

The Book of Acts - Chapter Twenty Eight

XI Acts 27:1-28:31 - The Witness in Rome (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Eight

With the drama of the storm and shipwreck behind them, all the ship's crew and passengers found themselves safely ashore on the island of Malta. The islanders, although heathens, were particularly gracious and welcoming, making them feel like guests. While building a fire for warmth, Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake. All the local people who witnessed this expected him to die, presuming him to be a criminal and that providence had caught up with him. When he did not die, they proclaimed him to be a god!

Paul's group were welcomed into the home of the island's chief official, Publius, whose father had an acute illness. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit instantaneously healed the man. After this, Paul would be involved in many other miraculous healings. Coupled with this, the snake bite and their survival from the shipwreck, these events would no doubt have impressed the local inhabitants, who would then have listened attentively to Paul's proclamation of the Gospel. When the winter was over it was time for them to leave Malta and the islanders provided all their needs for the journey ahead.

They sailed north via Sicily and southern Italy, before moving up the western coast to come to Puteoli, the main port for Naples. They stayed there for a week with the local church before continuing on to Rome. They were met by Roman believers up to 40 miles south of the city, who warmly welcomed Paul and travelled the final part of the journey with him.

Once in Rome, Paul was placed under guarded house arrest in his own rented apartment. After just three days, the leading Roman Jews came to see him, stated they had heard no bad reports about Paul but had heard negative reports about the Gospel message he proclaimed, so they arranged to come back on another occasion to hear Paul. When they did return, Paul spent much time explaining and proving that Jesus was long awaited Christ, who had been written about in their law and by the prophets. Once again, the group of men was divided between those who believed and those who didn't.

The story ends with Paul boldly proclaiming the Gospel to anyone who would come to listen to him, and he did so for at least the next two years, still a prisoner of the Romans but for Jesus. Paul is then lost to history except for those letters he wrote during or after this time. However, he has left the world with a remarkable legacy, he would finish the race!

Note that the dates stated in this chapter do tie in with the story so far, but as always they are contested, and no one has proof of the precise years of the NT major events and timelines.

XI.b Acts 28:1-10 - Paul ashore on Malta

The shipwrecked voyagers spent the remainder of the winter on the island. Paul's time there is highlighted by his protection from a viper's bite (vv.1-6), and his healing of the leading citizen's father (vv.7-10). God had not only saved them from the sea but cast them upon an island, where the inhabitants were benevolent and cared for them very well. It was clearly providential, for the Gospel had not yet reached Malta and God had work for Paul to do before his journey could continue.

Malta later became a strong Christian country, particularly in the middle ages when it came under the authority of Spain. After Islamic forces took Palestine during the second crusades, the Knights Hospitaller, a religious and military group that had been formed to care for sick and poor pilgrims in the Holy Land, relocated to Malta, and are commonly known as the Knights of Malta. This is an organisation that still exists today.

¹ Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta.

Acts 28:1

Malta was on the main route from Myra (Acts 27:5) to Rome. God's providence had brought them through the storm and back on course. The most famous archaeological remains on Malta are prehistoric or Phœnician; however, Malta also thrived under the Romans, and residential villas used in the NT period have been excavated.

² The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.

Acts 28:2

The Greek, translated here as islanders, designated the native people as barbarians, i.e. barbaroi. This is not a word that carried a negative connotation but simply referred in a general way to those who did not speak Greek. No doubt the island also had a number of educated people who did speak Greek, including the chief official.

³ 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. ⁴ 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, Justice has not allowed him to live."

Acts 28:3-4

The islanders believed Paul to be a murderer or something similar for, although he had survived the sea, it looked as though providence would still deal with him, and they expected him to die.

Greco-Roman lore spoke of fugitives, who escaped shipwrecks only to be killed by poisonous snakes. Mark 16:18 states: <<they will pick up snakes with their hands>>.

We must always remember that Mark 16:9-20 were not included in the early manuscripts and may not have been written by Mark. Although much of what is written in these verses is corroborated elsewhere in scripture, this verse, which also states that disciples can drink deadly poison and not be harmed, is not. The best advice to give for this is: <<Do not test the LORD your God>> (Deuteronomy 6:16a).

Justice, Greek dikē, in Greek can refer to justice or providence, or to the name of the goddess who dispenses justice: <<"Whoever flees from the terror will fall into a pit, whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare">> (Jeremiah 48:44a).

