like the wrecked ship, but this one had safely arrived at the island. Its figurehead could be standing for what that world relied on, so Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus should have resolved not to be relaxed but to “stand alert, stand firm in the faith, show courage, [and] be strong” (1 Cor 16:13) for further ministry in Rome.

It seems to take only one day for the Alexandrian ship to draw down to Syracuse (120 nautical km from Malta), “the capital of the Roman province of Sicily” from 212 BCE:<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “Pliny (NH [Natural History] 2.122) says that the seas are re-opened to navigation in spring, which commences when the west winds (*fauonii*) begin to blow on February 8” (Bruce 1990: 534).

<sup>32</sup> *ISBER* 4:930 under the title of “Twin Brothers.” For ancient mythology of the Twins, see Keener 2012–2015: 3697.

<sup>33</sup> *ISBER* 4:686.

**We drew down to Syracuse and stayed there three days (Acts 28:12).** If they departed on February 8, their stay in Syracuse would be from February 9 to 11. The “wind falling” is explained to be the reason behind their stopover;<sup>34</sup> however, since there was no mention of any matter with the wind, unlike the next verse, loading grain<sup>35</sup> and taking people on board seem more plausible reasons (cf. 21:3).

The further voyage went smoothly: **Taking away from there, we arrived at Rhegium, and after one day a south wind sprang up and on the second day we came to Puteoli (Acts 28:13).** Rhegium (130 nautical km from Syracuse) was “located along the SW [south-west] coast of the ‘toe’ of Italy ... opposite the Sicilian city of Messina.”<sup>36</sup> They might have arrived on February 12 and departed for Puteoli on February 14. Puteoli, 350 nautical kilometers away from Rhegium, enjoyed its importance as Syracuse “due to the harbor’s safety and the inhospitable character of the coast nearer Rome” and its population that climbed up to “nearly 100,000” “under Claudius and Nero.”<sup>37</sup> Their sea voyage to Puteoli ended possibly on February 16; it lasted almost a half year because they departed from Caesarea in the summer of 59 CE. According to Casson, the general voyage from Alexandria to Rome “took at least fifty days and on occasions as much as seventy.”<sup>38</sup> It took about three times more than usual.

In Puteoli they **found brothers and were invited to stay with them seven days (Acts 28:14a).** Paul again won Julius’s favor even though, as Schnabel says, Julius and his soldiers might need “to replenish their equipment, damaged or lost in the shipwreck” or “to prepare for the overland journey ahead where billeting facilities would become increasingly scarce as the party drew closer to Rome.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, it should have been very atypical for a prisoner to be hosted for a week. Hence, as Wright describes, Julius and the soldiers “must by now have realized that they were either dreaming or

<sup>34</sup> Bruce 1990: 535.

<sup>35</sup> Sicily was an important supplier of grain for Rome at that time, along with Alexandria and North Africa (see Casson 1968 [1959]: 234).

<sup>36</sup> *ABD* 709.

<sup>37</sup> *ISBER* 3:1060.

<sup>38</sup> Casson 1968 [1959]: 234; on the contrary, the voyage from Rome [exactly Ostia or Pozzuoli] to Alexandria took just “ten days to two weeks” on account of the wind direction.

<sup>39</sup> Schnabel 2012: 1055.

taking part in a very strange journey with an exceedingly strange prisoner.”<sup>40</sup>

Then Luke mentions the arrival at their final destination, Rome: **And in this way we came to Rome (Acts 28:14b)**. A chain of unexpected events could be included “in this way.” Schnabel suggests that this sentence “does not mark the party’s arrival in Rome, which does not take place until v. 16” and translates it as, “Here is the way we arrived in Rome.”<sup>41</sup> However, personally Bruce’s elucidation seems to make sense: “Luke first states the fact of their arrival in Rome [28:14], and then goes back to relate what happened on the way there [28:15].”<sup>42</sup>

