

ROME AT LAST ACTS 27, 28



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A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Rome at Last: Acts 27, 28
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Introduction to Acts 27, 28

Our study of the book of Acts and the ongoing work of Christ comes to an end, as Paul arrives in Rome, and sets up shop for the Gospel.

Sure, he's under house arrest, awaiting trial before the Emperor, but he's not about to let that keep him from proclaiming Christ and His Kingdom as often as he can.

Paul was warmly received by the brethren in Rome, and here we see the power of the Spirit at work in the ongoing work of Christ, building His churches into one Body worldwide. Many important lessons are ahead for us in these two chapters, to embolden our witness and encourage our souls.

We're happy to offer a series of brief videos to introduce each portion of this study. You can view each one by [*clicking here*](#).

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We hope you find this study of Acts instructive and helpful to equip you for your walk with and work for the Lord. Thank you for joining us.

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1 Setting Sail

Read and mediate on Acts 27.1-12.

This passage is vintage Luke, chock full of historical and geographical details and hints of things to come. If we could hear background music for the outset of this voyage to Rome, it would be light and hopeful to begin with, as Paul and his companions are treated kindly and he is able to visit with some friends.

For reflection

1. Everything is looking promising, except for an ominous note, set in a minor key with a kind of low rumbling, which begins to build. Luke notes that “the winds were contrary” as they set off (v. 4). Right. We haven’t seen anything yet. Can you see why it was important for Luke to establish the sovereignty of Jesus over this whole process? Explain.
2. They “sailed slowly” “and arrived with difficulty” because the wind was “not permitting” them to make good headway (v. 7). Are we getting it? This is going to get worse before it gets better. The voyage was becoming “dangerous” (v. 9), and Paul decided to weigh in on the wisdom of continuing (v. 10). Do Christians need to sit silently by while unbelieving society heads off into stormy waters? How can we, like Paul, make our concerns known?
3. It’s late in the season, and the weather’s only going to get worse. Paul’s concern here is not merely for himself. He’s looking out for the whole “society” of people on this journey, seeking their *shalom* and safety (cf. Jer. 29.7). He doesn’t preach here or pound a pulpit. He simply injects his opinion and advice in a way that others can understand and consider. This vessel had become Paul’s Personal Mission Field for the time, and he was determined to do his best to try and keep it within the bounds of God’s gracious provision and protection. Do we have a similar responsibility?
4. The centurion’s decision to press on is reasonable (v. 11), given that the helmsman and owner of the ship were confident they could make it to Crete, and thus complete an important leg of the journey. But what may be *reasonable* is not always *wise*. What’s the difference?
5. We will see the Apostle Paul play an important role in these final two chapters of Acts. He will provide us with an excellent example about the role of faith and the believing community amid an age of *reasonable* but *unwise* people, who are destroying themselves because they refuse to heed the voice of the Lord. Lesson 1: Don’t be afraid to speak up on matters of importance, when the chosen course seems unwise and likely *not* to be for the benefit of the society as a whole. And when you do, make sure your words are carefully chosen in order to gain a fair hearing. Are there any matters concerning which you ought to be speaking up today? How might you do that?

Summary

Paul begins the final leg of his journey to Rome, and it’s clear this is going to be an even rockier road than he’s traveled thus far. But Paul has the promise of Christ to sustain him, even when it looks like everything is coming apart. How should we lay hold on Christ’s promises amid the storms and stupidity of our own day?

Closing Prayer

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;
With flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
And the tongue that speaks proud things,
Who have said,
“With our tongue we will prevail;
Our lips *are* our own;
Who *is* lord over us?”
“For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy,
Now I will arise,” says the LORD;
“I will set *him* in the safety for which he yearns.”
The words of the LORD *are* pure words,
Like silver tried in a furnace of earth,
Purified seven times.
You shall keep them, O LORD,
You shall preserve them from this generation forever.

Psalm 12. 1-7

2 Told Ya So!

Read and meditate on Acts 27.13-26.

Our musical score again takes up a light and hopeful note, as a gentle south wind encourages the helmsman and crew to begin their journey past Crete. But even as they cleared the port, we can hear the rumbling, ominous, motif resuming and gathering strength.