Good people are afflicted in this life as Jesus foretold of his followers: <<If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you>> (John 15:18-19), and John again comments: <<Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you>> (1 John 3:13). Those who judge the afflicted as wicked make the same mistake Job's friends did in condemning him.

⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.

Acts 28:5

Shook the snake off. Affliction can be used for the strengthening of our faith and patience.

The serpent tested Paul's faith:

1. He didn't react fearfully or throw the viper off in terror as many of us maybe would have, but let it hang from his hand long enough for others to take note of it. See Mark 16:18 again, but note the caution given.
2. He shook the viper carefully into the fire to destroy it, just as he might have shaken off Satan's worldly temptations that most of us face: <<We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him>> (1 John 5:18).
3. It did him no harm nor did he make a fuss about it. RC church tradition states that no venomous creature has lived on Malta since, but this is untrue as there are four reported snake types on Malta, two of which are poisonous, including the variety that many believe bit Paul; the other is believed to have been introduced by ship during the First World War. There are also a number of poisonous jelly-fish, but these would not have been a problem for those shipwrecked, as the sea was far too rough for them to have been on the surface to bite the swimmers.

⁶ 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.

Acts 28:6

When the Lystrans took Paul as a god, he protested vigorously: <<But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them>> (Acts 14:14-15). The situation differs here, as no attempt to worship him is related. Throughout Acts miracles provide an opportunity for witness, and it is likely that Paul also witnessed to the Maltese, and this incident probably gave him a further opportunity to share the Gospel, just as the impending miraculous healings would.

The people deified him showing how fickle the human mind is: from murderer to god; from God to murderer, i.e. crucify him!

The viper brought the attention of the inhabitants on Paul out of all the 276 strangers who had turned up on their island. He had just gone from one disaster to another: <<It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him>> (Amos 5:19), and: <<Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake>> (Ecclesiastes 10:8). God seems to use this way of leading us to the people we need to listen

to, as personal testimonies are powerful. Only Jesus seemed to be bitten by the serpent more than Paul in his lifetime: <<And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel>> (Genesis 3:15).

⁷ There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably.

Acts 28:7

Publius is called the chief official, Greek *prōtos*, which was probably similar to being the governor of the island, indeed, he may have been a Roman proconsul, but there is not supporting evidence for this. The term has been found on Maltese inscriptions, and was probably a formal title.

Welcomed us to his home. He had received Paul in the name of a prophet and had received the prophet's reward: <<Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward>> (Matthew 10:41).

⁸ 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.

Acts 28:8

The description of Publius' father as having fever and dysentery fits the symptoms of an infection caused by goat's milk called 'Malta fever'. This illness was usually fatal in Paul's day; those who did recover usually did so very slowly but here it is again immediate as is usual when God is directly involved in the healing.

⁹ When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰ They honoured us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

Acts 28:9-10

The coming of the rest of the sick is reminiscent of what happened after Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law: <<Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Christ>> (Luke 4:38-41). The significance of the setting sun was that this had been a Sabbath, which had ended at sunset and so people were free to move around to do such 'work' as this, or so it was seen by the Pharisaic traditions of the time.

Honoured us in many ways. Travellers on ancient ships usually had to provide their own meals. The hospitable Maltese people equipped Paul and his shipmates for the remainder of their voyage. The Maltese received the gifts of Paul's teaching and healing, which were given free: <<Freely you have received, freely give>> (Matthew 10:8b). But for the spiritual gifts that had been imparted on them, they shared their material gifts for their journey to Rome, which they now undertook. This is a concept we have seen before: <<For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have

shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings>> (Romans 15:26-27).

XI.c Acts 28:11-16 - Paul's arrival at Rome

These verses relate the final leg of Paul's journey and his arrival in the city of Rome.

¹¹ 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.

Acts 28:11

After three months. After the winter, it became safe to navigate the Mediterranean Sea again.

The Alexandrian ship was likely a grain ship, similar to the one they had been shipwrecked on the previous year.

Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, were viewed as the gods who protected seamen. Luke no doubt mentions them as the ship's company would now feel secure in their superstition despite the miraculous work of God that had rescued them on their last journey. For their forthcoming journey, as with others, all that was needed is faith and trust.

¹² We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³ 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.



