

I OVERVIEW OF THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

BLUEPRINT:

Peter's Ministry (1:1-12:25)

- Establishment of the Church
- Expansion of the Church

Paul's Ministry (13:1-28:31)

- First missionary journey
- Moving of the church council
- Second missionary journey
- Third missionary journey
- **Paul on trial**

MEGATHEMES:

Church beginnings Acts is the history of how Christianity was founded and organized and how it solved its issues. The community of believers began by faith in the risen Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to witness, to love, and to serve.

Holy Spirit **The church did not start or grow by its own power and enthusiasm. The disciples were empowered by God's Holy Spirit. He was the promised comforter and Guide sent when Jesus went to heaven.**

Church growth Acts presents the history of a dynamic, growing community of believers from Jerusalem to Syria, Africa, Asia, and Europe. In the first century it spread from believing Jews to non-Jews in 39 cities and 30 countries, islands or provinces.

Witnessing **Peter, John, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, and thousands more witnessed to their new faith in Christ. By personal testimony, preaching, or defense before authorities, they told the story with boldness and courage to groups of all sizes.**

Opposition **Through imprisonment, beatings, plots, and riots, Christians were persecuted by both Jews and Gentiles. But the opposition became a catalyst for the spread of Christianity. This showed that Christianity was not the work of man, but it was the work of God.**

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ROME: FACIING LIMITATIONS

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II

SCRIPTURE

ENDURING DIFFICULTIES (27:1-44)

(1-8): Paul is taken by ship to Crete: Paul, Luke and 274 others left on a boat to Rome. They were under the custody of Julius, a member of the Imperial Guard. The trip was scheduled to make several stops, yet several unscheduled stops also occurred. It was already fall and the good sailing weather had already passed.

The use of the pronoun "we" tells us that Luke accompanied Paul on this trip. Aristarchus is the man who was dragged to the amphitheater at the beginning of the riot in Ephesus (*Acts 19:29; Acts 20:4; Philemon 24*).

Paul was allowed to visit friends at Sidon. Headwinds made them change course and they eventually landed at Myra. Sailing got rough, and as they neared Cnidus they moved very slowly through Crete and Salome.

The kindness Paul received reflected both his status as an uncondemned man awaiting an appeal before Caesar, and his evident godly character, giving him favor before man.

At Fair Havens they had to make a decision to either winter there as the weather was getting difficult, or to continue on with the risky long trip.

Ships in ancient times had no compass and navigated by the stars. Overcast weather made sailing very dangerous. In general, sailing was doubtful in September and impossible in November. This voyage took place in October 59 AD.

(9-12): Decision is made not to winter at Fair Havens: Paul, always in tune with the Holy Spirit, warned of shipwreck, loss of cargo, injuries, and death. Since Fair Havens was a poor harbor to spend the winter they decided to go up the coast to Phoenix to winter there.

"The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14 and lasted until November 11; after the latter date all navigation on the open sea came to an end until winter was over." (Bruce)

(13-20): Ship encounters strong winds: A strong cyclone suddenly occurred and blew the ship out to sea (i.e., a place that they did not want to be). They reached Clauda, a small island and strengthened the hull. However, they soon had to throw cargo overboard, and hope for survival was fading fast.

(21-26): Paul reveals to the crew what God has promised about their fate: Paul both admonished (i.e., "I told you so!") and reassured the crew and convinced them to eat something.

He shared an angelic vision that told him that he will definitely stand trial before Caesar. The angel that gave Paul this vision also indicated that **none of the 276 lives would be lost**. However, they would encounter more trials as they would be shipwrecked on an island, which turned out to be Malta.

Paul admonished his crew by reminding them that with God's guidance, he predicted this very problem. Soon they would listen to him (*Acts 27:30-32*) which would save their lives.

Take note of what Paul said: “**I believe God.**” He didn’t say, “I believe *in* God.” Every demon in hell agrees with the existence of God. Paul declared his total confidence in God’s promise. Paul believed God when there was nothing else to believe. He couldn’t believe the sailors, the ship, the sails, the wind, the centurion, human ingenuity or anything else. He could believe in only God and God alone.

This was **not a fair-weather faith**; he believed God in the midst of the storm, when circumstances were at their worst. Paul would say along with Job: *Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him (Job 13:15)*. His terrible situation was real, but God was more real to Paul than the dreadful circumstances.

(27-32): On the 14th night of the storm, Paul ministers to the passengers and crew: They conducted soundings and noticed they were moving closer to the coast where there would be rocks. They threw out anchors and prayed for daylight. As daylight approached, Paul encouraged everyone to eat to regain their strength as they had been through a long drawn-out ordeal.

He repeated his vision that not a hair on their heads would perish. The ship was further lightened by each of the men throwing all of the wheat overboard, reflecting the desperation of the situation. This was a pure struggle for survival.

(39:44): Ship runs aground and all are safe: They tried to negotiate a difficult passage and headed ashore. The ship hit a sandbar and the stern was exposed to the strong winds and began to break apart. Julius spared Paul's life and the other prisoners by not acting to kill them when they jumped overboard to attempt to swim to the land.

Remarkably, all 276 men successfully reached the shore. **God’s promise to Paul had been fulfilled.** They did not know it at first, but they came to an island called Malta, which means refuge.

The soldiers would pay with their own lives if any prisoners escaped (e.g., Philippian jailer). Therefore, their instinctive reaction was to kill the prisoners so that they wouldn’t escape. Julius was impressed with Paul and wanted to save his life, which preserved Paul for his Roman ministry and fulfilled Paul's prediction that all people on the ship would be saved.