The chain of unexpected events reached its climax in **Acts 28:15**: From there [Rome] the brothers, hearing about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us; and seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. The Forum of Appius<sup>43</sup> was “a station at the forty-third milestone on the Appian Road” so it was 63.5 kilometers away from Rome, “a single day’s journey for energetic travelers”;<sup>44</sup> but it would have been one-and-a-half or two days’ journey for travelers in general.<sup>45</sup> The Three Taverns was also “a station on the Appian Way” so it was 48 kilometers away from Rome,<sup>46</sup> which would be one day’s or one-and-a-half days’ journey. If Paul and his companions departed from Puteoli on February 23 after that one week, tarrying (28:14), they would have turned up at the Forum of Appius (117.5 km from Puteoli) on February 26 and at the Three Taverns (15.5 km from the Forum of Appius) on the next day, February 27. Even so, the Christians in Rome came out to meet Paul as far as the Forum of Appius (63.5 km from Rome) and the Three Taverns (48 km from Rome). If a brother in Puteoli was sent to inform the brothers in Rome of Paul’s arrival on February 26, he could have arrived there on February 22; the informed brothers in Rome should have departed

<sup>40</sup> Wright 2008: 239–40.

<sup>41</sup> Schnabel 2012: 1055.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce 1990: 535–36.

<sup>43</sup> It is known that “the Forum of Appius was ‘crammed with boatmen and stingy tavern-keepers’” (*ABD* 2:853).

<sup>44</sup> *ISBER* 1:214.

<sup>45</sup> “It was a 1-day journey from Rome for ambitious travelers, although Horace preferred a ‘lazy’ 2-day trip (*Hor. Sat.* 1.5)” (*ABD* 2:853).

<sup>46</sup> *ISBER* 4:843.

within two days after being aware of Paul's itinerary in order to get as far as the Forum of Appius before February 26, thus within four days to reach the Three Taverns before February 27. Bruce understands these greeting journeys as "the official welcome extended to a newly arrived dignitary by a deputation which went out from the city to greet him and escort him for the rest of his way."<sup>47</sup>

When Paul met the brothers in Rome on his way to Rome, he became very encouraged and could not thank God enough. Paul first planned to go to Rome four and a half years ago ([Acts 19:21](#); the fall in 55 CE), then he finished writing the Epistle to the Romans three years ago ([20:3](#); possibly in February in 57 CE). Too many days had passed in short notice because of abrupt, unanticipated reasons, viz., long delays in trials and wintering on account of the storm, two years in Caesarea and probably three months in Malta. Nevertheless, we may suppose that the brothers in Rome earned the opportunity and the time to discard "the law of sin and death" and apply "the law of the Spirit of life" ([Rom 8:2](#)). As for Paul, it could have been the time for him to prepare for his ministry in Rome, meeting and staying with the Roman officers.

Under these circumstances, the Roman brothers came out to meet Paul as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. Hence, Paul must have been encouraged, since their coming revealed that his epistle had been accepted quite positively. As Paul did, we sometimes need to spend our time conscientiously to grow mature and be prepared for fulfilling God's will.

Arriving in Rome the prisoner was respected: **And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who guarded him** ([Acts 28:16](#)). Paul's privilege of staying by himself with a soldier might have resulted from what Julius reported on, who Paul was and what happened on the way. According to our calculation, Paul arrived in Rome February 29 in 60 CE.<sup>48</sup>

### **Fusing the Horizons: Divine Preparations**

Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans probably in February in 57 CE. He wrote it with a strong desire for going to Rome, seeing the Christians there, and imparting some spiritual gifts to them ([Rom 1:10-11](#)). However, he spent three years anticipating coming face to face with them. Differently put, the Roman Christians waited for Paul for three years; long delays in trials and wintering on account of the storm made them meet

<sup>47</sup> Bruce 1990: 536.

<sup>48</sup> That year (60 CE) was a leap year.

quite later than expected. If Paul had not survived in the storm, there would not have been any encounters between them. Thankfully, after passing through all the hardships, Paul encountered the Roman Christians on the way to Rome because they came out to meet him, even as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. That meeting gave Paul such a great pleasure and impression that he **thanked God and took courage** (28:15). Here we can read the theme of “God’s preparation.”

