

Bible Study - Acts 28

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28:1 That Paul was under God’s protection is further underscored by the first incident that occurred on Malta—the apostle’s deliverance from the bite of a viper. This evidently took place soon after the entire party aboard the ship safely reached shore. They learned from the natives that they were on the island of Malta.⁵¹⁶ The ship’s crew had been unable to ascertain their position because of the darkened sky in the storm’s fury (27:20). Somewhat miraculously they had been delivered virtually on course for their final destination of Italy.

28:2–3 The simple natives of the island⁵²⁷ did not share the fear and suspicion that one might have expected and showed the storm-weary voyagers “unusual kindness” (*philanthrōpian*), lighting a fire to warm them from the chilly breeze that followed the “northeaster” (v. 2). Paul did not consider it beneath his dignity to assist in the maintenance of the fire and gathered sticks up into a bundle and threw them on the blaze. The heat from the fire revived a snake from its cold-blooded stupor brought on by the chill. It had been concealed

⁵¹⁶ Because of the reference to “Adria” in 27:27 (see n. 33), there have been recurring attempts to place the site of Paul’s shipwreck on the island of Melita, the modern Mljet, the southernmost of the Dalmatian islands in the Adriatic Sea. For a recent revival of this theory, see A. Acworth, “Where was St. Paul Shipwrecked? A Re-examination of the Evidence,” *JTS* 24 (1973): 190–93, and O. F. A. Meinardus, “St. Paul Shipwrecked in Dalmatia,” *BA* 39 (1976): 145–47. For a thorough rebuttal of this view, see Hemer, “Euraquilo and Melita,” 100–111. Recently H. Warnecke has argued that the shipwreck took place on the island of Cephalonia further south in the Adriatic (*Die Tatsachliche Romfahrt des Apostels Paulus* [Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1987]). For the implausibility of this suggestion, see B. Schwank, “Also doch Malta? Spurensuche auf Kefalonia,” *BK* 45 (1990): 43–46, and J. Wehnert, “Gestrandet: Zu einer neuen These über den Schiffbruch des Apostels Paulus auf dem Wege nach Rom (Apg. 27–28),” *ZTK* 87 (1990): 67–99.

⁵²⁷ Luke described the natives as “barbarians” (βάρβαροι). The term indicates a language difference and reflects Luke’s Greek bias. For a Greek, anyone speaking a language other than Greek was denoted a “barbarian.” The word is onomatopoeic, meaning that the foreign speech sounds to the Greek-speaker like “bar-bar-bar,” meaningless babbling. (Cf. Paul’s use of the term in precisely this sense in 1 Cor 14:11.) Ancient Maltese was a Punic dialect, deriving from the Phoenicians who colonized the island in the first millennium B.C. Inscriptions found on Malta in both Punic and Greek would indicate that these were the main languages used there in the first century; cf. H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (New York: Harper, 1955), 24. Malta seems to have been under the administration of a Roman procurator in the first century (R. B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* [London: Methuen, 1901], 493).

lifeless in Paul's bundle of twigs; and as the apostle threw the sticks on the fire, it struck and fixed itself to his hand.

The snake has provoked no end of discussion among scholars. Luke used a term (*echidna*) that generally denotes a "viper," a poisonous snake; but it has been pointed out that today there are no poisonous snakes on Malta. Obviously the current situation on the island would have little to say about conditions there in the first century. Malta has been heavily populated through the centuries, and poisonous snakes would have had little chance for survival.⁵³⁸ But the term *echidna* was not always used with precision, and it is possible that Paul's snake was not poisonous at all.⁵⁴⁹ Whether or not that was the case is impossible to determine from the text.

28:4–5 What *is* clear from the text is the perception of the natives. They obviously saw the creature as venomous and expected Paul to die. Since they were native to the island and should have known their own species, their reaction probably is the best clue about how the narrative is to be taken. For them the serpent's bite was a sure sign that Paul was a fugitive from the gods and that divine retribution had finally caught up with him (v. 4).⁶⁵⁰ In this they were reflecting a common ancient concept. The Romans, for instance, told the story of a fugitive who escaped a shipwreck but was killed by a snake that bit him as he lay recovering on the beach; and Jewish tradition told of the murderer who got his just deserts from the fangs of a viper.⁶⁶¹ But this was not the case with Paul. He simply shook the snake into the fire and suffered no ill effects from its bite (v. 5). Justice was not catching up with Paul. Quite the contrary—providence was *preserving* him.

28:6 It was remarkable how radically the islanders' opinion of Paul shifted. After waiting for a long time for the venom to take effect and waiting in vain, they drew the opposite conclusion. He was not a fugitive at all but rather a god (v. 6). One is surprised that Luke abruptly concluded the incident at this point. On an earlier occasion, when the natives of Lystra hailed Paul and Barnabas as gods, Paul quickly set them straight (14:11–15); and when Cornelius sought to worship Peter, the apostle corrected him immediately (10:25f.). The reader of Acts needs no

³⁵⁸ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, 1930) 3:478.

⁴⁵⁹ A number of interpreters suggest that the snake may have belonged to the species *Coronella austriaca*, which is found in Malta today and which is a constrictor, thus fitting the picture of its clinging to Paul's hand (e.g., R. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 2:298). This view is too influenced by the need to account for the absence of poisonous snakes in contemporary Malta and goes against the most natural reading of the text.

⁵⁶⁰ Luke used the word δίκη to describe "justice." Δίκη was the name of the Greek goddess of justice, who was responsible for meting out to the guilty their just deserts. It is unlikely the Maltese "barbarians" venerated the Greek goddess Δίκη but likely that they had a similar concept in their own religion that Luke translated into the Greek equivalent.

⁶⁶¹ *Anthology Palatine* 7:290 and Tosepta, *Sanhedrin* 8:3. Perhaps the most interesting parallel is the tradition about the snake that bit the saintly rabbi Haninah ben Dosa and was later found dead at its hole. The saying then spread, "Woe to the man whom the snake meets, and woe to the snake whom Haninah ben Dosa meets" (Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakot* 5:1).

reminder that the response of the Maltese was inappropriate. Rather, by ending on their acclamation, Luke emphasized another point altogether in this narrative—namely, that Paul was thoroughly under the protection of God. Whether a storm at sea or a viper on land, Paul was delivered against all expectations. Both were acts of divine providence; both were miraculous. Throughout Acts miracles are always shown to be in service to the word. They provide the occasion and opportunity for sharing the gospel. Luke gave no account of Paul’s evangelizing Malta; but following the pattern of miracle and witness found throughout Acts, one would naturally assume that Paul seized this opportunity to share the gospel with the natives.