“If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long.”
(Bruce).

EXPERIENCING KINDNESSES (28:1-10)

(1-6): Paul’s ministry on Malta: Paul was bitten by a snake when he was gathering up firewood after the Maltese built a bonfire to help the men dry off and warm up, yet Paul was unharmed by the snake (*Mark 16:18*).

The people, as those in *Acts 14:11-18*, thought Paul was a god as to not be hurt by the deadly snake. What they didn’t see was the Hand of God that was protecting Paul so that he could complete his mission to witness to the uttermost parts of the Earth.

God had promised safe passage to Paul, and would not let either sea or serpent stop his bondservant. Today, God protects us in various ways, so we can complete our mission on Earth before we spend eternity with Him.

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(7-10): Paul heals the father of Publius and many others: Publius, the Maltan governor, welcomed everyone and fed all 276 of them for 3 days. Paul, under the power of the Holy Spirit, healed the governor's father from a terminal illness. This led to the other sick people who sought healing. **All of them, expressing their faith, were healed.**

Some think that the sickness Publius' father had was a malady known as *Malta fever*, which comes from a microorganism found in the milk of Maltese goats. Its symptoms usually last some four months.

HAVING LIMITATIONS (28:11-29)

(11-15): Final leg on Paul's journey to Rome: They set sail after wintering in Malta, they arrived at Syracuse, the capital city of the Island of Sicily, and stayed 3 days. Afterward, they made their way northward up the Italian peninsula, circled Rhegium and arrived at Puteoli where they shared with Roman believers.

The Christians in Rome received Paul's famous letter to them a few years before, so they probably felt like they knew him already. They honored him by greeting Paul as the emperors were greeting when they arrived at Rome: they went out to meet him as he came into the city, traveling some 50 miles to do it!

The next day they went on to Rome and fulfilled the many prophecies that Paul would witness in Rome. **God had gone through many events to get Paul exactly where He wanted him at that time.**

None of these events were coincidences. None of the events in the life of a Christian are coincidences. God is sovereign and always in control.

(16): Paul's status as a prisoner in Rome: When Paul came to Rome the city had existed for almost 800 years. The famous Coliseum had not yet been built but the prominent buildings were the temple of Jupiter, the palaces of Caesar, and a temple to Mars, the god of war. At the time, Rome had a population of about two million (i.e., one million slave, one million free) and its society was divided into roughly three classes (i.e., small upper class, large class of poor, and slaves).

In *Philippians 1:13*, written from this Roman custody, Paul speaks of how his message is getting through to the palace guards of Rome. Though he was the prisoner, he had a truly captive audience!

(17-22): Paul appeals to the Jewish community of Rome: Paul followed his consistent practice of going to the Jews first in every city he came to as an evangelist. Paul wanted to know what they had heard from Jerusalem about him. All these Jews in Rome were willing to say they knew about Christianity was that it was spoken against everywhere.

We neither received letters shows that the religious leaders who accused Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea knew their case was hopeless. They made no effort to send ahead documents confirming their case against him.

(23-24): The Jewish community of Rome hears the gospel from Paul: Paul spoke of the kingdom of God, and gave an exhaustive study of how the Old Testament spoke of Jesus. Paul taught exactly what Jesus taught: That now, God was bringing a spiritual kingdom that would take root in men's hearts before it took over the governments of this world. The Jews of Jesus' day and of Paul's day were looking for a political kingdom, not a spiritual kingdom.

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(25-29): The Jews reject the gospel again: Paul understood that Isaiah prophesied of the hardness of heart these people would have (*Isaiah 59:1-3*). Certainly, Paul was gratified that some received the gospel, but he would undoubtedly have been distressed if even one of them rejected Jesus!

Essentially, Isaiah is saying: "If you reject Jesus, you can hear, but never understand; you can see but never perceive. You heart is, and will be, hard, your ears closed, and your eyes shut because you really don't want to turn to God and be healed of your sin."

Soon, in 70 AD, after Paul's rebuke of this Jewish rejection of Jesus, the Jewish people of Judea would be slaughtered wholesale and Jerusalem destroyed to the point where not one brick laid upon another. **Israel would not be a nation again for 1,878 years.** God's judgment was coming, and part of Paul's frustration was that he sensed this.

SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES (28:30-31)

(30-31): Paul spends two years in Rome before his trial in Caesar's court: Why did Paul get "stuck" at Rome for two years? There are many reasons, but three big reasons are the letters to the *Ephesians*, the *Philippians*, and the *Colossians*. God didn't waste Paul's time in Rome.

God never wastes our time, though we may waste it by not sensing God's purpose for our lives at the moment.

EPILOGUE

1. It is quite likely that Paul had his appearance before Caesar Nero; and there is also no doubt that he boldly and powerfully proclaimed the gospel to him - as God had promised he would (*Acts 9:15; 23:11*).
2. It also seems likely that Paul was acquitted of these charges, and enjoyed a few more years of liberty until he was arrested again, imprisoned, condemned, and executed in Rome at the command of Nero, as the historical traditions of the early church state.
3. There is no end to the story. Why? Because this same story is repeated again and again throughout the history of the Church. Trusting in Jesus, relying on the power of the Holy Spirit and the guidance of the Father, the Word of God will continue to spread without hindrance and continue to change lives for the glory of God. The Book of Acts really is a never-ending story.