Acts 28:12-13

See the map for the route taken by Paul's ship from Malta, via Syracuse, through the Messina Straits and then on northwards to Puteoli, which is just northwest of Naples.

Syracuse was at the eastern end of Sicily. Its fame as a Hellenistic city rivalled that of Athens, and the extensive archaeological remains at Syracuse include a great theatre and the temple of Apollo.

Rhegium, a city of the kingdom of Calabria or Naples, and modern Reggio di Calabria, was at the southern tip of Italy across the Messina Straits from Sicily. Inscriptions, literature, and archaeological evidence testify to Rhegium's importance as a port city.

The legend is that Paul preached there that evening on the beach and was so powerful that even the fish came to the edge of the sea to listen to him. After giving his message, he then set fire to a stone column with his candle and many who witnessed this came to faith. His previously unmentioned and unknown companion on the voyage, Stephen, remained behind to become their first bishop. The sad thing is that some people actually believe such fanciful stories.

The reality seems to be that their ship anchored off the city for the night before continuing its journey to Puteoli, modern Pozzuoli near Naples, which was a major port for Roman traffic and was some 257 miles or 413km by road up the western coast of Italy from Rhegium.

¹⁴ There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome.

Acts 28:14

The brothers at Puteoli are evidence that Christianity had not only reached Rome by this time (AD60), but was widely dispersed in Italy. They stayed there with disciples for a week. Julius remained respectful of Paul to the very last and allowed him this visit, even though he was probably close to his own home in Rome, and had been away for a long time.

There were now a number of Jews and Christians living in Rome and the surrounding cities, as Claudius had died about 5 years earlier, and his edict against the Jews had died with him.

Luke's comment, so we came to Rome, may seem premature, as Rome was still 130 miles or 209km away, but it perhaps functions as a summary statement, indicating the process by which Paul reached Rome.

Despite the claim of some traditions that Peter planted the church in Rome, it is unlikely that Peter came to Rome until after Paul. The most probable explanation is that some of the Roman Jews, who heard Peter and the other apostles proclaim the word of God at Pentecost in Jerusalem more than 25 years previously, see Acts 2:10, had returned to Rome and established the church then among the Jews initially and then the Gentiles also.

¹⁵ The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they travelled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged.

Acts 28:15

The brothers there had heard that we were coming. It is likely that some disciples had travelled all the way up from Puteoli to inform those in Rome of Paul's arrival, indicating they saw this as a major event in the life of the church in Italy.



Paul's party was met by Roman Christians at two points along the way to Rome: the Forum or marketplace of Appius, some 40 miles or 64km from Rome, and 12 miles or 19km farther on at The Three Taverns. Paul had written his epistle to the Roman church about three years earlier during his winter stay in Corinth, and, although he had not personally visited Rome, his greetings at the end of his letter, see Romans 16:1-16, show that he already had many acquaintances in the church there, or he knew them by reputation, at least.

Paul thanked God. That these disciples had travelled so far from Rome to meet Paul shows the great respect and anticipation they had. Paul was coming as a Roman prisoner and so even association with him could mean trouble for them, especially under the increasing wickedness of Nero, but they went anyway. Paul had given thanks for the Roman church: <<First, I thank

my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world>> (Romans 1:8), and he gave thanks again for them here as they met him on the road.

Prisoners for Christ, who are not set free from their physical bonds, still have reason to be thankful: <<He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive>> (Psalm 106:46), like Joseph: <<the Lord was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden>> (Genesis 39:21), and Jehoiachin: <<In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin from prison on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honour higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon>> (2 Kings 25:27-28).

Some commentators are critical that this group of Roman disciples were so supportive of Paul at this time but they would abandon him in his time of trial, as stated in 2 Timothy 4:16, but it seems more likely that Paul was referring to the Gentiles who had been with him, as the Roman believers would themselves have been the victims of persecution, and many of them were probably dead by the time Paul wrote his final letter to Timothy.