For reflection

1. Suddenly a storm engulfed the ship, making it impossible to sail. All they could do was let the storm drive them along and make the ship as light as possible, so that it would ride the waves rather than be pounded by them. We know Who has sent this storm. Why do you suppose He did this?

2. Haven't we seen a version of this story before (Jonah)? Evidently it's not a good idea to resist the Word and counsel of God. The crew tossed overboard all the extraneous gear and cargo, a complete loss of investment. They struck the sails and hauled the skiff (a life boat) on board, to keep it from sinking (they figure at least some of them might need it). Then the crew ran cables under the ship to help hold it together. Even Paul's companions were beginning to lose hope (v. 20). Put yourself in that situation. How would you have felt? Where would you have turned for hope? How would you have tried to encourage others?

3. But Paul was not afraid. As he began to speak, there was no gloating or chiding in his voice (v. 21). A simple, "I told ya so!" was enough before he moved on to give them hope and advice. Paul's approach changed at this point. He figured his little "society" was so desperate for encouragement and hope that he could speak freely about the things of the Lord, and mention the visitation of an angel without fear of being scorned. He held out the promise of deliverance for all, albeit not without some significant loss and turmoil, the result of their unwise choice to sail in the wrong season. Should we make it a point to rub the noses of our lost contemporaries in the unhappy consequences of their reasoned but unwise choices? Why not?

4. Paul did not call on his companions to have faith in God, only in him. His faith in God would have to do for everyone, at least in this situation, at least for the time being. This was not the time for evangelism; this was the time for sound advice and resolute hope. It seems that, while the Gospel is about everything, not everything is about the Gospel, at least, not all the time. Explain.

5. Lesson 2: When we venture into these arenas, we must consider the needs of society as a whole and offer our advice in hopeful and encouraging terms. We must try to show people that our counsel – even though we claim it to have divine provenance – is intended for the good of all. It might be hard to follow, and the course we have to choose may not be altogether convenient or agreeable, but in the end everyone will be better off if they'll listen to what we say. Do you think Christians have anything sound or useful to offer to current discussions? Why or why not?

Summary

Just because people are stubborn and stupid doesn't mean we stop caring for them, or seeking to do good works for them. Jonah sulked and slept in the hold, content to leave the lost world to its unwise choices. Paul stood bold and confident on the deck, encouraging the fearful and counseling them according to the wisdom of God. How can local churches be more like Paul and less like Jonah when it comes to the good of their communities?

Closing Prayer

To You, O LORD, I lift up my soul.
O my God, I trust in You;

Let me not be ashamed;
Let not my enemies triumph over me.
Indeed, let no one who waits on You be ashamed;
Let those be ashamed who deal treacherously without cause.
Show me Your ways, O LORD;
Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You *are* the God of my salvation;
On You I wait all the day.

Psalm 25.1-5

3 Help in the Short Term

Read and meditate on Acts 27.27-38.

Words of comfort and hope aren't enough when a society is in jeopardy. God's people need to be ready to act, and to offer immediate help where they can.

For reflection

1. The sailors determined that their ship was being driven into shallow water, so they set out anchors at the stern in hope of keeping the ship from crashing onto rocks (vv. 27, 28). They were not persuaded that was going to help, however, so they concocted a scheme to escape what they perceived would be certain destruction. Paul saw through their ploy, however, and counseled the centurion to keep them on board and to cut away the ship's boat to avoid that temptation ever rising again. Sometimes, when you're trying to help, you have to take measures to keep the unwise from acting even more unwisely. How might this relate to Christian involvement in matters of importance?
2. If they were going to run aground, Paul knew they'd need strength to get ashore. So he advised them to eat something before they threw the last of the provisions overboard. He prayed with thanksgiving in front of them all, and led the way to a meal. His prayer and actions encouraged the others, and all benefited from the repast. What can you learn from Paul about meeting the needs of people that come to your attention?
3. We get the sense that Paul was now very much in charge. Everyone was looking to him, and all benefited from his short-term counsel and example. Now they were ready for what everyone seemed to know, and what Paul had foretold, was the inevitable. We can't keep others from running aground, but we can speak the truth and show concern for the members of society as it heads for the rocks. How can we do this in our prayers (cf. 1 Tim. 2.1-8)?
4. Lesson 3: Talk is cheap. If we expect to make long-term changes in public policy, Christians need to be ready to act and to help others with short-term and immediate needs. Like Paul, we need to see the overall situation clearly and determine what should be done for the wellbeing of all (1 Chron. 12.32). Then we need to lead the way into the courses of action we prescribe. How can you begin to become more informed about issues within your home and church, and of morality, culture, and public policy?
5. Can you think of any actions Christians could begin to take right now that might help to shape the course of public policy for the future? What about in your [Personal Mission Field](#)? How could you begin to show more concern for the people God sends you to each day?

