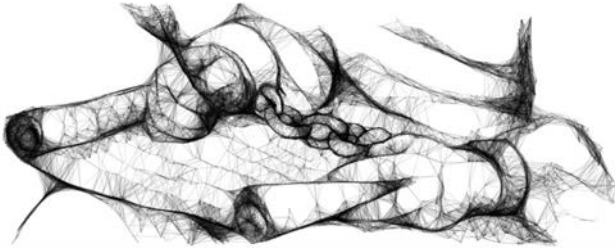


Journey to Rome



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Acts 27, Acts 28, Rom. 1:18–20.*

Memory Text: “Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar.”
(*Acts 27:24, ESV*).

Paul had long wished to visit Rome, but his arrest in Jerusalem changed everything. By giving in to the legalistic pressure of the Jerusalem church leaders, he ended up in Roman custody for almost five years, including the time he spent on the sea journey to Italy. This change represented a severe blow to his missionary plans.

Despite the setback, Jesus Himself promised that the apostle would still testify of Him in Rome (*Acts 23:11*). Even when we fail Him, God may still give us another chance, though He does not always spare us from the consequences of our actions. Not only was Paul taken to Rome as a prisoner, but there is no biblical evidence that he ever went to Spain, as he had hoped to do (*Rom. 15:24*). After being released from what is known as the first Roman imprisonment, Paul would be arrested again, this time to suffer martyrdom (*2 Tim. 4:6–8*) under Nero in A.D. 67.

Yes, Paul made it to Rome, and while waiting in his house-prison to be tried before the emperor, he spoke, despite his chains (*Eph. 6:20, Phil. 1:13*), without hindrance to whoever came to him (*Acts 28:30, 31*), including important figures from Caesar's household (*Phil. 4:22*).

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 29.

Sailing to Rome

After about two years of confinement in Caesarea (*Acts 24:27*), Paul was to be sent to Rome. Judging by the first person plural and the richness of details used to describe the long and turbulent sea journey to Italy (*Acts 27:1–28:16*), Luke was accompanying Paul, as was another Christian named Aristarchus (*Acts 27:2*). Another important character in the story was the Roman centurion, Julius, who had other prisoners as well in his charge (*Acts 27:1*).

It was late summer when they departed. The Fast (*Acts 27:9*) refers to the Day of Atonement, in the second half of October. Because of the winter conditions, travel in the Mediterranean was normally avoided between November and March. This time, however, they faced difficulties from the beginning, and only after much delay they reached the small bay of Fair Havens, in the island of Crete (*Acts 27:8*).

Read *Acts 27:9–12*. While in Fair Havens, how did Paul intervene in the story, and how was his intervention received?

Paul's warnings went unheeded, and so they decided to sail westward another 40 miles to a harbor (Phoenix) where they could winter with safety. Unfortunately, with a sudden change in the weather, they were caught in such a violent tempest that the crew had no option but to let the ship be driven southwest by the wind, away from land. Soon they began to throw the cargo overboard and even some of the ship's gear in a frantic attempt to lighten it, as it was already taking on water. The situation was dramatic. After several days of scant daylight, poor visibility, heavy rain, and raging winds, without knowing where they were and in complete exhaustion, they "finally gave up all hope of being saved" (*Acts 27:20, NIV*).

Read *Acts 27:21–26*. What was Paul's second intervention in the story?

In prophetic words, Paul told the crew a message he had just received from God. There was no reason to despair or lose hope. There would still be danger and loss, but all of them would survive.

Why would such a faithful and dedicated servant of the Lord like Paul have to suffer through so much? What lessons can we learn from his experiences?

The Shipwreck

In his second intervention in the story, Paul assured all who were on board—276 people altogether (*Acts 27:37*)—that, though not everything would come out fine, there would be no casualties; only the ship would go down (*Acts 27:22*). Fourteen days later, the apostle’s words were fulfilled. Still under a terrible storm and with the ship completely adrift, the sailors sensed land was near, possibly because they could hear the noise of breakers (*Acts 27:27*). After a series of soundings, and fearing the ship would be driven against the rocks along the shore, they dropped four anchors from the back of the ship in order to reduce their speed; meanwhile, they desperately asked their gods for daylight to come (*Acts 27:28, 29*).

Read *Acts 27:30–44*. What lessons are here for us in this story?

