

TUTORIAL

2.26

Paul is taken to Rome and teaches there for two years

Paul is given a trial before the governor in Caesarea, but denies he has committed any crime and asks to be brought before Caesar in Rome. He has a chance to speak to King Agrippa and his sister before beginning the long and eventful journey to Rome. Paul remains under house arrest for two years, but is able to teach and write letters to the churches.

The portion of Scripture referred to in this tutorial is: **Acts 24:27-28:31**.

Last time

In Jerusalem, Paul complied with a request of the church leaders that he participate in a Jewish ritual purification to demonstrate his orthodoxy. At the temple he had to be rescued by Roman soldiers when an angry mob accused him of religious sedition and tried to kill him. The Roman army commander arranged a meeting between Paul and the Supreme Jewish Council but it disintegrated into chaos. At night the Lord spoke to him, bringing reassurance and comfort. With Paul's life under threat the commander had him taken to Caesarea, where he was tried by the Roman governor. No clear verdict was reached and he was jailed, although well treated, for two years.

Paul uses his right as to “appeal to Caesar”

Eventually the governor, Felix - known by history for his brutality and corruption - is replaced by Porcius Festus who will die after only two years in this appointment. Soon after his arrival he makes the trip from the coast up to Jerusalem, where the religious leaders waste no time in putting their case against Paul to the new Roman ruler (Acts 24:27-25:12). They want him brought up to Jerusalem for trial, secretly hoping to have him ambushed and killed on the way. But Festus says he'll try the case in Caesarea, so the leaders go there soon after and make their accusations against Paul in court. When Paul denies having committed any crime, Festus - no doubt eager to make a good early impression in this province that's notoriously difficult to govern - asks him if he's willing to stand trial in Jerusalem. But Paul realises by now he won't get justice from Festus, he is aware of the Jewish leaders' evil intent and, most

importantly, he's determined to get to Rome and do whatever God has for him there, even if it means going as a prisoner. So in a move that effectively takes the matter out of the governor's jurisdiction, he formally *appeals to Caesar*...in other words, he claims his right as a Roman citizen to be tried by the imperial court in Rome.

Paul has opportunity to speak before King

Agrippa

The governor Festus knows that he has no choice (Acts 25:13-26:32); he'll have to send Paul to be tried by the emperor. But it's a most unusual case. There's no evidence of any Roman laws being broken by this Roman citizen, and yet there's a widespread demand for the death sentence for the former Pharisee allegedly violating the laws of his own people. What is the governor to say in the written explanation of the case that will accompany the prisoner to Rome? An opportunity for some advice comes with the visit of King Agrippa, great-grandson of Herod the Great, and his sister Bernice. Curious to hear this former Pharisee who's willing to risk everything for the sake of "a dead man named Jesus" he insists is actually alive, Agrippa and his sister come back the next day.

So Paul has the opportunity to tell his story once again before this quasi-Jewish ruler who grew up in Rome under the patronage of the Emperor Claudius. It's noticeable that Paul makes adjustments in order to connect and communicate with his audience. This time it's his own Jewishness rather than his Roman citizenship that he stresses in describing his initial persecution of the believers, then his dramatic conversion and commissioning by the resurrected Jesus. He concludes with an appeal to Agrippa's knowledge of the prophets and tries to convince him that everything they said has been fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. One thing Paul doesn't mention in his address is how years ago in Damascus, when Jesus stated that He'd chosen him to take His message to the surrounding ethnic groups as well as to the Jews, He also said that Paul would share the truth with kings.

In the intervening years since that first encounter, if he'd pictured the Lord's words coming true, it's likely that being a prisoner wasn't part of the dream. But by now, Paul has been through so much in his journey with his Master, that he is not even craving a prominent or glorious role in the unfolding Narrative...for him the important thing is that Jesus is seen and known by people. Being full or hungry, respected or humiliated, at peace or under stress, free or locked up...those things have become increasingly less important. He knows that it's not even his story anyway, but he's just glad to have a part if he is bringing glory to God and contributing somehow to His amazing purposes. As the royal party in Caesarea leave the hall where they've heard Paul's story, they agree that he has committed no crime, but he has appealed to Caesar, and so to Rome he must go.