Summary

As the salt of the earth, Christians are called to preserve whatever is good and useful. The world may not appreciate our efforts, but our efforts will be consistent with our Kingdom-and-glory calling, and they may help to lay a foundation for our witness to the Lord. Do you suppose Paul was thinking *only* about this desperate situation as he worked to help save these people? Explain.

Closing Prayer

Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,
For we have been brought very low.
Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,

For Your name's sake!
Why should the nations say,
"Where *is* their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants *which has been* shed.
Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power
Preserve those who are appointed to die;
And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

Psalm 79.8-12

4 Safe at Last

Read and meditate on Acts 27.39-44

Cutting the anchors away would have increased the boat's speed, and hoisting the foresail would have lifted the bow, thus, hopefully, making it possible for the vessel to ride in closer to the shore. Instead, it struck a reef and lodged fast. Ouch.

For reflection

1. The constant pounding of waves against the stern caused the ship to begin breaking up, so now it was push come to shove. Would everyone continue to listen to Paul's advice? Would everyone be safe? Imagine the panic and fear. What would you as a Christian be doing about this time?
2. It's a good thing Paul and the centurion had come to respect one another. What the soldiers were planning was standard operating procedure (v. 42). The centurion intervened however, contrary to accepted Roman military practice, in order to keep Paul alive. Here is Roman government fulfilling its God-appointed charge, and going against established laws (Rom. 13.1-4). Is there a place for not obeying wicked laws when it comes to some matters? Explain.
3. Then the centurion took over and, with all the authority and threatening power he possessed, directed everyone to do what Paul had previously advised. Consequently, and against all odds, everyone landed safely on the beach. Sometimes it helps to have friends in places of power. Like Paul. Like us. Compose a prayer that you might use to seek the Lord's power for those who are in authority.
4. Lesson 4: In working to bring matters more in line with the will of the Lord, Christians should not scorn the help of people in places of power and authority. God has established government as a servant for good. Sometimes public servants can be encouraged to act in ways that may buck existing protocols but which, because they can see through to the larger vision of society's welfare, they may be willing to risk. We need to be in communication with our leaders, and to be praying for them faithfully (1 Tim. 2.1-8). Which public officials do you presently hold up in prayer?
5. Meditate on 1 Timothy 2.1-8. It's not a stretch to use this story of Paul and the shipwreck to think about our own roles in a society which is sinking in its own unwise choices. And the starting-point for making a solid contribution is prayer. Suggest some ways you might begin to be more faithful in praying for those who serve in places of authority. Share your thoughts about this with some other believers, and see if they'd be willing to join you from time to time to pray for these people.

Summary

Paul built up enough credibility with the centurion – by his patience, wisdom, courage, and resolve – to move that man to spare his life. Is it too much to expect that, if we were more encouraging and helpful to our leaders – even if only by praying for them, and letting them know we do – that they might show more of God's common grace toward us and our cause? Explain.

Closing Prayer

Let the saints be joyful in glory;
Let them sing aloud on their beds.
Let the high praises of God *be* in their mouth,
And a two-edged sword in their hand,
To execute vengeance on the nations,
And punishments on the peoples;

To bind their kings with chains,
And their nobles with fetters of iron;
To execute on them the written judgment—
This honor have all His saints.