(9) The Hospitality of Publius (28:7–10)

⁷There 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. ⁸His 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. ⁹When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

28:7 The second incident Luke related from Paul’s time on Malta deals with the hospitality of the natives and Paul’s healing ministry on the island. It begins with the mention of Publius, who is designated as the “chief official” (*prōtos*) of the island. Inscriptions have been found on Malta that use this same title,⁶⁷² and Luke here may have used the precise designation borne by the main governing official of the island. Luke said that Publius welcomed “us” into his home and entertained “us” for three days “hospitably” (*philophronōs*, v. 7). Just who the “us” included is not clear. It may be that it concerned only the Christian group and not the entire 276 who were aboard ship.⁶⁸³

28:8–10 The stay in Publius’s house afforded Paul the opportunity to reciprocate on his host’s hospitality. Publius’s father was sick with fever and dysentery. It may well be that this involved a sort of gastric fever caused by a microbe in goat’s milk which was at one time so common on the island that the disorder was named “Malta fever.”⁶⁹⁴ Paul healed the man by laying his hands upon him and praying. This is the only time in Acts when both prayer and the laying on of hands accompany a healing.⁶¹⁰⁵ The two acts are joined together in commissioning

⁶⁷² One inscription is in Greek and reads πρώτος Μελιταίων καὶ Πάτρων (I. G. XIV.601). The other, in Latin, is badly mutilated. The reconstruction has (*munci*)*pi Meli(tensium) primus omni(um)* (C.I.L. X.7495). In both instances the πρώτος/*primus* may not be an official title but a deferential appellation for rendering certain benefactions to the nation. See C. Hemer, “First Person Narrative in Acts 27–28,” 100.

⁶⁸³ There may be a shift in the “we” narrative beginning at 28:1, with the first-person plural being used more restrictively in 28:1–16 for the Christian group rather than the whole party aboard ship, as in chap. 27.

⁶⁹⁴ This is one of those passages where the “medical theory” has some basis, in the rather specific terminology employed—πυρετοῖς καὶ δυσεντερίῳ.

¹⁰⁶⁵ A parallel is found in the Qumran literature in a midrash on Genesis where Abraham healed Pharaoh of a plague by praying and laying hands on him (1 QapGen 20:29). See

narratives (e.g., 6:6; 13:3), and Paul was healed of his blindness when Ananias laid his hands upon him; but prayer is not mentioned there (9:17). A similar practice is found in Jas 5:14, where prayer is combined with anointing in healing. Perhaps the closest parallel to Paul's healing of Publius's father is Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law, who was also "oppressed" (*synechō*) with fever (Luke 4:38f.). In both instances word of the healing soon reached the surrounding neighborhood, and many came forth and were healed (Luke 4:40; Acts 28:9).⁶¹¹⁶ At Malta the natives responded by continuing their lavish hospitality. When the three winter months were over and the party was ready to resume its voyage, the Maltese furnished them amply with the food and provisions they would need (v. 10).

The emphasis on the Maltese hospitality is striking. It is recurrent throughout the account of Paul's stay on Malta: the Maltese welcomed the shipwrecked party with "unusual kindness" (v. 2); Publius received Paul's group and entertained them "hospitably" (v. 7); on their departure, the travelers were "honored" and amply fitted for their journey (v. 10).⁶¹²⁷ It is the same sort of hospitality (*philanthrōpōs*) shown by the *Christians* of Sidon (27:3). Perhaps in this manner Luke was drawing attention to the fact that simple pagan "barbarians" like the Maltese have a genuine potential for becoming Christians. Their hospitality would in any event be in stark contrast with the reception Paul found from the Jews of Rome.

(10) The Final Leg to Rome (28:11–16)

¹¹After 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. ¹²We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. ¹³From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled 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. ¹⁶When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

From his Damascus conversion on, Paul is depicted in Acts as continually on the move. In this passage his travels finally came to an end. More particularly, from 19:21 on, Paul's focus

W. Kirschlager, "Fieberheilung in Apg. 28 und Lk. 4," *Les Actes des Apôtres*, ed. J. Kremer (Gembloux: Duculot, 1979), 514f.

¹¹⁶⁶ Some interpreters have made a distinction between the two words used for healing, *ἰάομαι* (v. 8) and *θεραπεύω* (v. 9), arguing that the latter refers to Luke's healing through his medical practice, the former to Paul's miraculous healing. It should be noted that both words are used interchangeably in Luke 6:18 for Jesus' healings (Robertson, *WP* 3:481).

¹²⁶⁷ It has been argued that the "honor" (*τιμῆς*) heaped on the Christians (v. 10) actually consisted of honoraria, of fees paid for medical services. The word *τιμῆ* can certainly have the meaning of a payment or fee (cf. Acts 5:2; 1 Tim 5:17), but the emphasis is on the hospitality of the Maltese and on the divine healing ministry through Paul—not on Luke's practice of his medical profession.

had been on Rome, the capital and hub of the empire. Now at last his vision was fulfilled as he reached the great city, the “ends of the earth.” It was the fulfillment not just of Paul’s vision but of the Lord’s commission (cf. 1:8).

28:11 It was impossible to travel during the winter, and so those three months were spent on Malta, awaiting the favorable spring breezes.⁶¹³⁸ Paul’s ship had been wrecked, but another was located whose crew also had been wintering on Malta, perhaps up the coast at the major port of Valetta. Like the wrecked vessel, it was of Alexandrian registry, probably also a giant grain carrier. Luke said that its figurehead bore the images of the “twin gods” (NIV). Ships often carried the figurehead of these two gods, who were Castor and Pollux, the sons of Zeus and Leda. They were venerated as the protectors of seamen. When their constellation was viewed in the sky, this was always considered a favorable omen for a smooth voyage.⁶¹⁴⁹

28:12–13 The first leg of the renewed voyage took Paul to Syracuse, which was some ninety miles from Malta (v. 12). Syracuse, located on the eastern extremity of southern Sicily, had two harbors and was in the Roman period the capital city of the island. The party waited there for three days. The reason for the delay is not specified—perhaps the ship had business there or the winds were not favorable. The next leg of their voyage took them to Rhegium, a port at the southern tip of the boot of Italy, just opposite Sicily and at the entrance to the straits of Messina. It could be that the seventy-mile journey from Syracuse to Rhegium did not go completely without difficulty. The majority text says that the party “sailed around” (*perielthontes*), which may indicate that they had to tack against the wind. (The NIV follows the variant reading, which has them “cutting anchor” and interprets this as indicating that they “set sail.”)⁷¹⁵⁰ The final leg of the journey took them from Rhegium through the straits of Messina up the west coast of Italy the 210 miles or so to Puteoli. Sailing was particularly good. There was a favorable south wind, and the voyage took only a day (v. 13). Puteoli in Paul’s day probably was the main port for the grain fleet.⁷¹⁶¹ Modern Pozzuoli, it lay about eight miles northwest of Naples and approximately 130 miles by foot from Rome.

¹³⁶⁸ The ancient sources are somewhat at variance as to when the sea reopened for travel. Pliny (*Natural History* 2.122) placed the date early—on February 8. On the other hand, Vegetius (*Military Epitome* 4.39) stated that the seas were closed until March 10. If Luke’s “three month” interval is precise, the earlier date would be the more likely for Paul’s voyage. The shipwreck would have been at the latest in late October, allowing for November through January as the three months on Malta (see n. 19).

