Arrival in Rome

V 1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.

"Malta." **An island about 60 miles south of Sicily.**

V 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.

"Showed us unusual kindness." **Uncorrupted by mainland society and eager for news from the outside world, island cultures can tend to be very warmhearted and hospitable.**

"The rain… cold." **It was late autumn/early winter now.**

V 3-5 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.
So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."
But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.

"Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks." **Paul didn't mind doing menial chores and was a good example of a humble, loving shepherd.**

"A viper came out." **Snakes often hide in wood piles. It *"fastened on his hand",* and*"the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand."* In other words, the snake truly did bite him. The bite of a viper causes the following symptoms: intense pain, swelling, necrosis (death of a part of the body), hemorrhaging, internal organ breakdown, blood cells destroyed. Without medical treatment, a viper bite meant certain death. However, Paul *"shook off the creature… and suffered no harm."***



V 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

"He would swell up, or suddenly fall down dead." **The islanders' first reaction was that Paul must have been a *"murderer"* whom *"justice* (divine retribution) *does not allow to live".* But later, seeing no harm come to him, *"they changed their minds and said that he was a god."* This reaction reminds us of the citizens of Lystra who, after the lame man's healing, proclaimed Barnabas and Paul to be the gods Jupiter and Mercury. (Acts 14) Reactions like this are to be expected when someone is operating in the full power of God.**

When this happens, as Barnabas and Paul demonstrated in Lystra, it is vitally important to continue giving God the glory, to walk humbly before Him and others, knowing that such God-given power, although admired so

much by others, must be used only in love for the benefit of others and for God's glory, not one's own.

V 7 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days.

"Leading citizen of the island… Publius." **Publius was the Roman governor of the island.**

V 8-9 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.
So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

"Sick of a fever and dysentery." **Because of poor sanitation, dysentery (or gastric fever) was widespread in the ancient world (and in many parts of the world today). Paul's healing of this man led to *"the rest of those… who had diseases"* to come and be healed.**

During this voyage Paul was not on any official mission from the church, although he knew that God was sending him to Rome with the great prospect of being *"brought before Caesar".* He would have had every excuse to isolate himself, but instead, he remained accessible and well aware of the needs that surrounded him on the ship, and now here on this obscure island in the Mediterranean.

The measure of character in a person is seen by what he does when no one is looking, when there are no other guideposts but God and conscience to direct his actions. Paul certainly proved himself such a man of character during this whole sea voyage chapter of his life.

V 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

"Honored us… provided us such things as were necessary." **Paul and his companions were well rewarded by the island people.**