Praise the LORD!

Psalm 149.5-9

5 Always on Duty

Read and meditate on Acts 28.1-10.

Certainly everyone knows Paul is the hero of this story. They would have understood if he'd have let himself be tended to and cared for by others. But that's not how Paul worked his Personal Mission Field.

For reflection

1. Instead, Paul went to work gathering sticks for the fire – still on duty, trying to help where he could, no task too menial. How does his example counsel you with respect to your Personal Mission Field?
2. The incident with the serpent is a bit of comic relief (we need some!). Paul had escaped assassination attempts (were those guys still fasting?), shipwreck, execution, and more. No little snake – poisonous or not – was going to keep him from getting to Rome. Paul didn't do this for showy reasons. He just trusted the Lord and pressed on in his work. What can we learn from his example about dealing with untoward circumstances or people?
3. We note how the local people changed their view of Paul in order to try to make sense of the circumstances they observed. Pagan religion is built on all kinds of shifting sand. Paul did not despise them for their fickleness or their folly. He just kept on being Paul. In what ways can you see that the religion of secularism – materialism, narcissism, licentiousness, and relativism – doesn't really make sense? How can we help those who hold this worldview to see the folly of it?
4. Paul showed himself to be a servant to all, beginning with the father of their generous host. Always on duty, always ready to serve, Paul's example is an excellent one for us. How might you become more like Paul in your Personal Mission Field?
5. Lesson 5: Keep working until the task is completed. Don't despise the small tasks, but do whatever comes before you to improve the wellbeing of all. Take every opportunity to expand your outreach. Live to serve, not to be served. What opportunities will you be presented with today to serve others? Are you ready for them?

Summary

The storm is over, the wreck is in the past. No sense dwelling on these or being traumatized by them. We don't wallow in our problems, and we can't let setbacks and trials keep us from our Kingdom-and-glory calling in the Lord. Paul certainly didn't. He dragged himself up on that shore, and the first question on his mind was, "What can I do to help?" The Lord honors such an attitude, as we see in these verses. How can you make sure that's your attitude every day?

Closing Prayer

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—
From whence comes my help?
My help *comes* from the LORD,
Who made heaven and earth.
He will not allow your foot to be moved;
He who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, He who keeps Israel
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The LORD *is* your keeper;
The LORD *is* your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day,
Nor the moon by night.
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;
He shall preserve your soul.
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in
From this time forth, and even forevermore.

Psalm 121

6 Rome at Last

Read and meditate on Acts 28.11-16.

Luke's account of the final leg is as historical as the rest of his story – places, details about travel and wintering, weather and navigation, how long it takes to get from here to there. The Kingdom of God unfolds in real history, and it turns real history rightside-up. Luke helps us to see this.

For reflection

1. Paul must have been elated to find fellow believers in Puteoli. Remember, “we” would have included Paul's Roman escort as well as his friends and companions. The Christians showed hospitality without discrimination. How can you see the Spirit of Christ at work in His Body here?
2. The brethren in Rome were so excited to hear about Paul's arrival that they actually went out to meet him and escorted him along the way – a kind of “triumphal procession” into the imperial capital. Rome was known for such processions, when a general returned leading captives into Rome. Do you think Luke or his readers would have been mindful of this, or that Luke might have wanted to say something along these lines with this brief report? Explain. How do you think this warm greeting might have impacted those Roman soldiers?
3. We note how the company of other believers encouraged Paul's soul and provoked him to give thanks. Even Paul needed the fellowship of the Body of Christ. Do we find our Christian brethren to be as encouraging? Are we as encouraging of other believers as we should be? Do we encourage one another in giving thanks to God?
4. In Rome, Paul was placed under house arrest, with a good deal of freedom. He would make the most of it. Paul had previously written to these brethren in Rome, telling them he was on his way (Rom. 15). They could not have known all that would transpire to get him there, but they were certainly glad to know he had arrived. The Body of Christ is one Body, all over the world, but we need to work hard to maintain that unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4.3). What are the implications of this for the oneness of Christ's Body for churches in a local community (Jn. 17.21)?
5. Does your church work to maintain unity with other churches in your denomination? In your community? Elsewhere in the world?