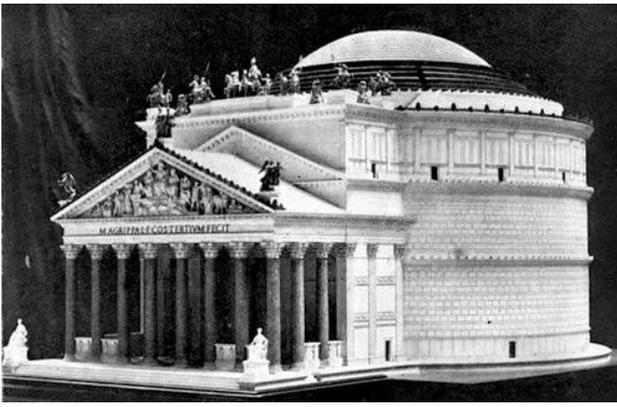
¹⁶ When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Acts 28:16

Allowing Paul to provide his own quarters points to his high status as a prisoner and perhaps to the support of local believers, who had influence in the city.

The city of Rome was founded upon seven hills on the eastern shore of the Tiber River. Rome grew from a small city to an empire through its conquests of Italy (3rd Century BC), Carthage in north Africa (3rd Century BC), Greece and Macedonia (2nd Century BC), western and northern Europe (2nd Century BC to 2nd Century AD), and Egypt and much of the Near East (1st Century BC). By Paul's day, the senatorial rule of the Roman republic had succumbed to a centralised empire under the leadership of Augustus (27BC-AD14), Tiberius (AD14-37), Gaius (AD37-41), Claudius (AD41-54), and Nero (AD54-68).

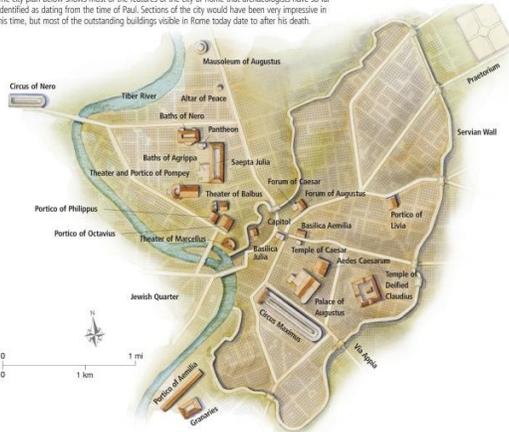
Archæological evidence in Rome confirms monumental structures that stood during the time of Paul, such as the Circus Maximus, Tabularium, i.e. state archives, theatres including those of Pompey and of Marcellus, and multiple forums. Later, in the 3rd Century AD, the Umbilicus Romæ stood in the centre of the city, and this cylindrical monument marked the theoretical centre of the Roman world; likely this way of thinking about Rome's place in the world stemmed from well before the NT period. The prestige of the early emperors was memorialised during Paul's day in their basilicas, arches, and forums, e.g. the Forums of Cæsar and of Augustus, in the Altar of Peace, in the Mausoleum of Augustus, in porticoes and images honouring their extended imperial family, and in imperial cult temples, such as the temple of Julius Cæsar from 29BC and the temple of Claudius. Innumerable pagan gods received worship in Rome. Especially impressive temples were dedicated to such ancient gods and goddesses including Mars, Saturn, Castor and Pollux, Vesta, Venus and Roma, Apollo, and Jupiter. Indeed, devotion to all the great Roman gods was offered in the monumental domed Pantheon, which stands in Rome to this day. An earlier Pantheon, depicted in the illustration, was built in 27BC and destroyed by fire in AD80. The present-day structure was built around AD120.



A significant portion of the city was destroyed by fire during Nero's rule in AD64. Nero, who was suspected of having started the blaze, blamed and persecuted Christians for the conflagration. The fire allowed Nero to design and construct his own monumental buildings, including his 200-acre imperial dwelling, the Domus Aurea or Golden House.

ROME IN THE TIME OF PAUL (C. A.D. 60)

The city plan below shows most of the features of the city of Rome that archaeologists have so far identified as dating from the time of Paul. Sections of the city would have been very impressive in his time, but most of the outstanding buildings visible in Rome today date to after his death.



Among the structures that are contemporary with the last books in the NT canon, one should especially note the Arch of Titus and the Coliseum. The Arch of Titus, built in AD81 by the Emperor Domitian, who reigned AD81-96, commemorates the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD70.

The two generals who re-conquered Palestine received such fame from this war that they both attained imperial rule, which went first to Vespasian (AD69-79) and then to his son Titus (AD79-81).

The Arch of Titus still manifests a relief portraying the captured temple menorah and other Jewish sacred objects being carried through Rome in processional tribute to Titus. Vespasian and Titus built the Flavian Amphitheatre, better known as the Coliseum due to its proximity to a gigantic statue, Greek kolossos, of Nero. The Coliseum is estimated to have seated more than 45,000 for gladiatorial spectacles.