Paul and the others begin the long trek to Rome

Along with some other prisoners being taken to Italy, the Apostle is placed in the custody of an officer, a commander of the Augustan or Imperial Regiment that has been serving in Syria (Acts 27:1-5). He and his soldiers will accompany Paul on what will prove to be an eventful trip, to say the least. The first ship they board is from near Troas, on the Aegean...a coastal trader that is probably heading home carrying cargo and passengers for different stops along the way. Doctor Luke has obviously decided to go with Paul to Rome because he narrates the rest of this story as an eyewitness. In fact, he has almost certainly been with Paul since they arrived here two years ago. It has been suggested that Luke probably stayed in Caesarea to be a support for Paul, and that it is during this time he collected eyewitness accounts from the disciples and others that he'd later compile, under the Spirit's guidance, as his *Gospel*. Another friend of theirs from Macedonia, Aristarchus, had come with them to Jerusalem and now he continues to travel with them, possibly as a personal assistant to Paul.

They head up the coast and dock at Sidon, a port about 40 kilometers south of modern day Beirut. The commander Julius is kind to Paul and lets him visit some friends there. The next day, as they head out they strike the first hint of the problems that lie ahead. Their course lies to the northwest but by now it's autumn and the *etesians* - strong, dry winds - are blowing from that direction, as they do most years. The square sailed ships of the time are not well suited to heading 'close to the wind' and so they are struggling, even to make it across the corner of the Mediterranean to the coast of Asia. Instead of going the straightest route, they have to loop up around the top end of Cyprus and parallel the coast until, around two weeks later, they land at Myra, on the southwest tip of Asia Minor.

They make it to Crete against contrary winds

The commander finds another ship that's headed their direction (Acts 27:6-12). Larger than the coastal trader they've been on, this one is a grain ship, sailing between Alexandria in Egypt and Italy. They've come across to Myra first before making the long haul west into the teeth of the dangerous autumn weather. They set out, full of grain and nearly 300 passengers...progress is slow. They sail on the eastern side of the island of Crete to get what protection they can from the wind that is howling now from the northwest. It takes another couple of weeks of tedious tacking back and forth to make their next port, an open bay, about a third of the way along the 260 kilometer long island. There's no mention of a vision from God, but somehow Paul senses trouble ahead. He speaks up but the commander, the captain and ship owner are keen to push on for Italy and don't listen to his warning.

After two weeks in a storm they are shipwrecked

At first things seem okay, but then the wind changes and suddenly they're being battered by gale-force winds from the northeast that all sailors in the Mediterranean know and fear. They're being blown further south and even though it's still 600 kilometers away, they worry they'll be driven onto the desolate stretch of sand banks off the north coast of Libya (Acts 27:13-44).

This is only the start of their ordeal. One terrifying day blends into the next until it seems like this nightmare will never end. Some of the wheat cargo has been thrown over and even the ship's tackle, to lighten the ship. No one is even bothering to eat any more. No doubt the soldiers and crew ask for the help of every deity they have ever heard of, but all to no avail...they've given up all hope. But of course Paul knows of a different reality, and he takes the opportunity to share this with them. Unlike their voiceless false gods, the true God that he belongs to and serves has communicated with him. This Creator God is not a helpless victim of natural forces - His intentions, like sending Paul to stand before the Emperor of Rome, won't flounder even in the face of the worst storm. Not only is He powerful, but He's merciful as well...He's going to rescue everyone on the ship even though they don't know Him. They'll be shipwrecked on an island, but they'll all survive.

And that's exactly what happens. They've battled the storm for two weeks and drifted 750 kilometers through open ocean when, in the middle of the night, the experienced sailors sense that they are close to land. As dawn breaks they are able to make out a small bay with a beach in an unfamiliar coast. They raise a sail and head towards it but before they can make it in through the breakers they run aground on a sand bank. With the waves smashing the boat to pieces around them, everyone jumps into the ocean and eventually makes it to shore, either swimming or holding on to planks.