¹⁴⁶⁹ D. Ladouceur (“Hellenistic Preconceptions,” 444–46) documents the tradition that Castor and Pollux were viewed as the protectors of innocent seafarers and punishers of the guilty. He sees this detail as a further indicator that Luke wished to stress Paul’s innocence.

¹⁵⁷⁰ The scribes evidently had problems with the verb in 13a. κ and B have περιελόντες, the term used in 27:40 for cutting the anchors; but that makes little sense in this context. The reading of the Byzantine text is περιελθόντες (“coming around”), which is still problematic. Does this mean *sailing about*, *tacking*?

¹⁶⁷¹ In a later day Ostia became the major port of Rome at the mouth of the Tiber. It was given to extensive silting and in Paul’s day does not seem to have been sufficiently dredged to accommodate the large ships of the grain fleet.

28:14a At Puteoli the Christian travelers found some “brothers” (meaning Christians) who prevailed upon them to spend a week with them (v. 14). It is remarkable how completely Julius and Paul’s Roman guards have disappeared from the narrative since the end of chap. 27. Perhaps this indicates the great amount of freedom Paul enjoyed under his privileged custody and the high degree of trust he had established with his Roman guards. It should also be noted that a Christian community already was in Puteoli when Paul arrived there.⁷¹⁷² This should come as no surprise. The edict of Claudius, to which Luke referred in 18:2, dealt with a dispute in the Jewish community of Rome that seems to have involved Christ and is evidence that the gospel had already reached Italy by A.D. 49.⁷¹⁸³ Paul’s Letter to the Romans is perhaps the best evidence for the existence of a church there long before his own arrival.

28:14b In the present narrative word was evidently sent off to the Christians in Rome immediately upon Paul’s arrival in Puteoli, and some of them intercepted him along the way (v. 15). Verse 14b seems premature and somewhat redundant with v. 16. Luke may have viewed Puteoli as belonging to “Rome” in the larger sense of the total area of Italian jurisdiction.⁷¹⁹⁴ More likely, he simply wished to note that Paul’s goal was now as good as attained. It had been a long and arduous route to Rome from Paul’s first conception of the visit to the capital (19:21). He had to overcome angry mobs, endless legal proceedings, the fury of the sea, and long delays. Now at last his destination was as good as attained. In a real sense, v. 14b can be considered as the climax to the entire Book of Acts.⁷²⁰⁵

28:15 Verse 15 is at best anticlimactic, going back and filling in the details of Paul’s final steps to Rome. The route from Puteoli to Rome involved about 130 miles and took about five days by foot. It led to Capua by way of the Via Compana and then up the Via Appia to the capital. On the Appian Way, forty-three miles south of Rome, lay the stopping place known as Apii Forum, or “marketplace of Appius.” It was there that a group of Christians from Rome intercepted the apostle, in the little town described by Horace as “crammed with boatmen and stingy tavern keepers” (*Satires* 1.5.3). As the group of them proceeded another ten miles or so toward Rome, they encountered at the way station known as “Three Taverns” a second group of Christians who had come from the city to welcome the apostle. Probably there were several house churches in Rome, and the two groups represented different congregations. This is the only mention of the Roman Christians in Acts. They play no role in the narrative of Paul’s witness in 28:17–31. Their presence here is significant. It assures the reader of the backing of a Christian community for the apostle’s witness in the city. They served as a constant encouragement for him (v. 15b).

¹⁷⁷² As in Rome, Christianity may have made its first inroads in the Jewish synagogues of Puteoli. There is known to have been an extensive Jewish community there. Josephus referred to it in *War* 2.104 and *Antiquities* 17.328. More debatable is whether there were Christian communities at nearby Herculaneum and Pompeii. See Hemer, *Acts in Hellenistic History*, 155, n. 156.

¹⁸⁷³ Aquila and Priscilla may already have been Christians when they went to Corinth. See commentary on 18:2f.

¹⁹⁷⁴ For the view that v. 14b refers to “greater Rome,” see Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 347.

²⁰⁷⁵ Robertson, *WP* 3:483.

28:16 Verse 16 is transitional. It brings the long travel narrative to a close, and it opens the account of Paul's witness in Rome. Once again we are reminded that Paul was a prisoner because his military guard reappeared.⁷²¹⁶ Still under free custody, he was granted considerable liberty, being allowed to live in his own rented house with only a single soldier to guard him (cf. v. 30). He was thus free to bear his witness; the subsequent narrative highlights this, but the presence of the soldier reminds us that it was a witness *in chains*.

2. Paul's Witness in Rome (28:17–31)

The account of Paul's witness in Rome centers primarily on his testimony to the Jews of the city. This comes as something of a surprise because the narrative up to this point has prepared us for Paul's witness before Caesar. Nothing, however, is said of his trial before the emperor. Instead, the focus is on Paul's encounter with the Jewish community in Rome. A familiar pattern reappears, where Paul was first heard favorably by them, then was resisted, and finally turned to the Gentiles—a pattern that recapitulates Paul's experience with the Jews of Pisidian Antioch (13:42–48), of Corinth (18:5–7), and of Ephesus (19:8–10). It is not by accident that Luke ended his book on this note. The Jewish rejection of the gospel and the acceptance of the Gentiles has been a major theme throughout Acts. Indeed, the book opens with the question of Israel's place in God's kingdom (1:6). It closes on the same note.

The conclusion to Acts is carefully constructed.⁷²²⁷ It consists of an outer framework which focuses on Paul's situation in Rome, living in his own rented house and under military guard (vv. 16, 30). In between are two scenes involving Paul's testimony to the Jews of Rome—an initial favorable encounter (vv. 17–22) followed by a second encounter in which the Jews reject Paul's message and the apostle turns to the Gentiles (vv. 23–28).

(1) First Meeting with the Jews (28:17–22)

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.**

²¹⁷⁶ The Western text expands v. 16 considerably, indicating that the centurion gave the prisoners over to the *stratopedrarch* (στρατοπεδάρχῳ) and that Paul was allowed to stay “outside the barracks.” This is almost certainly a later expansion of the text, but the question is raised whether it might accurately reflect the legal situation with prisoners like Paul from the provinces. If so, who was the “stratopedarch”? The experts are divided on this question as to whether this should be seen as the *praefectus praetorii* (the head of the praetorian guard), the *princeps perigrinorum* (the centurion over the detached foreign legionaries), or the *princeps castrorum* (the officer over the barracks for the legionaries to whom prisoners from the provinces would be delivered). On the whole question, see Hemer, *Acts in Hellenistic History*, 199f.

²²⁷⁷ For a detailed analysis of the structure of this section see H. J. Hauser, *Strukturen der Abschlusserzählung der Apostelgeschichte* (Apg. 28, 16–31), *AnBib* 86 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979); J. Dupont, “La conclusion des Actes et son rapport à l'ensemble de l'ouvrage de Luc,” in *Les Actes*, 360–404.