In the beginning of the journey, the centurion treated Paul well but had no reason to trust the apostle’s nautical judgment earlier in the trip. After two weeks, however, things were different. Paul had already gained the centurion’s respect with his prophetic intervention about the shipwreck (*Acts 27:21–26*), which was heading now to its fulfillment.

Paul urged the people on board to eat, otherwise they would not have the strength to swim and get ashore. Divine providence does not necessarily exempt us from doing what would normally be our duty. “Throughout this narrative a nice balance is maintained between God’s assurance of their safety and the efforts of the people involved to ensure it.”—David J. Williams, *Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), p. 438.

As morning approached, the sailors came in sight of land; it was a bay with a beach, where they decided to run the ship aground. The ship, however, never reached the beach. Instead, it struck a sandbar and ended up breaking apart by the force of the waves. The soldiers’ plan to kill the prisoners to prevent them from escaping was stopped by the centurion, mainly because of Paul. In the end, as God had promised, not a single life was lost.

What should it say to us about the power of Paul’s witness, and his character, that in a desire to keep Paul alive the soldiers were forbidden to kill any of the prisoners?

In Malta

It was only upon reaching the shore that the survivors learned they were in Malta, a small island in the center of the Mediterranean, just south of Sicily. In the two weeks they had been adrift in the sea, yielded to the force of the wind, they had covered about four hundred seventy-five miles since Fair Havens, in Crete. Now they would have to wait out the three months of winter before continuing their journey (*Acts 28:11*).

Read Acts 28:1–10. What happened to Paul on the island of Malta, and how was God able to use him?

The people of Malta were very friendly and hospitable, and their first action toward Paul and his group, who were all wet and cold, was to light a fire to warm them up; the temperature in Malta at this time of the year would not be higher than about 50°F.

The incident of the snake drew the people's attention to Paul. At first, the local pagans viewed the fact that he was bitten as an act of divine retribution. They thought Paul was a murderer who had managed to escape from death by drowning but was still caught by the gods, or perhaps the Greek goddess *Dikē*, the personification of justice and vengeance. Because the apostle did not die, he was hailed as a god, as had happened in Lystra several years before (*Acts 14:8–18*). Though Luke does not dwell on the episode, it is probably safe to assume that Paul took advantage of this situation to bear witness of the God he served.

Publius was either the Roman procurator of Malta or just a local dignitary, but he welcomed Paul and his companions for three days until they found a more permanent place to stay. At any rate, the healing of this man's father gave Paul the opportunity to engage in a sort of healing ministry among the Maltese people.

In Luke's account, there is no mention of a single convert or of any congregation Paul left behind when he departed from Malta. Such omission might be entirely coincidental, but it illustrates the fact that our mission in the world goes beyond baptisms or church planting; it also involves concern for people and their needs. This is the practical aspect of the gospel (*Acts 20:35; compare with Titus 3:14*).

How fascinating that these islanders, who were ignorant about God's law, had a sense of divine justice. Where, ultimately, did that come from? See Rom. 1:18–20.

Paul in Rome, Finally

After three months in Malta, Paul and his companions were finally able to continue their journey (*Acts 28:11*). They arrived in Puteoli (*Acts 28:13*)—modern Pozzuoli, in the Bay of Naples—from where they would travel to Rome by road (see *Acts 28:11–16*).

The news of Paul's approach quickly reached Rome, and from there a group of believers traveled several miles south to welcome him. Though he had never been to Rome, the apostle had numerous friends in the city: co-workers, converts, relatives, and many others who were very dear to him (*Rom. 16:3–16*). The meeting on the Appian Way must have been particularly moving, especially in view of the shipwreck and the fact that Paul was now a prisoner. As a result of such a unique demonstration of love and care on the part of his beloved friends, the apostle thanked God and felt deeply heartened as he was about to face trial before the emperor.

In his official report, Festus certainly must have written that according to Roman law, Paul was not guilty of any significant crime (*Acts 25:26, 27; 26:31, 32*). This probably explains why he was allowed to rent a private dwelling (*Acts 28:30*) instead of being sent to a regular prison or military camp, though after Roman fashion he was chained to a soldier the whole time. That Paul was at his own expense implies he was able to carry on his own trade (*Acts 18:3*).

Read Acts 28:17–22. What did Paul do as soon as he settled down?

