

Text: Ac 28.11-15

In my notes file, I call the section of Acts 28 covered by our text today, “Malta to Rome.” This is the last journey of Paul recorded in the book of Acts.

And of course, Luke gives us a travelogue.

And of course, I will resort to a map during part of our message.

Again, we have to think about these travelogues. Luke includes them over and over again in the book of Acts. Acts 27 is an extended travelogue, with a violent storm at sea mixed in.

Why does Luke include them so often? I’ve made various suggestions or given some ideas from the commentaries as we’ve covered Acts in this series.

This time, I think I might have figured it out.

But ... more later on that ...

We are almost through with the book of Acts. It is time to be looking back, thinking about how Acts started, what Acts means, and — more important — what it means about how we should live.

The Timeline of Acts:

Acts 1: opens 40 days after the resurrection, and gives us the ascension

Acts 2: ten days later — Pentecost, the church begins

Acts 9: two years later, Saul is converted on the road to Damascus

Acts 12: twelve years later, Herod dies (AD 44)

Acts 11: two more years pass, famine in Jerusalem (AD 46)

Acts 13: Paul and Barnabas set out on the first missionary journey

Acts 21: Paul arrested in Jerusalem (AD 57)

Acts 28: Paul arrives in Rome, about AD 59/60

When Paul arrives in Jerusalem, his entry is recorded almost “triumphantly,” or with an air, if not of triumph, at least of joy.

Read Acts 28.11-15

Proposition: The course of God’s plan ever runs smooth (though for us it may seem to run “bumpy”).

I. Three-week journey to Rome

A. The journey began in the fall of the previous year

1. They were late in the year (“after the fast” — Day of Atonement, Oct 5, 59) (Ac 27.9)
2. They risked — and experienced — winter storms

B. Their stay in Malta was three months (Ac 28.11)

1. Last week we imagined Paul’s evangelistic efforts during this time (not mentioned in the text)
2. At last, the day arrives to sail again
 - a. Acc. to Pliny the elder, shipping would resume after Feb 8 (or so) when the prevailing westerlies resumed
 - b. If the shipwreck was late Oct/early Nov, an early Feb departure would match Luke’s 3 months (some make it a bit longer)
3. “As the bird flies,” it is 427 miles from Malta to Rome (686 km)

C. Their travel by sea

1. They sail on a ship called “the Twin Brothers”
 - a. That is, Castor and Pollux, the mythical offspring of Zeus and the queen of Sparta
 - b. Their constellation is Gemini, which ancient sailors considered a “good sign” if they could sight it on their voyage
 - c. The ancient pagans considered “The Twins” to be the “patrons” of seafarers

Constable: “Perhaps Luke mentioned these twin brothers to contrast God’s real protection, as illustrated in the previous chapter and this one, with the protection that the pagans superstitiously thought these gods provided. I can imagine Paul saying to Luke, as they got ready to board this ship: We have a better Protector than the twin brothers!”¹

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ac 28.11.

2. First leg to Syracuse

- a. Syracuse an ancient Greek colony on Sicily, settled by Corinthians
- b. In the Punic Wars (with Carthage), came under the control of Rome [since 212 BC]
- c. Across the open ocean – riskiest leg of journey

3. Next, they roughly follow the course of Sicily up to Rhegium “on the toe of the boot”

- a. They stay in Syracuse for three days – winds not right?
- b. This part of the journey may reflect that: text says “sailed around”
 - 1) Note, KJV “fetched a compass”
 - 2) NIV: “set sail”

These variations reflect a textual variant

- c. Seems best to think the winds were contrary and their journey to Rhegium required them to tack against the wind

4. The next leg follows a favorable south wind which takes them to Puteoli

- a. Syracuse to Rhegium is only 70 miles
- b. Rhegium to Puteoli is 200 miles – they get there the next day
- c. Puteoli was the main port for grain arriving in Italy, although later supplanted by Ostia further up the coast
- d. From Puteoli, they will take the last leg to Rome by land
 - 1) Here, they remain one week, under the hospitality of “some brethren” found there
 - 2) From Priscilla and Aquila, and the book of Romans, we know there has long been a church in Rome
 - 3) Here we see a church in Puteoli (which also had a sizable Jewish presence)

e. The centurion becomes invisible after Acts 27 – why does Paul have access to “the brethren” in Puteoli?