¹⁸They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar—not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. ²⁰For 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.”

²¹They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. ²²But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

28:17 Paul’s first conversation with the Jews of Rome occurred at his own initiative: he called together the Jewish leaders of Rome, and they came to him in his rented quarters (v. 17). There was an extensive Jewish community in Rome, but it does not seem to have been well-integrated but rather to have consisted of a number of separate synagogues. It is unclear exactly who these “leaders” of the Jewish community were—perhaps the ruling elders of the various Roman synagogues.⁷²³⁸ Paul set before them the circumstances that had brought him to Rome. His words summed up what is already familiar to the reader from the defense scenes of chaps. 22–26 and serve to underline one final time Paul’s total innocence. He first pointed out that he had done nothing against the Jewish people or their ancestral customs. The Asian Jews in Jerusalem might quibble with this statement because they had charged him with exactly the opposite (cf. 21:28). Paul, however, had constantly pointed out that these charges were false and that he had been a law-abiding Jew in the strictest sense (cf. 22:3; 24:14; 26:4f.). Paul next described how he had been arrested in Jerusalem and “handed over” to the Romans (v. 17b). This is Paul’s summary of the temple scene in which the Romans intervened, rescuing him from the angry Jewish mob and placing him under arrest (21:33). Paul’s version to the Roman Jews brings out the parallel to Jesus, who was also “handed over” (*paredothēn*) to the Gentiles (cf. Luke 9:44; 18:32; 24:7).

28:18–20 Paul then pointed out to the Roman Jewish leaders that he was guilty of no crime deserving death (v. 18). The Roman officials had constantly affirmed this in his hearings before them (cf. 23:29; 25:25; 26:31). Paul’s own version of his experience with the Roman officials is highly abbreviated and an interpretation of the events. The reference to their wanting to release him (v. 19a) is only explicitly borne out by Agrippa’s comment after the appeal had been set in motion (26:32). Likewise, Paul’s remark that he made his appeal because of the objection of the Jews is an interpretation. It was because Festus wished to do the Jews “a favor” that Paul had made his appeal (25:9). All of these things are familiar from the narrative of Acts 22–26. Paul’s statement in 19b is a new emphasis and a new angle on his innocence: he had no charge to make against his people. He was a loyal Jew in every respect. Just as he was not guilty of any crime *against* the Jews, so he was innocent of any ill intent *toward* them. They had falsely accused *him*. He would make no accusations against *them*. He only wanted one thing from his fellow Jews—their commitment to Christ. It was ultimately because of “the hope of Israel” that Paul found himself in chains (v. 20). It was his testimony to the resurrection of Jesus, that Jesus

²³⁷⁸ They are simply called “leaders” (πρωτων). Inscriptions found at Rome designate the ruling elders as “gerousiarchs.” See R. Penna, “Les Juifs à Rome au Temps de l’Apôtre Paul,” *NTS* 28 (1982): 329f.

is both Messiah and Lord, that constituted the real contention between him and the Jews. That was the *real* issue, and Paul had constantly focused on it in his defense speeches (23:6; 24:15; 26:8, 23).

28:21 The response of the Roman Jews is somewhat surprising. First, they stated that they had received no official letters from Judea or even an oral report about Paul (v. 21). Some interpreters find this inconceivable.⁷²⁴⁹ Yet it may well be that because of winter travel conditions, no one from Palestine had arrived in Rome prior to Paul. It is also possible that the connections between Jerusalem and the synagogues of Rome were not very strong anyway.⁸²⁵⁰ Or it may possibly be that the Roman Jews were deliberately disassociating themselves from the trial of Paul, not wishing to be involved in a case that could eventually prove to be an embarrassment for the Jewish accusers.⁸²⁶¹

28:22 The second response of the Roman Jews is somewhat more puzzling. Their knowledge of the Christians did not seem to be very intimate, only a sort of hearsay acquaintance that “people everywhere are talking against this sect.” Christians were well established in Rome. Paul had written an epistle to the church there, and Luke had just referred to the “brothers” who met Paul on his way to Rome (v. 15). The edict of Claudius seemed to have involved a dispute within the Jewish synagogue over Christ, and that only some ten years or so prior to this.⁸²⁷² It is altogether likely that in the aftermath of Claudius’s edict the Jewish synagogues kept themselves completely separate from the Christians,⁸²⁸³ but it seems equally likely that they would have had some acquaintance with the movement. Perhaps the Roman Jews were being “a model of diplomacy,”⁸²⁹⁴ maintaining as much distance as possible from the whole matter of Paul. In any event, their refusal to speak anything against Paul was in itself something of an indirect testimony to his innocence.

(2) Separation from the Jews (28:23–28)

²³They 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. ²⁴Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this 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.”**

²⁴⁷⁹ E.g., R. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 2:309.

²⁵⁸⁰ R. Penna (“Les Juifs à Rome, 336) points out that literary and inscriptional evidence reflects there was little interaction between the Roman Jews and Palestine.

²⁶⁸¹ According to K. Lake and H. J. Cadbury (*Beginnings* 4:346), Roman law had severe penalties for prosecutors who brought poorly established cases.

²⁷⁸² See commentary on 18:2.

²⁸⁸³ Rackham, *Acts*, 501.

²⁹⁸⁴ Bruce, *Acts: NIC*, 530.

**²⁷For 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.'**

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

There is a close correspondence between the narratives of Paul's interaction with the Jews of Pisidian Antioch (13:14–50) and with those of Rome (28:17–28). The former occurred at the beginning of Paul's wider mission and the latter at its close. Both scenes involve an initial positive response from the Jews who heard Paul's testimony and a request to hear him further (13:42; 28:22). In both accounts a second hearing occurred on a subsequent day (13:44; 28:23). In the course of the second meeting with Paul, strong Jewish resistance to his witness developed (13:45; 28:24). Thereupon Paul addressed them with a quote from the prophet Isaiah. At Pisidian Antioch the text was from Isa 49:6 and pointed to the divine imperative for a mission to the Gentiles (13:47). In Rome the text was Isa 6:9f. and highlighted the Jewish rejection of the divine message (28:26f.). Together the two texts give the full picture—the witness to the Gentiles and the rejection by the Jews. It was the Jewish rejection of the gospel that gave impetus to the Gentile mission. Consequently, in both instances Paul concluded his testimony to the Jews with an emphatic statement that he was now turning to the Gentiles (13:46; 28:28).

These two texts form a framework for all of Paul's missionary activity. In between them the pattern of Jewish rejection and Gentile receptivity regularly repeats itself. Paul never gave up. Rejected by the Jews of one place, he always began his witness in a new town in the synagogue. The question arises as to whether there is something final about Paul's rejection by the Roman Jews. In this instance there is no subsequent narrative to show him in a new city, starting over once more with his witness to the Jews there.