Though Paul could not go to the synagogue, the synagogue could come to him. So, soon after his arrival, following his policy of going first to the Jews (*Rom. 1:16*), he called together the local Jewish leaders to state his innocence and explain, as he had done before, that he had been arrested for no reason other than the hope of Israel (*Acts 23:6, 24:15, 26:6–8*). His intention was not so much to defend himself as to create an atmosphere of trust that allowed him to preach the gospel, showing how Jesus' resurrection was the fulfillment of Israel's ancestral hope. Surprised that they had not received any information from Jerusalem about Paul, the Jews decided to hear him.

Read Acts 28:22. What does this tell us about the hostility against the believers still at this time? How can we stay faithful even when others are talking against our faith?

The Victory of the Gospel

On a set day, the Jews came in large numbers to hear Paul's presentation of the gospel (*Acts 28:23*).

Read Acts 28:24–31. What was Paul's point in quoting Isaiah in this context?

The quotation from Isaiah 6:9, 10 describes what happens when people refuse to accept the divine message. Though some Jews believed, others didn't, and so, because of this great dispute, the apostle had no choice but once again to turn to the Gentiles (*Acts 13:46, 47; 18:6*).

Paul had to wait two years to be tried by the emperor. Meanwhile, though restricted to his house-prison, he was still able to share the gospel without hindrance with those who came to him. The last scene of Acts is one that emphasizes the victory of the gospel, as no force, whether Jewish or Roman, had been able to stop its progress.

It is not clear why Luke finishes his book at this point, as there is evidence that, due to the weakness of the case against Paul, he was released from this imprisonment, went on another missionary journey, and was again taken to Rome and executed (*2 Tim. 4:6–8*). Perhaps, from the standpoint of Luke's literary purpose, by having preached even in distant Rome, the gospel already had reached the "ends of the earth" (*Acts 1:8*).

"Paul's patience and cheerfulness during his long and unjust imprisonment, his courage and faith, were a continual sermon. His spirit, so unlike the spirit of the world, bore witness that a power higher than that of earth was abiding with him. And by his example, Christians were impelled to greater energy as advocates of the cause from the public labors of which Paul had been withdrawn. In these ways were the apostle's bonds influential, so that when his power and usefulness seemed cut off, and to all appearance he could do the least, then it was that he gathered sheaves for Christ in fields from which he seemed wholly excluded."—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 464.

From the standpoint of the church's mission, however, it could be said that the book of Acts—or the history of the spreading of the gospel—is not yet finished, and it is here that each one of us enters the picture. Many more exciting and dramatic chapters have been written throughout the centuries, sometimes with the blood of God's faithful witnesses. Now it is our turn to add one more chapter, the last one (we hope!), and bring the mission Jesus left with the disciples to its full completion—"and then the end will come" (*Matt. 24:14, NKJV*).

Further Thought: “Christ has given to the church a sacred charge. Every member should be a channel through which God can communicate to the world the treasures of His grace, the unsearchable riches of Christ. There is nothing that the Saviour desires so much as agents who will represent to the world His Spirit and His character. There is nothing that the world needs so much as the manifestation through humanity of the Saviour’s love. All heaven is waiting for men and women through whom God can reveal the power of Christianity.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 600.

“Long has God waited for the spirit of service to take possession of the whole church so that everyone shall be working for Him according to his ability. When the members of the church of God do their appointed work in the needy fields at home and abroad, in fulfillment of the gospel commission, the whole world will soon be warned and the Lord Jesus will return to this earth with power and great glory.”—Page 111.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 How does Luke portray Paul’s faith in God throughout the whole journey to Rome? How were others affected by such unconditional faith?
- 2 Despite everything he had gone through, Paul never gave up his faith or his mission. In Rome, he continued to preach despite his limited freedom. What can we do when tempted to give up on our proclamation of the gospel to someone?
- 3 Read Romans 1:14, 15. Why did Paul feel himself under obligation—or a debtor—to preach the gospel to everybody? Are we less obligated than he was? Consider this statement: “To save souls should be the lifework of everyone who professes Christ. We are debtors to the world for the grace given us of God, for the light which has shone upon us, and for the discovered beauty and power of the truth.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 53.
- 4 Read again the passage from Isaiah that Paul used. How could this idea apply to us? Yes, we have been given a great deal of truth, but if we harden ourselves to it, or even to aspects of it that might conflict with our own wishes or desires, what danger could we face spiritually?
- 5 Imagine being the soldier chained to Paul. What do you think he saw in the man to whom he was so closely tied?