In Acts, the term meaning “preparation” occurs only once: when Peter was praying, people were preparing [the meal] (*paraskeuazē*) (Acts 10:10). Then, the context talks about how God prepared a different kind of meal. He arranged a large eating sheet containing **all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds** (10:11–12). If we interpret this story in regard to preparation, we can find both human and God’s preparation. The human and earthly one was for Peter’s physical hunger, but God’s and the heavenly one was for Peter’s spiritual mission. For the salvation of the gentiles, an angel (10:3–7a), the sheet (10:11–12), and even Peter the apostle (10:13–20) were on His agenda. Peter neither intended to be prepared for the gentile mission nor did he know God’s intention in advance. Rather, God guided the situation and went ahead of them for the gentile mission.

This kind of preparation can also be detected in Saul’s conversion. His conversion was not prepared by Paul, neither being planned nor expected beforehand (Acts 9:1–3), and Ananias was at first not prepared to meet Paul (9:13–14). However, divine preparations for Paul worked efficaciously: Jesus met and communicated with Paul on his way to Damascus (9:4–6); God showed a vision to Paul to see **a man named Ananias come in and place his hands on him so that he may recover his sight** (9:12); and finally, Jesus persuaded Ananias to visit Paul. Lydia’s conversion was also prepared by the Lord, who **opened her heart to pay attention to what Paul was saying** (16:14b). A holistic expression on salvation is written as follows: **As many as were appointed to eternal life believed** (13:48b). We should put God as the subject who performed that appointment; hence, we can say that people were converted on the basis of divine preparations.

These divine preparations for ministries and conversions are based on Jesus the resurrected, God’s fundamental preparation for the salvation of all the nations (e.g., Acts 2:39; 3:25). Peter introduced Jesus the resurrected as **a man exhibited by God** (2:22) and **handed over by the predetermined will and foreknowledge of God** (2:23), as **the appointed Christ** (3:20), and as the unique name given to people for salvation (4:12). Disciples identified Jesus in their prayer with the holy servant anointed by God (4:27). Paul described Jesus the resurrected as the Savior brought to Israel as promised by God (13:23b) and as the Judge designated to pass sentence upon the world (17:31). In this way, Jesus the resurrected is presented as God’s foundational preparation in Acts.

Not only Jesus but also his ministers are portrayed as prepared by God. Peter called those, who had eaten with Jesus after his resurrection, **the witnesses God had already chosen** (10:41). Jesus designated Paul as his own chosen instrument (9:15). Barnabas and Saul were labeled “separated” for the work to which the Holy Spirit called them (13:2b).

To sum up, in Acts we can trace lots of divine preparations in the characters’ footsteps: first, Jesus the resurrected is God’s primary and fundamental preparation for the salvation of all the nations; second, divine preparations are very deeply related with gospel ministers, their ministries, and all kinds of conversions by all means. This makes divine characters, the so-called Trinity, very essential to all the events; we find particularly that God the Father does not appear directly in Acts but directs it.

### *Paul's Ministry in Rome (28:17–31)*

In his last section, Luke tells of Paul's ministry in Rome that occurred from the spring of 60 CE to the spring of 62 CE. During this period, Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, and Philippians were written.

Paul, who arrived in Rome as a prisoner but with a wonderful reception, did not hesitate to resume his ministry: **After three days Paul called the Jewish leaders together (Acts 28:17a)**, probably on March 3 in 60 CE. In spite of his long journey, Paul began his ministry in Rome after merely three days just as Festus did (25:1). The leaders Paul called for could refer to the (possibly eleven) heads of the synagogues in Rome.<sup>49</sup> Modern estimates of the population of “Roman Jews at the time of Paul's arrival” vary between 20,000 and 50,000.<sup>50</sup>

Paul's reason for calling the leaders of the Jewish community is explicated in his speech (Acts 28:17b–20), namely, to communicate with them. He began by summarizing the process of his trials: **Brothers, having done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, I was handed over as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans; and they, after examining me, wanted to release me because there was no reason for death in me (28:17b–18)**. The first phrase is a précis of his defense (cf. 25:8). The second one is a summary of a series of events starting with the tribune's arresting Paul and going on to being examined by two procurators and one king. He was “handed over to the Gentiles” like Jesus<sup>51</sup> but not from the Jews but “from Jerusalem”; possibly because the Jews did not want to hand Paul over to the Romans; they wanted to kill him. As a result, it seems that Jerusalem, as a place, was being blamed for handing Paul over to the Romans. The third one is related to their reaching a unanimous verdict of not guilty (cf. 23:29; 25:18, 25; 26:32).