The Arch of Titus in Rome



The Coliseum in Rome

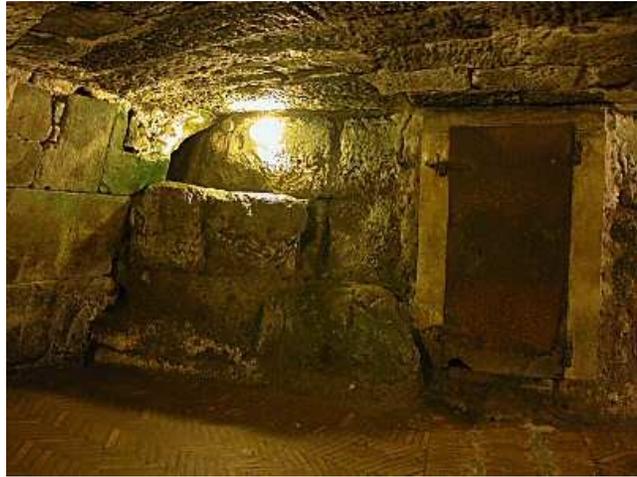
Daily life in Rome could be luxurious for the wealthy but onerous for others. Multiple aqueducts and a huge sewer system provided for the immense water requirements of Rome, including the many bathhouses, fountains, and latrines. Food had to be imported to satisfy the needs of this thriving metropolis, and the emperor often directly oversaw the vital grain supply. Luxurious villas in Rome were the privileged possessions of the wealthiest

families, often of senatorial or equestrian rank, and especially of the emperors, but most of the housing in ancient Rome consisted of *insulæ*, i.e. multi-story apartment buildings often constructed above ground-floor shops. Contemporary authors spoke of a severely overcrowded, loud, and smelly city, a place that provided every virtue and vice known to mankind. The residents of Rome were mostly pagan, although a sizable Jewish population also existed, as evidenced both by 1st Century literature and by later remains of inscriptions. The expulsion of the Jews under the Emperor Claudius in AD49 was a limited measure.

Today, churches in Rome built during the 4th-5th Century Byzantine period mark the traditional burial places of Paul and of Peter, reflecting the post-NT church tradition which claims that Paul and Peter died as martyrs in Rome during the reign of Nero, circa

AD64-65, perhaps after an incarceration in the Mamertine Prison. The Roman catacombs house early Christian burials from the 2nd Century AD and after, and these catacombs contain some inscriptions and graffiti testifying to Christian martyrdom prior to the legitimisation of Christianity by Licinius and Constantine, by the Edict of Milan in AD313.

The image shows the inside of the Mamertine Prison in Rome, where Paul, Peter and many other Christians were probably held prior to being executed.



XI.d Acts 28:17-31 - Paul preaches at Rome under guard

Due to his house arrest, Paul was unable to visit the synagogues himself or any other locations in the city, so he invited the leading Roman Jews to come to him.

¹⁷ Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. 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. ¹⁸ They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death.

Acts 28:17-18

On meeting with them after only three days in Rome, Paul identified himself with them by calling them brothers and attesting to his Jewish heritage.

The leaders of the Jews were probably the elders of the synagogues, of which there were a number in Rome. Although a different title is normally given for these people, and it may be had not yet fully established their organisational structures following their return from Roman exile. Paul’s main purpose in this meeting was to explain his presence in Rome. He declared his innocence of transgressing any Jewish law.

Handed over to the Romans. Some interpreters think this refers to Paul’s original capture in Jerusalem (Acts 21:33-36); others think it refers to his transfer out of Jerusalem into the Roman judicial system to stand trial in Cæsarea (Acts 23:23-35).

Wanted to release me. All the Roman officials and King Agrippa agreed that Paul was innocent of all charges brought against him: <<Agrippa said to Festus, “ This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Cæsar” >> (Acts 26:32).

¹⁹ But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Cæsar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own people.

Acts 28:19

I was compelled. This could either be seen as a way of avoiding death at the hands of the Jews, or providential in ensuring that Paul would witness in the centre of the Empire and to the emperor himself.

Not that I had any charge to bring. Paul was a loyal Jew not only with respect to the Jews' charges against him but also in his refusal to accuse them of any wrongdoing.