Summary

The greeting and reception given Paul by the believers in Rome is evidence that the Spirit of God had been at work in Rome, building the church there, just as He was throughout the Roman world. The oneness Paul felt with these brethren cheered and emboldened him. We need to work harder at oneness in the Body of Christ. What's one thing you might do in order to help your church realize more of its oneness with other congregations?

Closing Prayer

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is*
For brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Running down on the beard,
The beard of Aaron,
Running down on the edge of his garments.
It is like the dew of Hermon,

Descending upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—
Life forevermore.

Psalm 133

7 End of the Beginning

Read and meditate on Acts 28.17-31.

Luke's story ends where it began – with Jesus and the Kingdom of God, and His faithful servants continuing the work He began to do. The ongoing work which began in Jerusalem is continuing in Rome, and in each of our Personal Mission Fields.

For reflection

1. Paul called the Jewish leaders together because he wanted them to hear his case before he went before the Emperor. They had no clue about him or the charges against him, but they had heard about the “sect” of the Christians, and that it is spoken against everywhere. But they seemed interested. Do you think unbelievers in our day are interested in hearing about the Gospel? Why or why not?
2. Paul took up his wonted tactic, reasoning from and expounding the Scriptures about Christ and His Kingdom. Should we be reluctant to invite our unbelieving friends, co-workers, or neighbors to join us in having a look into the Scriptures? Explain.
3. The results were pretty much the same he encountered everywhere else, and his response was the same, too. He gave the Jews an opportunity to hear the Gospel. Now he would concentrate on the Gentiles. The goal of our witness is not to *convert* the lost but to *explain* the Good News. What's the difference?
4. Paul was a man under guard, but not the Gospel. His liberty may have been restrained, but not the Gospel. Rome could keep him under house arrest, and his opponents could scorn and deride him; but the Gospel continued, the Kingdom continued, the ongoing work of Christ continued, “with all boldness and without hindrance.” Is this work continuing in you?
5. Our final lesson from Paul and the entire book of Acts: What Jesus began to do, Jesus continues to do, and Jesus will finish. May we be found striving together with Him until that great day. What's the most important lesson you carry away from the book of Acts?

Summary

The ongoing work of Christ goes on. Scandals and plots can't stop it. Persecution fuels it. Storms and shipwrecks are just open doors of opportunity. Foes may decry and deny the Good News, but the world is full of people who are looking for the hope that is in Jesus. Are we looking for them? Are you?

Closing Prayer

God has spoken in His holiness:

“I will rejoice;

I will divide Shechem

And measure out the Valley of Succoth.

Gilead *is* Mine, and Manasseh *is* Mine;

Ephraim also *is* the helmet for My head;

Judah *is* My lawgiver.

Moab *is* My washpot;

Over Edom I will cast My shoe;

Philistia, shout in triumph because of Me.”

Who will bring me *to* the strong city?

Who will lead me to Edom?

Is it not You, O God, who cast us off?

And You, O God, *nbo* did not go out with our armies?
Give us help from trouble,
For the help of man *is* useless.
Through God we will do valiantly,
For *it is* He *nbo* shall tread down our enemies.

Psalm 60.6-12

For reflection or discussion

1. What do we mean by “the ongoing work of Christ”? Which part of that work is His? Which is ours?
2. Why is it important that Christians be ready to help and try to be an influence for good? How can we do this?
3. Why is the oneness of Christ’s Body so important? Why is it so hard to maintain (Eph. 4.3)? What can we do to realize more of this oneness?
4. How has our study of Acts helped you in working your own Personal Mission Field?
5. What’s the most important insight or lesson you’ve learned from Acts 27 and 28?

Glory to Glory

We are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ *from* the glory we encounter in God’s Word *to* the way we live for His glory in the world (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

What have you encountered *of* God’s glory in our reading and meditations in this week’s studies? How has He shown Himself *to* you more clearly? How can this help you live more consistently *for* His glory in the daily details of your life?

What have you learned about yourself from Acts 27 and 28 to help you in knowing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom?

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