28:23 As in Pisidian Antioch (13:44), Paul's second meeting with the Roman Jews involved considerably larger numbers (28:23). In Rome, however, there was no Gentile contingent: the audience were solely Jews. Since Paul was under guard, they came to him in his private rented quarters (cf. vv. 16, 30).⁸³⁰⁵ Paul devoted the entire day to presenting them with the gospel.⁸³¹⁶ The content of his message is summarized in terms of the "kingdom of God" and "Jesus." The same two terms, "kingdom" and "Jesus," summarize his preaching in v. 31. They are twin concepts: Jesus stands at the center of God's sovereign rule; God's people are gathered around

³⁰⁸⁵ H. J. Cadbury suggests that "place where he was staying" (ξενίαν) should be translated "guest table, hospitality" and should be seen as a reference to Paul's providing a "reception" for the Roman Jews ("Lexical Notes on Luke-Acts: III. Luke's Interest in Lodging," *JBL* 45 [1926]: 320).

³¹⁸⁶ "From morning to evening" is an OT expression; cf. Exod 18:13; 1 Kgs 22:35; Sir 18:26.

him. The Jews looked to the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of God's kingdom in a renewed Israel (cf. 1:6). The message of Acts has been that this has already occurred—in Jesus. This was what Paul set before them that day. He sought to convince them through an exposition of the Scriptures (“from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets”). Luke did not specify which texts Paul used to expound Jesus, but they were surely those which point to the necessity of the Messiah's suffering and to his resurrection—the texts Jesus set before the disciples after his resurrection (Luke 24:27, 44–47), which Peter used to show Christ's messianic status to the Jews at Pentecost and in the temple square (Acts 2:17–36; 3:12–26) and which Paul himself expounded in the synagogue of Pisidian Antioch (13:32–39).⁸³²⁷

28:24 The result was a sharp division among the Jews who heard Paul's witness—some being convinced, others refusing to believe him (v. 24). The reference to some being “convinced” (*epeithonto*) could mean no more than that some of the Roman Jews found Paul's arguments persuasive without implying their coming to a point of commitment to Christ. On the other hand, the picture of a divided synagogue is a constant of Acts—some believing, others resisting and violently opposing Paul. It is likely that the same pattern is to be seen here.⁸³³⁸ Some individual Jews believed, but “the Jews” as a whole, “the synagogue” in an official sense, did not accept Paul's witness to Christ. This had been the tragic story of the Jews in every community in which Paul had preached.

28:25 The divided Jews argued among themselves and began to disperse, but not before Paul had gotten in the last word—one final Old Testament testimony. This time it was not a prophecy regarding the Christ but rather one that applied to them and their refusal to hear the word of God. The text is introduced with particular emphasis—“well” (“the truth,” NIV; *kalōs*) had the Holy Spirit uttered these words through Isaiah the prophet. The inspiration of the prophet's word is stressed through the reference to the Spirit's mediation. The Spirit is described as speaking the word of the prophecy. In every instance in Acts where a scriptural quote is introduced by a reference to the Spirit, the Spirit is described as having spoken (cf. 1:16; 4:25). In this manner the written Word is shown to be a dynamic, “living” Word.⁸³⁴⁹ Note that at this point Paul began to “distance” himself from the unbelieving Jews. Earlier he had addressed them as “my brothers” (v. 17). Now he spoke of “your” forefathers (v. 25b). Paul had not ceased being a Jew, but his faith in Christ sharply separated him now from his Roman brothers who refused the gospel message. Paul was *not* one with those hardhearted forefathers who had rejected God's word through Isaiah, who had resisted the Spirit in the past, and whose descendants were now so doing (cf. 7:51).

28:26–27 Verses 26–27 reproduce verbatim the Septuagint text of Isa 6:9f. In this Greek version the prophet's words constitute a prophecy of the people's obduracy. The three organs of perception are highlighted—the eyes, the ears, and the heart, the latter in Hebrew thought being considered the organ of understanding and will. The picture is that of a people who

³²⁸⁷ For the use of the messianic testimonia in these sermons, see the commentary on 2:17–36; 3:12–26; and 13:32–39.

³³⁸⁸ For the “believing” minority from synagogues that rejected Paul, see 13:43; 14:1; 17:4, 12; 18:8; 19:9. See also G. Krodel, *Acts*, PC (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 499.

³⁴⁸⁹ F. Bovon, “‘Schön hat der heilige Geist durch den Propheten Jesaja zu euren Vätern gesprochen’ (Act. 28, 25),” *ZNW* 75 (1984): 226–32.

merely take in sensory perceptions but in no sense appropriate them. Their ears heard the sounds, but the hearing was without understanding. Their eyes took in the sights but without any insight because their hearts had become calloused; the message received by their eyes and ears was neither understood nor acted upon. Otherwise, they would have done something in response to God's message. If they had heard and understood the divine word, they would have turned from their ways in repentance (*epistrepsōsin*) and received God's healing.

The Jews of Rome had exemplified precisely this response. They had heard from Paul the message of God's salvation in Christ, but their hardness had made them unresponsive and resistant. The key concept in the narrative of Paul's encounter with the Jews of Rome is that of "hearing." The verb "to hear" (*akouō*) occurs five times and at key points. The first occurrence is when the Roman Jews expressed their desire to "hear" Paul's views (v. 22). But when they had heard his testimony, it became clear that they had not really "heard him" because they responded in disbelief and rejection. The quote from Isaiah refers to "hearing" three times, and its whole point is that hearing is not really hearing at all if the message is not acted upon. Finally, in v. 28, Paul referred to hearing one last time; and it is the last, emphatic word of the entire passage. The Gentiles would "hear"—they would "listen," would hear with receptive, responsive hearts. The Jews had expressed their desire to hear Paul, but they were hardened to his message and really did not hear his word of salvation. It would be different with the Gentiles. They would hear and receive the gospel.⁹³⁵⁰

Isaiah 6:9f. was a key Old Testament text for the early Christians as they sought to come to terms with the Jewish rejection of the gospel. It occurs in the Synoptic tradition among the sayings of Jesus with reference to the failure of the Jews to understand and appropriate the message of his parables (Matt 13:14f.; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10). When in Rom 9–11 Paul wrestled with the riddle of the Jewish rejection of the gospel, he cited this same passage of Isaiah (Rom 11:8). Isaiah's words were seen as a real prophecy of the Jewish obduracy. They did not, however, explain it. It remained something of a riddle. In Rom 11 Paul suggested that perhaps the hardening was temporary, a time allowing for the message to be taken to the Gentiles, that finally in the mystery of God's plan of salvation there would be a great turning of his people to Christ. Here in Acts he provided no such solutions. The Jewish rejection was a reality and a riddle. To a great extent it remains so—how the gospel of God's salvation which was foreshadowed in the Jewish Scriptures, fulfilled in a Jewish Messiah, and first proclaimed by Jewish heralds like Paul would ultimately be embraced not by the Jews but primarily by Gentiles.