²⁰ 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.”

Acts 28:20

The hope of Israel is the coming of the Messiah and was fulfilled by Jesus, as attested by his resurrection and ascension, see Acts 23:6, 24:15, 26:8 and 26:23, for similar statements by Paul.

Paul outlined the reason for being there. He had done nothing against the Jews, their religion or their traditions. Although he had not required Gentiles to undergo Jewish rites, he had never instructed Jewish converts not to observe their traditions, although he had pointed out Peter's hypocrisy for not eating with Gentiles when some of the Jerusalem Jews came to Antioch, see Galatians 2:11-21. It was for the hope of Israel that the Jews had handed Paul over to the Romans, who in turn had found him innocent. When they would not free him but wanted him to be tried in Jerusalem, he appealed to Cæsar but had no intention of haranguing his country in a Gentile court. The Jewish nation was seen by Rome to be factious, turbulent, disaffected and dangerous. An eloquent man like Paul could easily have made a case against them that Nero would not oppose, but that was not Paul's intention. Paul had frequently made intercession for his nation and would continue to do so; he would not make intercession against them. Any judgement on Israel would be rightly left to God.

²¹ They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judæa concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.

Acts 28:21

Said anything bad about you. In the end it would be the change in Jewish leadership, and their failure to even travel to Rome to oppose Paul in court, that would have Paul set free. But that would not be for at least a further two years, as Nero was allegedly wandering around Italy at that time, seeking solace. He had apparently had his mother murdered and then felt remorse for doing so. During this time, a backlog of cases built up, including Paul's.

²² But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

Acts 28:22

Talking against this sect. Even though they had only heard negative reports about the Gospel, they were still prepared to hear Paul on it for themselves before making their own judgement. This indicates the same open-mindedness that the Jews in Berea had shown (Acts 17:11), unlike many of their counterparts in Jerusalem who refused to listen, and many of the Berean Jews subsequently came to faith, just as some in Rome would.

²³ They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

Acts 28:23

Larger numbers shows the interest that Paul's presence and the Gospel message had generated among them at that time.

From morning till evening shows this was an all day meeting and Paul would have provided much evidence, no doubt breaking of in prayer and praise to God throughout the day.

The content of Paul's message was the kingdom of God and Jesus, see v.31. The kingdom represents the fulfilment of God's saving promises to his people.

The Law of Moses and from the Prophets. These OT scriptures, along with the Psalms, are full of references to the coming Messiah, who he would be, where he would come from, what he would accomplish, how he would die and that he would be raised to life again. The Jews were steeped in the tradition of the scriptures, but too few of them fully understood what they were being told, nor were they able to make the link to Jesus as the Christ, despite all the evidence that teachers like Paul were able to proclaim to them. See also comments made on Luke 24:44 and 24:45, Acts 2:31, 3:11-26 and 3:24.

The kingdom of God was inaugurated, though not completely realised, in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus is not only the messianic Son of David, but the King who exercises God's own kingdom power against Satan and his agents, and overcomes the kingdom of Satan, i.e. the world as it is today and in each generation, through his much greater power.

²⁴ Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe.

Acts 28:24

We have seen this pattern of the Jews' resistance before. See Acts 5:33, 7:51, 12:1, 13:45 and 25:11. Amos 4:6 states: <<"I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the Lord>>, showing the hard-heartedness of the Jews even when undergoing physical hardships imposed by God. How much less notice will they take of him when things seem to be going well in their lives?

²⁵ They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made his final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶ "Go to this people and say,
"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

²⁷ 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.’

Acts 28:25-27

Luke records this meeting quite succinctly but it had lasted many hours, during which Paul proclaimed the whole Gospel to them, proving that Jesus was the Christ using Moses and all the prophets as recorded in the OT scriptures they were so familiar with, yet did not understand. After this, the group were divided in their judgements and understanding; some believed and some didn't. Even among those that did not believe there was contention about what it was they could not accept. They disagreed among themselves on what they had heard: <<But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division>> (Luke 12:48-51). Jesus, as always, was the rock of salvation and a foundation for some, while being a stumbling block for others.

Isaiah 6:9-10, quoted here, was also quoted by Jesus to explain the failure of the Jews, as a whole, to accept him, see Matthew 13:14-15. They had eyes to see, ears to hear, but the heart, i.e. not the physical heart but it was their brains - the organ of thinking, willing, and deciding, that failed to respond.