Second, he revealed the reason why he came there: **But since the Jews objected [to my release], I was forced to appeal to Caesar—not because of my having some charge to bring against my own nation (Acts 28:19)**. Paul was brought to Rome due to

<sup>49</sup> Barrett 1998: 1238. So also Schnabel 2012: 1066.

<sup>50</sup> Keener 2012–2015: 3734.

<sup>51</sup> The theme of “Isaiah's Suffering Servant” flowing in the phrase is noted in Keener 2012–2015: 3739–40.



his appeal to Caesar; however, it did not mean that he accused the Jews of any kind of culpability; he could not help appealing to the emperor since the Jews did not stop indicting for a range of crimes that Paul did not commit at all.

Last but not least, Paul talked about the reason for calling the Jewish leaders along with the real cause of his trials: **So for this reason I urged you to see and speak with me, for I am bound with this chain because of the hope of Israel (Acts 28:20)**. His final remark reminds us about his present status, a prisoner, as stated, for the sake of the hope of Israel. The “hope of Israel” was literally articulated as “the risen Jesus” in his final defense before Agrippa II (26:2–23). Hence, he conducted himself to be “a prisoner of Christ Jesus” (Phlm 1); he was “bound for Christ Jesus”: Paul was bound for the hope of Israel; the risen Jesus is the Hope of Israel; so the reason Paul was bound was Jesus the Christ. As a matter of fact, he received a prophetic commandment from Jesus that he should come to Rome (Acts 23:11); thus, his Lord was the cause and effect of his binding and arrival in Rome.

The leaders of the Jewish community in Rome responded: **We have received no letters from Judea about you, nor have any of the brothers come and reported or said anything bad about you (Acts 28:21)**. The plausibility of this answer is spelled out by Witherington:

Two things must be remembered: (1) Paul had been in Rome only three days, hardly enough time for Jewish authorities to have heard other oral reports about Paul’s case from visiting Jews; (2) Paul in all likelihood arrived in Rome in February of AD 60, before most ships would have been expected to arrive to Puteoli, for it was the very beginning of the navigable season. Furthermore, we noted that all along the ship Paul was on was trying to rush to get to its destination before winter truly set in. It is hardly very plausible that another ship had gotten to Italy before Paul’s in view of when both would have set out from Caesarea.<sup>52</sup>

Nevertheless, their response did not signal that they did not have any possibilities of contradiction: **But we count it worthy to hear from you what you think, for regarding this sect we know that it is contradicted everywhere (28:22)**. They had already known of a bad reputation of the sect to which Paul belonged. What they did not have was a formal letter or an ambassadorial messenger which delivered any judgment

<sup>52</sup> Witherington 1998: 799.

against Paul.

Hence, they reached an agreement that the Jews in Rome should gather to hear Paul speak: **Having set a day with him, they came to his lodging in even greater numbers** (Acts 28:23a). Maybe on a Sabbath in March in 60 CE, the Jews in Rome, possibly hundreds or thousands, assembled in Paul's guest-chamber, which shows the degree of their interest in Paul's case. And Paul expounded on his belief for a whole day: **To them he explained [his belief] with testifying about the Kingdom of God and convincing them of things concerning Jesus, from both the law of Moses and the prophets, from morning until evening** (28:23b). He repeated what Jesus taught his disciples after his resurrection (1:3). In addition, he talked about Jesus by adducing evidence from the Scriptures; it should have been like 26:23, **on the condition that the Christ is subject to suffering, and on the condition that he is the first to rise from the dead, he will proclaim light both to the people [the Jews] and to the Gentiles.**