Healthy Church for the Rich

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Kiyong Kwon, a business owner and church planter, chose an affluent suburb of South Korea's capital, Seoul, to open his second church. His first church, opened in a rural area four years earlier, was filled to overflowing, and he wanted a new challenge. "When God first called me, I said, 'I can't,'" Kwon said. "But after I witnessed God's power, I became bolder."

He reasoned that impoverished people can accept God more easily than the wealthy. He wondered how to share the gospel with those who have everything and decided that even the wealthy need good health. So, he opened the Bundang NEW START church and a vegetarian restaurant in an office building in the suburb of Bundang. "I decided God's health message is the way to share the last-day gospel," he said. The new church began organizing health seminars, cooking classes, and Bible studies.

Among the first attendees was a pharmacist who seemed to enjoy the weeklong health seminar. After the seminar finished, participants interested in more information were invited to attend Bible studies on Daniel and Revelation. But the pharmacist didn't come. Kwon made some inquiries and learned that the pharmacist had taken a week of vacation to attend the health seminar. She didn't have free time for Bible studies. So, Kwon made audio recordings of the Bible studies and sent them to her.

"The woman was really shocked by what she heard, but she didn't want to leave her Sunday church," Kwon said.

The pharmacist's mind began to change as she continued to listen to the Bible studies. She thought about keeping the Sabbath and worshiping at the church. As she pondered what to do, she began to suffer a bad headache. She worried that she might have brain cancer, but doctors couldn't find anything wrong. Still, the pain persisted.

Finally, her 24-year-old daughter said, "Do you know why you have the headache? It's because you know what's right but you aren't doing it. I'll go to the Sabbath church with you."

The pharmacist and her daughter showed up at church the next Sabbath, and they are faithful members today.

"From these kinds of experiences, I realize that this is God's business," Kwon said. "Hearts are not changed because of anything that people do."



KIYONG KWON, 56, left, has planted three churches in South Korea. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help plant the first Adventist church in Sejong, South Korea. Read more about Kwon last week.

Our study guide for next quarter, *Oneness in Christ* by Denis Fortin, will focus on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and what unity in Christ means to us. Fundamental belief no. 14, “Unity in the Body of Christ,” states: “The church is one body with many members, called from every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. . . . We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation. Through the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Scriptures we share the same faith and hope, and reach out in one witness to all. This unity has its source in the oneness of the triune God, who has adopted us as His children.” The guide’s purpose is to provide biblical instruction on Christian unity for us as Seventh-day Adventists, who, now, as always, face challenges to that unity. However, in Scripture we find insights and instructions on how to live God’s gift of oneness in Christ. Those insights and instructions about living out the unity we have been given, will be our topic this quarter.

Lesson 1—Creation and Fall

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Love as a Foundation of Unity** (*Gen. 1:26, 27*)

MONDAY: **The Consequences of the Fall** (*Gen. 3:16–19*)

TUESDAY: **Further Disunity and Separation** (*Gen. 11:1–9*)

WEDNESDAY: **Abraham, Father of God’s People** (*Gen. 12:3, 18:18*)

THURSDAY: **God’s Chosen People** (*Deut. 7:6–11*)

Memory Text—*Genesis 15:5, 6, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Any attempt at understanding the nature of church unity must begin with God’s plan at Creation and then the need for restoration after the Fall. God works through people to restore unity and to make His will known to lost humanity.

Lesson 2—Causes of Disunity

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **“Return, O Backsliding Children”** (*Jer. 3:14–18*)

MONDAY: **Right in His Own Eyes** (*Judg. 17:6*)

TUESDAY: **The Division of the Hebrew Nation** (*1 Kings 12:1–16*)

WEDNESDAY: **Schism in Corinth** (*1 Cor. 1:10–17*)

THURSDAY: **“Wolves Will Come”** (*Acts 20:25–31*)

Memory Text—*Proverbs 9:10, NKJV*

Sabbath Gem: Disobedience and carelessness led Israel into apostasy and disunity. Obedience to God’s laws was intended as a means to preserve the people from the natural consequences of sin and to sanctify them in the midst of many foreign nations.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audio CD to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services for the Blind, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097. Phone: 402-488-0981; e-mail: info@christianrecord.org; Web site: www.christianrecord.org.