It seems that Paul said this more in regret and sadness than in anger or resentment. The following scriptures may also have applied: <<"The word of the Lord you have spoken is good," Hezekiah replied. For he thought, "There will be peace and security in my lifetime" >> (Isaiah 39:8), <<Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned>> (Mark 16:16), <<You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you>> (Matthew 15:7), <<O Lord, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; let the fire reserved for your enemies consume them>> (Isaiah 26:11), and: <<But they refused to pay attention; stubbornly they turned their backs and stopped up their ears. They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law or to the words that the Lord Almighty had sent by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. So the Lord Almighty was very angry>> (Zechariah 7:11-12).

There seems to be nothing harder than for a man to admit he is in the wrong. Satan so often prevents the conversion of souls to God by blinding the mind through confusion and misunderstanding: <<The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God>> (2 Corinthians 4:4). Deuteronomy 29:4 <<But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear>>, and Isaiah 29:10-12 <<The Lord has brought over you a deep sleep: He has sealed your eyes (the prophets); he has covered your heads (the seers). For you this whole vision is nothing but words sealed in a scroll. And if you give the scroll to someone who can read, and say to him, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I can't; it is sealed." Or if you give the scroll to someone who cannot read, and say, "Read this, please," he will answer, "I don't know how to read" >>, also seem to apply.

²⁸ "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

Acts 28:28

Paul's pattern of turning from the Jews to witness to the Gentiles repeated itself in Rome, but there is no reason to think that he gave up on the Jews in Rome at this point. We saw this in Corinth too, when Paul relocated next door to the synagogue to give the Jews every opportunity to hear him proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Jesus said: <<For salvation is from the Jews>> (John 4:22c), but their rejection of the Gospel is justification itself for it being taken to the Gentiles, many of whom so freely embraced it, but even more continue to reject it, just as the Jews did. Paul had previously written to the church in Rome: <<Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious>> (Romans 11:11), and: <<in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them>> (Romans 11:14), which shows how passionate Paul was that the Jews should turn to God through Jesus. He was much more than an apostle to the Gentiles. Their aggravation and condemnation of this activity was perhaps similar to the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law sneering at the tax collectors and sinners, who went to receive John's baptism: <<For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him>> (Matthew 21:32).

The absurd thing is that Jews thought it so wrong that the Gospel, i.e. the true salvation of God, should be taken to the Gentiles as it was highly prized and promised to the Jews as God's chosen people. Yet they considered themselves unworthy of such a prize by rejecting the Gospel for themselves. If they did not believe in it then why object that it should be given to someone else?

They will listen! Some have, but many of us, too many, still will not listen to the only truth that will save us from ourselves and from a life totally separated from God for all eternity.

{{Verse 29 is not in early manuscripts and does not appear in the NIV translation. The following is taken from the ASV:

²⁹ And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, having much disputing among themselves}}

³⁰ For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹ Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 28:30-31

For Paul's provision of his own quarters, i.e. his own rented house, see v.16.

Without hindrance shows that Christianity was not yet under the persecution that was still to come and that the local Jews, who had not accepted the Gospel, were not as actively opposed to it as their brothers were in other towns and cities.

His sharing the Gospel with all who came to him would have included both Jews and Gentiles, see comment on v.28. As with Joseph, whom the Chief Cupbearer forgot and left to languish in prison (Genesis 40:23), so too Paul was forgotten about by the Roman judicial system, so his situation continued for two whole years, i.e. AD60-62, at which time Luke's account ends. It is likely that Luke wrote his Gospel, either in Cæsarea or here in Rome, and almost certainly wrote and sent his second account to Theophilus during this time in Rome.

Yet for Paul, his time of captivity and relative isolation in Rome may have been a blessing. It had been several years since his last beating and, perhaps for the first time since he was a child, he had his own house to live in. He could freely study, write and meet with all that would call on him, and was a place of peace and rest: <<Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" >> (Mark 6:31). When we cannot do what we would in the service of Christ then we must do that which we can.

Philippians 4:22 <<All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Cæsar's household>>, seems to indicate he had been before the Emperor before writing the letter, or perhaps that some of Cæsar's household had come to him for teaching.

Information as to what happened beyond this time comes to us from extra-biblical sources and from hints in the last few letters of Paul.