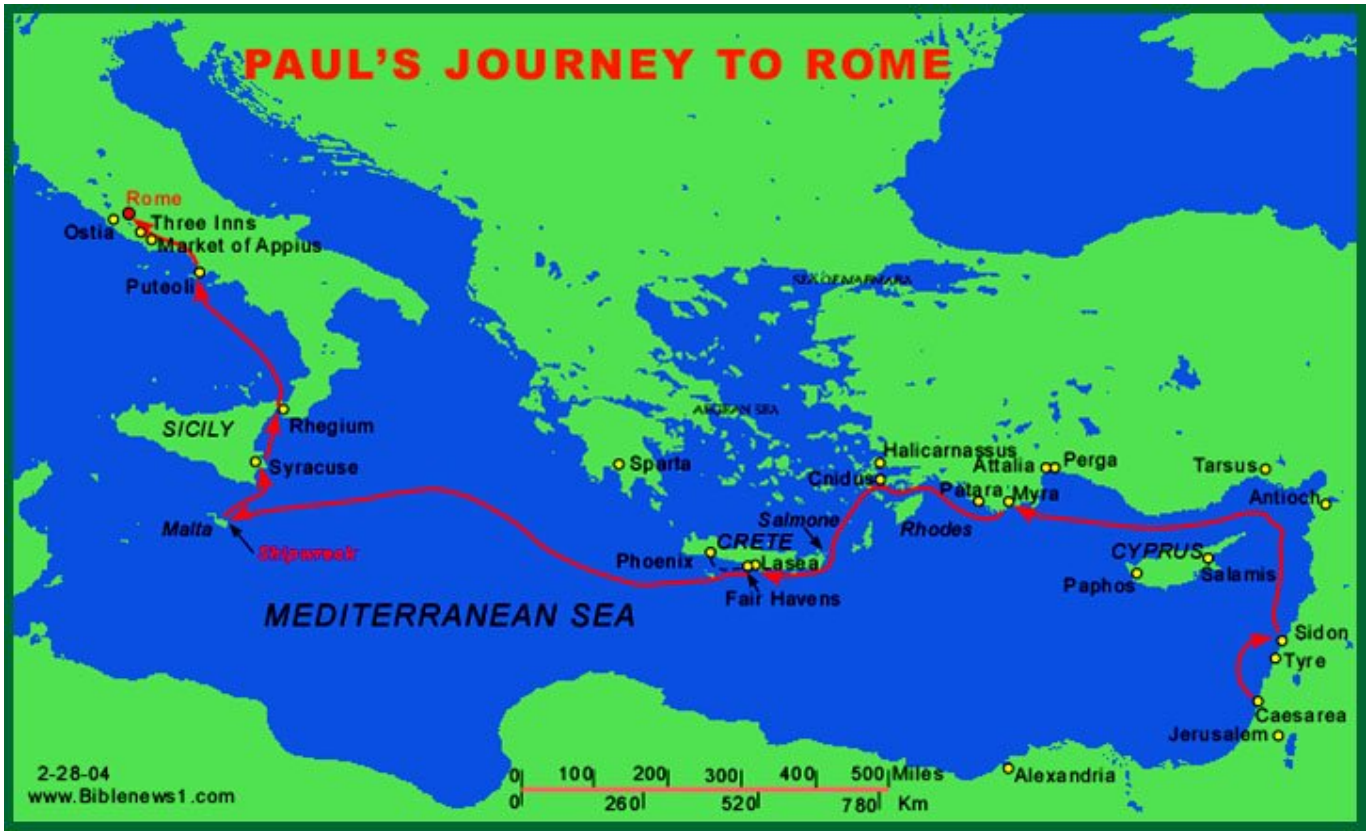
V 11 After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose

figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.

"After three months." **They waited until the winter months were over when sailing would no longer be dangerous.** ***"An Alexandrian ship."*** **Probably another ship of the imperial grain fleet on its way to Rome from Egypt.** ***"The Twin Brothers."*** **The constellation of Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus (Jupiter) who, according to Greek mythology, were believed to bestow protection on sailors. That may have been the name of the ship, or its figurehead, or an image painted or engraved on the forepart of the ship.**

V 12 **And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.**

"Syracuse." **An important city on the island of Sicily. Tradition has it that a new group of believers sprang up there during their 3-day stopover during which time the ship may have off-loaded some cargo.**



V 13-14 **From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one**

**day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,
where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.**

"We circled round." **Or, "coasted about, sailed along*". "Rhegium."* A harbor on the southern tip of the Italian mainland. There the ship waited one day until a favorable *"south wind"* allowed it to sail northwards through the Straits of Messina that separated Sicily from Italy. *"Puteoli."* Modern Pozzuoli, located on the Bay of Naples near Pompeii. It was Italy's most important port since it serviced the city of Rome and was also the main port for the Egyptian grain fleet.**

"We went toward Rome." **After seven days in Puteoli where they had *"found brethren"*, Paul and company continued on to Rome, travelling now on land via the road known as the Appian Way.**

V 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

"The brethren… came to meet us." **There was already an active Christian community in Rome to whom the brethren in Puteoli must have sent word about Paul's arrival.**

"Appii Forum." **A market town 43 miles south of Rome in the Appian Way.** ***"Three Inns."*** **A rest stop on the Appian Way, about 30 miles south of Rome.**

"Paul… thanked God and took courage." **To see some fellow-disciples again, especially those from Rome, after all those perils at sea must have been a great encouragement.**



V 16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

"We came to Rome." **For years Paul had been wanting to get to Rome, and now at last in the early spring of A.D. 60 or 61 that heart's desire was fulfilled.**

"Paul was permitted to dwell by himself." **Unlike the other prisoners, Paul was given special treatment, probably through the intervention of Julius, the centurion who had escorted him from Palestine. By now, Julius must have felt a little ridiculous, after witnessing Paul's exemplary behavior and exploits during the sea voyage, to have to play the role of guard over his "prisoner" whom he now looked up to with utmost respect.**

V 17-20 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,

"who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.