28:28 Now for the third, climactic time in Acts, Paul turned to the Gentiles (v. 28; cf. 13:46; 18:6). Paul saw his ministry as primarily to the Gentiles (cf. Gal 2:8), and his vision in the temple had confirmed this (Acts 22:21). Throughout Acts he has been depicted as having great success among the Gentiles. So Paul's directing his efforts to the Gentile mission was nothing new. The main question is whether at this point Paul's turning from the Jews to the Gentiles was final and definitive. Had Paul "given up" on the Jews? Many scholars feel that he had.⁹³⁶¹ But there are

³⁵⁹⁰ For a full development of this theme of hearing, see J. Dupont, "La Conclusion des Actes," 372–76.

³⁶⁹¹ This has been strongly stated recently by J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). For a similar position see D. Slingerland, " 'The Jews' in

significant clues in the text to indicate that such is not the case. All along, Luke has shown that there were some Jews who believed, even in those synagogues that rejected and persecuted Paul. The same pattern of acceptance and rejection appears in the present scene. In v. 30 Paul is said to have welcomed “all” who came to him. Elsewhere it is specified that Paul witnessed to both Jews and Gentiles (cf. 14:1; 18:4; 19:10), and there is no reason to believe that individual Jews have been excluded in this instance. Yet there is a sense in which the Jewish rejection is seen to be definitive. It had become clear that “official Judaism,” the Jewish people as a whole, would not embrace Christ.

This rejection first became explicit at the martyrdom of Stephen. It repeated itself in every synagogue Paul entered. He was never able to remain in a single synagogue but always was forced to leave. The same was true in the present instance. The Jewish delegation in Rome was representative of official Judaism. It was the “leaders” (*prōtous*) of the Jews who came to Paul (v. 17). In Rome as in Jerusalem and the Diaspora synagogues, this official Judaism refused the gospel message. But everywhere individual Jews had come into the Christian fold, into “the way” within true Judaism, into the true people of God.⁹³⁷² There is no reason to believe that the same pattern of a continued witness to Jews would not go on after this scene. Perhaps the wording of Paul’s statement in v. 28 underscores this fact. Paul did not say that because the Jews had rejected his message he would turn to the Gentiles. Rather, he stated that God’s salvation had already been sent to the Gentiles. The passage is thus not so much about Jewish exclusion as it is about Gentile inclusion in God’s people. Acts is primarily the story of the inclusive gospel: God’s salvation (*sōtēria*) has been sent to all.⁹³⁸³

(3) Bold Witness to All (28:30–31)

the Pauline Portion of Acts,” *JAAR* 54 (1986): 305–21. E. Haenchen argues that for Luke the Jews are definitively rejected and the Gentiles alone become the people of the promise (“Judentum und Christentum in der Apostelgeschichte,” *ZNW* 54 [1963]: 155–87).

³⁷⁹² The opposite viewpoint to Sanders and Haenchen (n. 91) is espoused by J. Jervell, who argues that in Acts the only true Christianity is Jewish Christianity which represents the restored people of God. The question is not one of Gentile replacing Jew but rather of the mission of the (Jewish) people of God to the Gentiles (“Paulus ... der Lehrer Israels,” *NovT* 10 [1968]: 164–90). See also his book *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972). For a similar view see D. P. Moessner, “Paul in Acts: Preacher of Eschatological Repentance to Israel,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 96–104. For the various viewpoints on the question of the Jews in Acts, see the collection of essays *Luke-Acts and the Jewish People*, ed. J. B. Tyson (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988).

³⁸⁹³ It should be noted that the neuter form (*σωτηρίων*) occurs only in three places in Luke-Acts: here in 28:28 and in Luke 2:30; 3:6. In Luke 2:30 the context is Simeon’s song in which God’s salvation is described as “a light ... for the Gentiles” and “glory to ... Israel.” Luke 3:6 is a quote from Isa 40:5 and is equally inclusive, speaking of “all flesh” seeing the salvation of God.

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

28:30–31⁹³⁹⁴ With vv. 30–31 Acts comes to a rather abrupt ending. In v. 30 Luke told us that Paul stayed in Rome for a period of two years, evidently living under free custody in his rented dwelling.⁹⁴⁰⁵ He graciously received “all” who came to visit him there, probably including Jews as well as Gentiles.⁹⁴¹⁶ Verse 31 gives the content of his conversation with those who came to him. He “preached boldly” to them⁹⁴²⁷ in the power of the Holy Spirit—“without hindrance.” This is perhaps a quasilegal term, meaning that the Romans put no obstacle in the way of his testimony to the gospel. This in itself would be significant, an implicit evidence to the fact that the Romans found nothing dangerous or subversive in his message.⁹⁴³⁸ Surely as F. Stagg has so convincingly demonstrated, this final word of the text of Acts points to even more—to the unbound gospel, triumphant over every barrier of superstition and of human prejudice.⁹⁴⁴⁹ The content of Paul’s message forms the conclusion to the message of Acts. He preached “the kingdom of God” and taught about “the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁴⁵⁰ The two belong together: the good news of God’s kingdom *is* the good news about Christ. This was the same message Paul shared with the Roman Jews (v. 23). It is ultimately the central message of Acts. The book begins

³⁹⁹⁴ Verse 29 is omitted from the text of the NIV on text-critical grounds. It is not found in the earliest witnesses (ϝ⁷⁴, κ, A, B, one Old Latin ms., Vulgate mss., the Syriac Peshitta, the Coptic) and seems to have been a Western expansion added to round off the narrative, referring to the Jews continuing to argue among themselves as they departed: καὶ ταῦτα αὐτοῦ εἰπόντος ἄπηλθον οἰλοῦδαῖοι, πολλὴν ἔχοντες ἐν ἑαυτοῖς συζήτησιν.

⁴⁰⁹⁵ Translations differ about the meaning of μισθῶμα in v. 30. The word is a *hapax*, and its etymology would imply something earned. Hence the RSV renders it “at his own expense.” But it is used with the word “to dwell” (ἐνέμεινεν) and the preposition ἐν, which seem to call for a dwelling place. Accordingly, the NIV renders “in his own rented house.” See the debate between two German scholars on the subject: F. Saum, “Er lebte ... von seinem eigenem Einkommen (Apg. 28, 30),” *BZ* 20 (1976): 226–29; E. Hansack, “‘Er lebte ... von seinem eigenem Einkommen’ (Apg. 28, 30),” *BZ* 19 (1975): 249–53, and “Nochmals zu Apostelgeschichte 28, 30,” *BZ* 21 (1977): 118–21.

⁴¹⁹⁶ This assumption was evidently drawn quite early, as some Western witnesses have “Jews and Greeks” in addition to “all” in v. 30.

⁴²⁹⁷ In Acts the word “boldness” (παρρησία) seems to involve uncommon, inspired confidence in witness (cf. 2:29; 4:13). In 4:29 and 4:31 it is connected with the power of the Spirit.