Three months in Malta and then off to Italy

The sailors, soldiers, prisoners and passengers from the ship find out from people on the beach that they are on the island of Malta (Acts 28:1-14). They are treated kindly by the locals and by the Roman official stationed there. God demonstrates His power before the islanders when Paul is unaffected by the bite of a poisonous snake and when Paul (and possibly Luke) is used to heal a number of sick people. They are shown respect and gratitude and when the time comes for them to leave they are given everything they need for their onward journey. There is no mention of conversions or a church being planted then, perhaps a language barrier made real communication of truth impossible. There is, however, a tradition in Malta that it was through the Apostle Paul the Gospel first came to their island, but there's no real way to know for sure if this is factual or not.

After three months, spring brings more favorable weather and passage is found for them on another grain ship from Egypt that has wintered on the island. After leaving Malta, they head north to Syracuse on the eastern coast of the island of Sicily, then to Rhegium on the toe of Italy. Finally, they sail up the coast and into the bay of Naples with the active volcano Vesuvius looming overhead. Only 19 years after Paul's arrival it will erupt and famously bury the town of Pompeii at its base. They land in Puteoli, site of modern day Pozzuoli, the nearest harbor to the city of Rome and a hub of commercial and naval shipping for the Empire.

Paul lives under house arrest in Rome

They still have a land journey of about 240 kilometers ahead of them, so after being allowed to spend a week with a group of believers at the coastal city, they make their way to the *Via Apia* or *Appian Way* and then follow it towards the capital (Acts 28:15-31). The believers in Rome have found out that Paul and friends are coming, and they come to meet them on the road...some even travelling over 60 kilometers to welcome the Apostle. They haven't met him in person before, but of course they know him through the wonderful letter he wrote to them some 5 years ago. This is, of course, a huge encouragement to Paul, who has finally made it to the capital of the Empire, although not in the way he perhaps originally intended.

Although Paul is under guard all the time, because he hasn't committed a serious crime, and isn't considered a political threat, he's allowed to live in a house in the city that he rents himself, and he's free to invite people to visit. It seems that Luke stays with him in Rome for some time because later, in letters to the fellowship in Colossae and to a leader from that church, Philemon, the Apostle sends greetings from Doctor Luke. During this period of incarceration Paul will also write letters or epistles to the churches in Ephesus and Philippi. Soon after arriving in Rome, Paul has opportunity to share the truth about Jesus the Messiah with local Jewish leaders. It is clear that he is not bitter towards his own Jewish people, even though they have treated him so badly and tried to kill him just two years ago in Jerusalem. As has been the case throughout the entire Acts account, the response of these Jews in Rome to the Good News is mixed - some are persuaded but others refuse to believe.

Luke concludes his book about the amazing things Jesus has accomplished through His Apostles since His return to His Father, by briefly describing Paul's ministry in Rome. For two years he has opportunity to speak openly about God's sovereign purposes on earth that He has made possible through the Lord Jesus Christ. At the very beginning of Luke's account, he recorded the command of Jesus to His disciples that they should go out as His witnesses to the ends of the earth. In the three decades that are described in his book, through their efforts the *Ecclesia* has spread from its small beginnings in Jerusalem out through the Roman world and beyond. As His Body in *this*

generation we are called, like Peter, Philip, Stephen, James and Paul, to continue taking His Message out to the communities and ethnic groups everywhere that, after 2000 years, are still without access to the Good News.



DISCUSSION POINTS

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1. Imagine you've shared this much of God's Narrative with someone and seen them come to faith... they are here studying in university but will soon return to their home country where sharing Christian teaching is illegal, often resulting in persecution and long prison sentences. How would you advise them? What sections and/or themes would you highlight from the Acts account?
2. As we view the life of Paul, one thing that stands out is his unwavering sense of confidence in the overall direction and purpose for his life. Can you name three to five key things that, at this stage in your life, serve as guides or touchstones or 'core values' that underpin your priorities and decisions? If not, can you reflect on why this is and perhaps describe your search for this kind of definition?
3. Please feel free to share anything, either general or specific, that stands out as you reflect back on this study of the Acts Narrative.



ACTIVITIES

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1. Do any research necessary so that you know who *King Agrippa* was and a little about his (and the other Herods') relationship to the Jews and Judaism.
2. Re-read Paul's address to Agrippa and his sister Bernice in Acts 26. Note down any instances of Paul

contextualising in order to communicate truth with them.