First Clement 5.7, written in AD95, perhaps the earliest known orthodox Christian writing after the NT, speaks of Paul preaching in 'the limits of the west', which may indicate the fulfilment of his desire to preach in Spain: <<I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while>> (Romans 15:24). That would point to his release from the first Roman imprisonment.

The church historian Eusebius, writing in AD325, cites the tradition that Paul was freed from confinement and carried on a further ministry until he was arrested and placed in a second Roman imprisonment, at which time he was martyred (Ecclesiastical History 2.22).

In God's sovereignty, Paul's time in prison was not wasted, for it was during his Roman imprisonment that he wrote the letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Some commentators say he wrote Galatians at this time also, but most seem to hold that it was written from Antioch after his first missionary journey. If he were the author of Hebrews, and there is much contention on this issue, none of which can be proven, then it would have been written shortly before his release from his first imprisonment: <<I want you to know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he arrives soon, I will come with him to see you>> (Hebrews 13:23).

He would then have embarked on his 4th missionary journey that is unrecorded, but may have taken him to Spain but certainly Crete, Greece and Asia. The time after Paul's release from his first imprisonment, i.e. early-60's AD, would be when he wrote 1 Timothy and Titus. Some commentators believe that it was on this journey that Paul fell foul of Alexander the Coppersmith in Ephesus, who had him rearrested and shipped back to Rome.

There is a popular account that Paul had returned to Rome freely during the time of persecution to rebuild the ailing Roman church, as many of its senior members had been martyred. During this time, it is alleged his teaching brought one of Nero's mistresses to faith, who then repented of her former life. This upset Nero, who had Paul arrested and beheaded. An interesting story but with no supporting evidence.

He almost certainly wrote his last letter, 2 Timothy, during his second imprisonment, as he awaited execution: <<For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing>> (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Whatever the truth, history does not record the facts of Paul's life beyond that recorded here in Acts 28:30-31, and that is how we should leave it, giving thanks to God for the faithful service of this great man, who dedicated his life to God, initially through his

misguided Pharisaic traditions, but subsequently in full honour to the Risen Lord he had encountered on the Damascus Road. He accepted the hardships with the same grace that he taught was poured out by the Lord on all of us, and he freely proclaimed the Gospel, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

Epilogue:

And so this amazing story comes to an end. We read that: <<Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written>> (John 20:21), and it is likely this could be said of the apostles of that era too. Although there are many stories held in church tradition that tell us what the original apostles did to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, only the work of the inner core of Peter, John and James are mentioned in scripture.

James is mentioned briefly in Acts at his martyrdom. We see John working with Peter in the temple and in Samaria; that he stood bravely before the Sanhedrin, and we know he spent many years as an elder in Ephesus in later life. He ended up in exile on the island of Patmos for his service to Christ, where he would receive Jesus' Revelation.

Peter's story is given in more detail and we saw his work of healing, and the raising of Tabatha to life. We have a detailed account of his miraculous escape from Herod Agrippa, his vision in Joppa, showing that the Gentiles had equality with the Jews, and subsequently his bringing Cornelius' household to faith. Peter was also a key figure at the Jerusalem council.

In Acts, we are also introduced to new characters, such as Barnabas, who came to our attention through his generous gift to the early church, his acceptance of Paul as a disciple, and for bringing Paul out of obscurity in Tarsus to work in Antioch, and then sharing his first missionary journey.

Two of the Hellenist believers are also prominent. Stephen for his bravery before the Sanhedrin and his subsequent martyrdom for defending the Gospel, and Philip, who took the word to Samaria, converted an Ethiopian official, and then of his work around the plains of Sharon.

But the main focus in the second half of this great adventure is the work of Paul. His testimony, courage, conviction and perseverance, through unbelievable hardships, stand out as the brightest of all beacons for the Gospel. There has never been another like him and, as we read about Jesus, the world could not contain all the books had Paul's full story of 30-plus years as a Christian been told.

However, the story does not end with the deaths of these great men and women that we read about in scripture for, as many teachers and pastors will say, Chapter Twenty Nine of Acts is still being written. It contains all the work that is being done by disciples of Jesus throughout the world in each generation from then until now, and will continue until the Lord returns.

For our part, we must remain faithful in the traditions of those who went before us, and pass on the baton to those who will follow, and perhaps our prayer will be like that of John in Revelation 22:20b:

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.