As usual, Paul's proclamation of the gospel was accepted by some but refused by others (Acts 28:24). So the Jews **scattered without reaching a consensus** on Paul's speech (28:25a). At that moment **Paul made one last statement** (28:25b) by quoting Isa 6:9–10 in the same words as the LXX (Acts 28:26–27). Paul designated this word as **the Holy Spirit's speech announced to their ancestors through Isaiah the prophet** (28:25c): this understanding of the authorship of the Bible runs through Acts (cf. 1:16; 15:28). Marshall summarizes the differences between the MT and the LXX; the text in the MT is initially revealed and then the "change" in the LXX is analyzed just as the following: (1) The ironic imperatives "hear continually, but do not understand" and "see continually, but do not perceive" are changed to emphatic future indicatives expressing what will happen. (2) The command to the prophet to make the people's heart dull and so on is changed to a statement that the people themselves have already done so. (3) The passive "be healed" is changed to the future indicative "I will heal them," expressing more clearly that the healing is the work of God.<sup>53</sup>

Among these, the third one does not seem to be relevant because a literal translation of the last sentence in Isa 6:10 of the MT could actually be "and he/He will heal him." So regarding the third one it can be said that the LXX uses the first-person singular subject ("I") rather than the third-person singular subject ("he"), and the third-person plural

<sup>53</sup> Marshall 2007: 600.

object (“them”) rather than the third-person singular object (“him”). The text of the **LXX** seems to be adjusted to suit the line of thought. Likewise, the expression in the MT is also suitable for the context. The third-person singular subject could refer to God’s agent, namely, the Isaianic Servant of the Lord, and the third-person singular object refers to “the people” that appears in the present and previous verses in Hebrew in a singular form (also in the singular form even in Greek; *ton laon* and *tou laou*). Hence, by considering the first and the second differences of the MT and the **LXX** pointed out above, we may conclude that Paul construed **6:9–10** as “emphatic future indicatives expressing what will happen” and “a statement that the people themselves have already done so”; he then later applied the word to the Jews in Rome.

After Paul analyzed the audience in terms of **Isa 6:9–10**, he laid bare his confidence that **this salvation from God has been sent to the Gentiles, and that they will listen, too** (**Acts 28:28**). His confidence came from experience (**13:12, 48; 14:21; 16:33–34; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:8; 19:10, 17–19**) and was often reported to the Antioch church, the people in Phoenicia and Samaria, and the apostles and the elders (**14:27; 15:3, 12**); in addition, the barbarians in Malta proved a couple of months ago that his confidence was reliable (**28:9–10**). Following his custom, Paul proclaimed the gospel to the Jews first; so now he would do the same to the gentiles in Rome.

Paul did proclaim the gospel to the gentiles for two years: **He abided in his own rented quarters two whole years and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with complete boldness and without restriction** (**Acts 28:30–31**).<sup>54</sup> Paul did not discriminate in favor of the gentiles; he proclaimed the same theme (the kingdom of God) in terms of the same perspective (things concerning Jesus) (cf. **28:23**). He fulfilled the requirements in the disciples’ prayer by proclaiming the gospel “with complete boldness” (cf. **4:29**).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, he welcomed all who came near to him. He should have dealt with everyone well because in the meantime he met people of all kinds.

Furthermore, his ministry had been done “with no one venturing or able to hinder or prevent”<sup>56</sup> even though he was bound and abided in his own rented quarters. A house in

<sup>54</sup> See comments on **12:24**.

<sup>55</sup> The phrase, “with complete boldness,” appears only in **Acts 4:29** and **28:31** in the NT.

<sup>56</sup> Barrett 1998: 1253.

Rome was very expensive: “A house could cost up to 875,000 denarii (3.5 million sesterces), which few could afford; rent for the cheapest (upper-story) apartments (rooms) might run from 100 or 125 denarii (400–500 sesterces) annually, and much more for nicer apartments.”<sup>57</sup> Paul did not live in any brother’s house. He may have used 200 or 250 denarii, an annual salary of an average person, to rent a place for two years, which was too small an amount of money in comparison with him being so great a servant of the kingdom of God. Rome was the richest and biggest in that world. Still Paul’s status in the eyes of the unbelievers did not pose any problem for his ministry in Rome. Dominant and influential was God’s kingdom, and is forevermore.

<sup>57</sup> Keener 2012–2015: 3730. Sesterce was a Roman coin worth about one fourth of a denarius.