- 1) Bruce suggested the centurion had “business” that kept him there for the week
- 2) Regardless, Paul seems to be well treated and allowed (as at Sidon) to get help from friends

“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.”²

D. And “thus we came to Rome”

1. The words seem to conclude the travel section
2. They refer to the method of travel, through these means we arrived in Rome
3. The last leg of the journey, though, is 130 miles on foot, about one more week of travel
4. The journey from Malta is thus about three weeks

All these details are interesting to me just out of curiosity about the ancient world and thinking how it must have been to make this journey.

5. But the significant thing about it all: they arrived at their destination
 - a. Not easily
 - b. Not in a straight line
 - c. But exactly where God promised Paul he would take him

Proposition: The course of God’s plan ever runs smooth (though for us it may seem to run “bumpy”).

² John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 536.

II. Joyful entrance in Rome

A. The Roman Triumph

1. When a Roman general won a victory, he might be awarded a triumph in the city
2. He and his legionnaires would conduct a great parade into the city
3. They would send in the wagons full of their plunder
4. They would march in the slaves they had captured (even better if it included a manacled king)
5. The soldiers would march in
6. The conquering hero would be carried in

All of this was the privilege of a great general

B. The entrance of Paul the prisoner – NOT a triumph!

1. But consider: “the brethren heard of their coming”
 - a. This is the church in Rome
 - b. They set out to greet Paul and accompany him into the city
2. One group met him at Appii Forum (43 miles from Rome on the Appian Way)
3. Another group awaited him at “the Three Inns” – 33 miles from Rome
4. All these brethren marched with Paul into Rome

C. The church in Rome

1. Paul knew some of them personally (Aquila and Priscilla et al)
2. Others he only knew their names (see Rm 16) and perhaps met here for the first time
3. Three years before, he sent his letter to the Romans, announcing his intention to visit: now, here he is, at last!
4. Granted, Paul arrives as a prisoner, not as a free man
5. But he arrives and enjoys the fellowship of the believers

when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage

“Their reception led Paul to thank God. The entire trip from Malta probably took three weeks.”³

Proposition: The course of God’s plan ever runs smooth (though for us it may seem to run “bumpy”).

III. Inevitable gospel progress as exemplified by Rome

A. God’s promises to Paul concerning Rome

Ac 27.24 saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.’

Ac 9.15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

1. God intended for Paul to end up in Rome
2. God intended for Paul to speak to kings and leaders
 - a. Men like Felix, Porcius Festus, and Herod Agrippa II
 - b. Men like the Sanhedrin
 - c. Men like Nero

God’s program never fails

B. God’s program for the church concerning the world

Ac 1.8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

1. The first missionary journey took Paul to Crete and Galatia
2. The second missionary journey took Paul through all of Greece and Macedonia
3. The third missionary journey established churches in Asia (Ephesus) and surroundings

³ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Ac 28.15.

4. This journey finds Paul at the pinnacle of the Empire, with the church spread from Jerusalem to Rome

In a sense, Rome stands for “world-wide evangelism”

I have a book on missions, *From Rome to Irian Jaya*. Its subtitle is:

A Biographical History of Christian Missions

Irian Jaya is today known as Papua, the western half of “Papua-New Guinea”

The Christian church exists all around the world.

Proposition: The course of God’s plan ever runs smooth (though for us it may seem to run “bumpy”).

- C. God’s program is not over — next stop: the New Jerusalem

Conclusion:

Our path might seem “bumpy” — we might experience some turbulence along the way, but God will bring all those who believe in him to the New Jerusalem.

At the proper time...