⁴³⁹⁸ Perhaps ακωλύτως is a play on Paul’s captive status. Though captive, he was “unbound” in his witness. Cf. the similar play on “fettered” (δέδεται) in 2 Tim 2:9.

⁴⁴⁹⁹ F. Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955). See also G. Delling, “Das letzte Wort der Apostelgeschichte,” *NovT* 15 (1973): 193–204.

⁴⁵¹⁰⁰ Some Western witnesses add after “Jesus Christ”: “saying that this is the Messiah, Jesus the son of God, by whom the whole world is to be judged.”

with Jesus sharing the message of God's kingdom with his disciples (1:3). It quickly raises the burning question, "Are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (1:6). That question has now been answered. God has indeed restored his kingdom—in the Messiah, in Christ. And it is open to all who will receive him, Jew and Greek. In Christ, God's kingdom is realized as he comes to rule in the hearts of his people. The gospel proclaims the kingdom, and the gospel has triumphed. The final note of Acts is a triumphant one. The word of God has triumphed—but not Paul. Paul was still in chains, still a prisoner. Throughout Acts the triumph was never with the bearers of the gospel. They were rejected, beaten, reviled, imprisoned, and killed for their witness. But the gospel was unfettered, triumphant. Perhaps Luke deliberately ended on this note to remind his readers that with witness often comes suffering and trial. But when the witness is faithful, the gospel triumphs, the word of God's salvation strips all its bonds. And it is to that kind of witness we are called, even if, like Paul, the witness is in chains.

Still we are not satisfied with Luke's ending. How could he have led Paul through the endless hearings of chaps. 22–26 and the violent storm of chap. 27 and then left us in midair? We want to know what happened to Paul. It seems beside the point that Paul's situation probably was well known in the Christian communities that first read Acts. Still some scholars feel the abrupt ending of Acts is so unsatisfactory that they postulate Luke wrote Acts at this point, after two years of Paul's Roman custody and before his case came to trial.¹⁰⁴⁶¹ The difficulty with this view is that it places Acts at an early date—even prior to the Gospel of Mark.¹⁰⁴⁷² Others postulate that Luke may have intended a third volume which would have picked up at this point in his career.¹⁰⁴⁸³ A more radical solution is to argue that Paul received an unfavorable verdict and was executed and that Luke would not have wanted to mention this since it would detract from the favorable picture of the Roman officials which he had sought to portray.¹⁰⁴⁹⁴ It would seem, however, that Luke would not have portrayed the Romans in such a favorable light had they ultimately been responsible for Paul's death; and one wonders why Luke would not have developed the story of Paul's martyrdom as he did that of Stephen. One of the most ingenious solutions has been to argue that the "two years" of v. 30 refers to a set period of statutory limitations in Roman law. The first-century reader would thus know that if Paul did not appear

⁴⁶¹⁰¹ E.g., Bruce, *Acts*: NIC, 536, n. 49; J. Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles*, rev. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann, AB (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 260; Robertson, *WP* 3:489.

⁴⁷¹⁰² See the discussion of the date of Acts in the Introduction.

⁴⁸¹⁰³ So T. Zahn, *Die Apostelgeschichte des Lucas* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1922), 1:16–18; Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, 351f.

⁴⁹¹⁰⁴ So Haenchen, *Acts*, 731f.; Schneider, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 2:411; R. Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte* 2:306f. These interpreters feel that the reference to "seeing Paul's face no more" in the Miletus account (20:25, 38) is a clear allusion to his martyrdom. Even if it is—and that is debatable—it need not be a reference to his martyrdom at the time of this first Roman imprisonment. In all likelihood Paul *had* been martyred by the time Luke wrote Acts.

before Caesar within this period he would have been set free.¹⁰⁵⁰⁵ Unfortunately the evidence for such a legal procedure is late and doesn't seem to apply to cases like Paul's.¹⁰⁵¹⁶ All of these suggestions thus have problems, and it probably is best to see Luke as having ended at this point because he had accomplished his purposes in showing Paul in Rome preaching the gospel without hindrance.¹⁰⁵²⁷

Whatever may have been the outcome of Paul's Roman imprisonment, Luke seems to have deliberately chosen to end his story where he did. He ended not on Paul but on the gospel, on

⁵⁰¹⁰⁵ So K. Lake, "What was the End of St. Paul's Trial?" *The Interpreter* 5 (1908–09): 147–56; W. Ramsay, *The Teaching of Paul in Terms of the Present Day* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1914), 346–82.

⁵¹¹⁰⁶ A. N. Sherwin White, *Roman Society and Roman Law*, 112–19. Sherwin-White argues that it is possible that Nero released Paul as a former prisoner under Claudius. There is precedent for the release of prisoners in cases that new emperors "inherited" from their predecessors.

⁵²¹⁰⁷ The question still remains as to what *did* happen to Paul. Written in the third century, Eusebius, *Church History* 2.22, cites a tradition (literally "word has it" [λόγος ἔχει]) that Paul was released after his first defense and went forth on a ministry of preaching and that subsequently he returned to Rome and suffered martyrdom under Nero. Eusebius cited 2 Tim 4:16 as evidence that Paul was released after his "first defense."

Indeed, the Pastoral Epistles are a key element in the whole question of Paul's Roman imprisonment. It is virtually impossible to fit the personal information of the Pastorals into the framework of Paul's ministry from the onset of his first missionary journey to the Roman imprisonment of Acts 28:30f. It is thus highly likely that the personal events related in the Pastorals date from a period after Paul's first Roman confinement and are thus themselves testimony to Paul's release and subsequent ministry. In this view Paul would have arrived in Rome sometime in 59 or 60 and been released in 61 or 62. His return to Rome, second imprisonment, and martyrdom would have taken place under the Neronian persecution of the Roman Christians in A.D. 64 or 65. According to early tradition, Paul was martyred under Nero, being taken about a mile outside the city walls along the Ostian Way and beheaded.

The earliest extracanonical reference that might indicate a release of Paul is 1 Clem 1:5, which speaks of his having reached the "limits of the west," possibly an allusion to his working in Spain. The Clementine tradition, however, may be nothing more than a conclusion drawn from Paul's own stated plans in Rom 15:24. For a discussion of the evidence for Paul's release, see R. P. C. Hanson, *The Acts*, NCB (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 28–35. Cf. F. F. Bruce, "St. Paul in Rome," *BJRL* 46 (1963–64): 326–45, 50 (1967–68), 262–79.

the message of the kingdom. The word of God in Christ—not Peter, not Paul—is the real hero of Acts.¹⁰⁵³⁸⁵⁴

28:15. The Christians at Rome soon **heard** of Paul's **coming**, so **they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius** (a market town 43 miles from Rome) **and the Three Taverns** (33 miles from Rome) **to meet** him and his companions. The noun *apantēsin*, translated as an infinitive “to meet,” was used in Greek literature of an entourage coming out of a city to meet an official going to the city. It is also used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, which speaks of believers being “caught up ... to meet (*apantēsin*) the Lord in the air.” Like an entourage, believers will go up at the Rapture into the clouds to meet Jesus, their Savior and Lord, coming from heaven to take them to Himself. Paul looked forward to joining that group.