"But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.

"For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

"Leaders of the Jews." **The most prominent men from Rome's synagogues. Paul begins this final defense of the faith by declaring his innocence of any wrongdoing against the Jewish people or their traditions.**



V 21-23 Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.

"But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

"We neither received letters… nor have any of the brethren… spoken any evil of you." **Thankfully, due to the slowness of communication and travel in those days, there were no Jewish enemies from other cities in the neighborhood to stir up trouble.** ***"We desire to hear from you."*** **The Jews in Rome expressed an interest to hear what Paul taught, having heard only wild rumors.**

"Concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere." **If nothing else, this statement shows that already the Gospel had in the few years since Jesus' death and resurrection spread quite far and wide in the Roman world. Why the new** ***"sect"*** **of Christians had become so rejected –** ***"spoken against everywhere"*** **– can be understood from John 15:19 where Jesus said,** ***"If you were of the world, the world would love his own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."***

"From both the law of Moses and the prophets." **Paul's usual method throughout Acts for witnessing to the Jews was to use the Old Testament to prove that Jesus was the Messiah.**

"From morning till evening." **Despite his** ***"chain"*****, Paul was able to teach as much as he wanted.**

V 24-27 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,

"saying,

‘Go to this people and say:
“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;
And seeing you will see, and not perceive;
For the hearts of this people have grown dull.
Their ears are hard of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed,
Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,
Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”‘

“Some were persuaded… and some disbelieved.” **Again Paul was disappointed by his fellow-Jews’ lack of openness and receptivity, and quotes for them the passage in Isaiah 6:9-10, *“hearing ye will hear, and shall not understand…”* The very act of expounding the truth, of trying to open the eyes and ears and hearts, causes blindness, deafness, and hardness of heart because that’s what happens spiritually when truth is rejected.**

It’s like a psychological defense mechanism that comes into play in the minds and hearts of those who don’t want to receive the truth. In 2Thessalonians 2:10-12 Paul expressed it well: *“Because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved… God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie.”* And in Romans 11:25, *“Blindness in part has happened to Israel.”*

By this time Paul must have fully realized there was not much point in going too far out of his way to get the Jewish people to believe the Gospel. Of course, many individual Jews became dedicated believers and worked hard to spread the Gospel in those days, but the majority continued in their old belief system.

As for the group in Rome, it seems they at least did not try to raise persecution; Paul’s cause now rested with the court of Caesar, and the Jews in Rome probably did not want to risk pursuing the matter, and thereby drawing the attention and possibly the anger of Caesar upon themselves by interfering in a matter that belonged under Roman jurisdiction. In Israel they could get away with such interference, but not here in the heart of the Roman empire.

V 28-29 “Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”
And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

“The salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles.” **Twice before Paul reacted with righteous indignation and frustration with his Jewish brethren and signaled his intention to go to the Gentiles for *“they will hear it!”* (13:46-47, 18:6) It is fitting that the Book of Acts should end on this note – making it clear to the world that the Bible and the Gospel were meant, not for the benefit of the Jewish people only, but for all mankind.**

The scope of God’s Word is universal, designed by Him as His message and blessing for all the peoples of the world. God’s people lie scattered in all nations, for the heart of man is the same the world over. And as Paul learned (the hard way it seems), God was no longer showing any special favoritism to the Jews, to one nation only, when there were so many other nations of the world desperately in need of and desirous of the Good News.

“Great dispute among themselves.” **Rather than embrace the new truths they had just heard through Paul, some of the Jews started to ponder and analyze them. Their carnal minds got in the way of following the leading of God’s Spirit.**

This reminds us of the reaction Jesus experienced in John 7: *“So there was a division among the people because of Him.”* (verse 43) Some believed that He was the Messiah, while others of the Jewish leaders, looking for an excuse not to believe, opted to *“strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.”* (Matthew 23:24) They found a reason, they thought, to justify their unbelief: *“no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.”* (John 7:52) That reason, however, was just a case of jumping to conclusions; had they bothered to do some research, they would have learned that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as foretold in the Book of Micah (5:2).

When asked, *“What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”* Jesus replied, *“This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”* (John 6:28-29) It is a fight sometimes to believe. It doesn’t always come naturally.

The Law of Moses was instituted some 1,500 years before the coming of Christ, and it was the enlightened and revolutionary path to follow in that day. But in process of time it became inadequate to serving God's greater purpose of bringing all nations to the Light of His Truth. And when Jesus came along, He shattered that old framework of beliefs and practices that the Jews had become accustomed to. No more need for circumcision or animal sacrifices, for example, because forgiveness of sins now came through Jesus Christ.

But because many of the Jews were comfortable with and felt righteous about keeping the Law of Moses, they were unable to adapt to God's new framework for them; they had everything figured out, and that old mindset made it difficult to let go of the past. This same tendency exists in any movement or organization; it seems to be a basic weakness in human nature to resist change, especially when the old ways and habits have become comfortable.

> **A danger that comes with old mindsets is that you can have things so pigeonholed and boxed in that it's difficult for you to receive new, fresh things from God. Old mindsets can cause you to use carnal reasoning instead of being guided by the Lord's Spirit. They cause rigidity.**
>
> **The principle of flexibility can be summed up in three short words: All things change! We need to be flexible; we need to be open. We need to understand that the Lord may want to do something new, and when He does, then God help us not to get in the way.**
>
> **It's the danger of every religion or movement to solidify, to become established and settled down. Even those who started out as revolutionary, in time they became brittle old bottles because they stopped flowing with the Spirit of God. Without the flow of the Spirit, there's no life.**
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> **(from publication of *The Family International* – Dec, 2008)**

V 30-31 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,

preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

"Preaching the kingdom of God… with all confidence, no one forbidding him." **Even though under house arrest, with the help of his fellow workers, Paul had enough freedom that he could evangelize both Caesar's household and much of Rome. (Philippians 1:13, 4:22) So the Lord certainly knew how to turn Paul's seeming "defeat" into a great victory. He planted Paul right in the center of the Roman world where he could have an enormous influence in spreading the Gospel. It was also an ideal opportunity to write more epistles, which were sent to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and to Philemon.**

***

The Book of Acts ends abruptly here. Probably, Luke had sent the document at this time to Theophilus, the Roman dignitary to whom the Book of Acts was addressed. (Acts 1:1) This would have happened prior to Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment (in 62 A.D.). If the Book had continued, it might have related Paul's work after his release, then his second imprisonment, and finally, his execution.

Paul did make a fourth missionary journey after his acquittal, and it is fairly certain that he went to Macedonia and Crete. (See 1Timothy 1:3, Titus 1:5.) It's possible he may have made it also to Asia Minor, Greece, and even Spain during his last years of freedom from about A.D. 63 to 67. In *First Clement*, written A.D. 95, it speaks of Paul preaching in "the limits of the west", which seems to indicate that he did indeed make it to Spain, as he had long desired. (Romans 15:24) Epistles to Timothy and Titus were written during these final years of freedom.

Then Paul was arrested again, and from a jail cell, while awaiting execution, wrote his last epistle, Second Timothy. He was beheaded in approximately A.D. 67, after having served the Lord for some 35 years. His death happened about the same time as that of Peter the apostle who also, apparently, was in Rome then. Tradition has it that Peter was crucified upside down; this was his request because he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as did his Lord.

Other events that took place around this time were the martyrdom of James, head of the Jerusalem church, in 62 (or 66) A.D., the persecution under Nero in 64 A.D., and the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

As mentioned, the Book of Acts does not seem to have come to a proper conclusion. But then the Acts of the Apostles never did end. For it is an ongoing story; the exploits of God's men of faith have marched on through the centuries even to the present day. It is a story that will only reach its climactic, thunderous conclusion at the glorious Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture – an event that is drawing ever closer in the closing years of this present age of history.

~ End of Commentary on the Book of Acts ~