At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged (lit., “received courage,” *tharsos*; the verb *tharseō* is used in the LX⁵⁵X of people in distress who were then encouraged; cf. comments on Mark 6:50). At last God was bringing Paul to Rome. And the welcome of fellow believers, whom he had never met, uplifted his soul. So they proceeded on the Appian Way, “the queen of the long roads,” to the city of Rome.

⁵³¹⁰⁸ Several suggestions regarding the ending of Acts are worth mentioning. C. H. Talbert (*Acts*, KPG [Atlanta: John Knox, 1984], 104) notes that in Acts a period involving two years is one of “special blessing” (Antioch, 11:26; Caesarea, 24:27; Corinth, 18:11; Ephesus, 19:10), which particularly highlights the witness to Christ. Tannehill (*Narrative Unity*, 2:356) notes that by not bringing the story of Paul to a close, Luke left the narrative open, with its ongoing threads pointing to the Gentile mission, the outreach to the further “ends of the earth,” the Lord’s return, and the abiding question of the mission to the Jews. Along similar lines Rackham (*Acts*, 502) notes that v. 31 is not really a conclusion but almost a new beginning: “the history of Christianity is a succession of beginnings.”

⁵⁴ John B. Polhill, [Acts](#), vol. 26, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 531–548.

⁵⁵LXX Septuagint

28:16. Because he was a trusted prisoner, **Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him**. Paul's residence was in a rented house (v. 30).

28:17–20. The climax of the book is found in these closing verses (vv. 17, 24) which speak of another rejection of the gospel and of Paul's taking the message to Gentiles (v. 28).

As usual **Paul** first spoke with **the Jews** (cf. 9:20; 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:2, 10, 17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). In this case **he called ... the leaders** to meet with him because he could not go to their synagogues.

In his presentation Paul made several significant points: (1) He was innocent of damaging **the Jews** or their **customs** (28:17). (2) The Roman authorities in Judea thought Paul was innocent (v. 18; cf. 23:29; 25:25; 26:31–32). (3) Paul's only recourse was **to appeal to Caesar** because the Jews refused to deal with Paul justly (28:19; cf. 25:11). (4) This fourth point is a major one: he was not pressing charges against Israel; he only wanted to be acquitted (28:19). (5) His primary objective in calling the leaders was to **talk with** them about **the hope of Israel**. This term and concept was used by Paul a number of times in the last part of Acts (cf. 23:6; 24:15; 26:6–7). The hope of Israel was more than a resurrection; it meant fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to Israel (cf. 26:6–7). Paul firmly believed Jesus is the Messiah of Israel who will return someday and establish Himself as the King of Israel and Lord of the nations (cf. 1:6).

28:21–22. The response of the leaders was ambivalent: they said they knew nothing about Paul and their only reports about Christianity (**this sect**) were negative. One wonders if they were being truthful. How could Jewish leaders be unaware of Jews in Rome who had become Christians and also of the existence of tensions between the church and Judaism in Jerusalem? It is quite possible they had heard nothing of Paul, but they probably knew more than they acknowledged about Christianity. They were interested in hearing Paul's **views** since they knew **that people were talking against** his message.

28:23–24. In the Jewish leaders' second meeting with **Paul**, they were much more definitive in their responses to the gospel. This time they **came in even larger numbers**. The discussion was also longer. All day long Paul spoke of **the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets** (cf. 24:14; 26:22).

The term "kingdom of God" includes the death and resurrection of Christ as its basis but also looks ahead to Christ's reign on earth. It is clearly eschatological in significance (cf. 1:3–6; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; Luke 1:33; 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1, 10; 9:2, 11, 27, 60, 62; 10:9, 11; 11:2, 20; 12:31–32; 13:18, 20, 28–29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20–21; 18:16–17, 24–25, 29–30; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16, 18, 29–30; 23:42, 51). To the Jews the concept of the Messiah dying for sins as an atonement and the teaching of justification by faith as the way of entering the kingdom sounded strange.

The Jews were divided in their responses. **Some were convinced ... but others** refused to **believe** (Acts 28:24). In Greek the verb "convinced" is in the imperfect tense and may be rendered, "began to be convinced," that is, they were not fully convinced. The same verb, used in verse 23, is translated, "tried to convince."

28:25–27. The disagreement **among** the Jewish leaders in Rome about Paul's message showed that they were not amenable to the gospel. With prophetic insight **Paul** applied the words of **Isaiah** (6:9–10) to his own contemporaries. Obstinate refusal to believe results in **calloused** hearts, deafened **ears**, and spiritually blinded **eyes**. This had happened to Israel both

in Isaiah's day and in Paul's (cf. Rom. 11:7–10). Interestingly Paul ascribed Isaiah's words to the inspiration of **the Holy Spirit** (cf. Acts 4:25).

28:28. At the climax of this book and now for the final time the gospel focus was turned toward **Gentiles**. From Jerusalem to Rome most Jews rejected it and in city after city the message was then directed to non-Jews. Now in the capital of the Roman world the same phenomenon occurred; so it will be until the fullness of Gentiles comes (Rom. 11:19–26).

28:29. Some Greek manuscripts add, "After he said this, the Jews left, arguing vigorously among themselves" (NI⁵⁶V marg⁵⁷). Probably this verse should not be included in the text, though this undoubtedly was their response (cf. v. 25).

28:30–31. These verses are Luke's final "progress report" (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). With freedom **in his own rented** quarters **Paul ... preached** God's **kingdom**. This eschatological expression indicates not only that Jews and Gentiles alike are justified by faith but also that Gentiles with Jews will participate in the millennial kingdom (cf. comments on 28:23).

One question commonly raised pertains to Paul's activities after this **two**-year captivity. What happened? Perhaps no charges were filed in Rome and Paul was released. The Jews would know they had no case against Paul outside of Judea and so would be reluctant to argue their cause in Rome.

Probably Paul returned to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then turned west to Spain according to his original plans (Rom. 15:22–28). Then he ministered once more in the Aegean area where he was taken prisoner, removed to Rome, and executed.

During this two-year period Paul wrote what are commonly called his "Prison Epistles"—Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians (see the chart "Paul's Epistles, Written on His Journeys and During His Imprisonments," at Acts 13:6–25).

While Paul was in Rome during this incarceration the gospel was not bound. **He spoke boldly** (cf. comments on Acts 4:13). The last word in the Greek text of Acts is the adverb *akōlytōs* which means **without hindrance**. Men may bind the preachers, but the gospel cannot be chained!

And so it was that the kingdom message under God's sovereign control went from Jew to Gentile, and from Jerusalem to Rome.⁵⁸

⁵⁶NIV New International Version

⁵⁷marg. margin, marginal reading

⁵⁸ Stanley D. Toussaint, "[Acts](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 429–431.