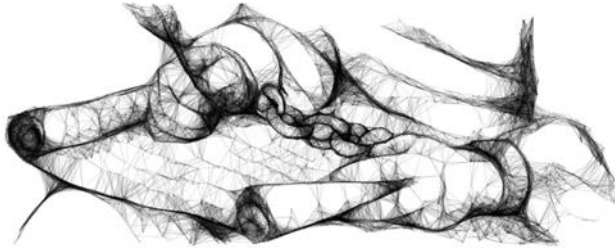


Journey to Rome



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, NIV*).

"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 in last week's lesson.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Acts 27:24*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Understand that circumstances, dangers, and trials cannot stop the spread of the gospel. Only a closed heart can do this.

Feel: Find courage in the call that has been placed upon the life of every believer to share the gospel.

Do: Open his or her own heart to the gospel and recognize the places in which he or she can share it.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Circumstances Cannot Stop the Spread of the Gospel.

A What different circumstances did Paul go through that could have stopped him from spreading the gospel?

B What can stop the spread of the gospel in the life of an individual?

II. Feel: Find Courage to Share the Gospel.

A When have you found yourself too overwhelmed with life's circumstances to share your faith in God? Talk a little bit about what that experience was like.

B How do these feelings limit the gospel?

C How can you take courage from Paul's story?

III. Do: Be Open to the Gospel in Your Life and in the Lives of Others.

A Why is it important for believers to be open to the gospel in order for it to go forward?

B How might a believer discover an opening in another's life in which the gospel can be shared?

► **Summary:** Acts ends with the story of Paul's journey to Rome. He encounters many difficulties along the way, including being put in chains, surviving a shipwreck, and experiencing rejection by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Paul perseveres through all this adversity in sharing the gospel. The one way the message is stopped is in the individual lives of those who reject it.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Acts 27:24*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Never stop sharing your faith, even when circumstances and rejection discourage you from doing so. Make sure that you are always open to the gospel in your own life and that you are looking for ways to share it with others.

Just for Teachers: Throughout this lesson, your class members will have the chance to explore the limitations that there may be for the sharing of the gospel in each of their lives. It is important to recognize that the only limitation to the gospel is our willingness to share and another's willingness to hear it. If we will share, there are always people who will listen, and life's circumstances cannot stop the spread of the gospel.

Opening Discussion: One of the most limiting things for the gospel today is the openness of the people to the gospel message. This limiting factor holds true for both the believer who could share the message and for the listener who could receive it. One of the hindrances that, as a pastor, Cory would face with preaching the gospel was his own unworthiness. He would at times find himself in his office preparing for a sermon and think to himself, *What right do I have to share this good news? My life is far from perfect.* But Cory would turn this concern over to God in prayer and find the same answer again and again: *Your unworthiness does not make the gospel unworthy of being heard.* Imagine if Paul had given in to discouragement from the accusations of the unbelieving Jews or from the hardships that he faced. His witness could have been silenced, but he persevered and remained open to sharing the gospel. Even though the gospel may have been stopped at the doors of the hearts of those who rejected it, Paul continued to spread the gospel to those who would receive it.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are the things that have stopped you from sharing your faith in the past?
- ❷ Have you ever felt unworthy of sharing the gospel? Why, or why not?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: As you lead out in the study of the story of Paul's journey to Rome, help your class to think through the various kinds of obstacles that they, too, might encounter in spreading the gospel.

Bible Commentary

In this final lesson, we will take a look at Paul's difficult journey to Rome and the response of the Jewish leaders in Rome. The study will look at the different obstacles that Paul faced and the ways in which he persevered.

I. The Difficulties of Paul's Journey (*Review Acts 27:1–28:16 with your class.*)

Paul has been held in Caesarea for two years as a prisoner. Both Felix and Festus have found Paul to be not guilty of any civil crime, but in order to escape the murderous intentions of the religious leaders in Jerusalem, Paul appeals to Caesar. It is finally time for Paul to begin that journey. This journey is a significant voyage of several hundred miles to be made by sea. This journey is made even more difficult by inclement weather conditions and the coming winter. The journey from Alexandria to Rome could take as little as 10 days, but with adverse conditions, this voyage could extend to 45 days. The wisdom of the day told sailors to avoid the sea from November through mid-March, and the slow progress of Paul and his fellow 275 shipmates meant they would need to stop for the winter. (See Darrel L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 733.)

The port they were in was less than ideal. Most likely it was partially open to the sea, and, therefore, the ship was not safe to stay in port. (See Darrel L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 733.) Despite Paul's warnings, the captain and the Roman centurion decide to try for the next port. This maneuver does not work, and the crew find themselves tossing cargo and ship tackle in order to survive as they are blown off course. The failed attempt to reach the next port shipwrecks them on the isle of Malta. After wintering with the friendly natives on the island, the crew makes it to port on another ship, only to have another 494 miles to travel before reaching Rome. (See Darrel L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 745.)

Discussion Questions:

- ① What kind of travel hazards have you faced in your life?
- ② How is the cause of sharing the gospel great enough for you to keep going?
- ③ Have you ever made a difficult journey for the sake of the gospel?

II. Paul's Effort to Win Hearts on the Journey (Review Acts 27:9–11, 21–26, 33–36; 28:3–6, 7–10 with your class.)

The circumstances of the journey were difficult enough. Paul, however, had other difficulties to face in the midst of the storm and the shipwreck. Paul, for the sake of the gospel, had to earn the trust of those with whom he was traveling. When the decision is to be made as to whether the ship should stay in the semi-safe port for the winter or move on, Paul counsels the centurion that if they try to continue the journey, it will not go well. The centurion does not listen to him. Once they are lost in the midst of the storm, the whole crew is more open to listening to Paul as he reminds them of his warning to them not to go in the first place.

Paul then steps into the role of the spiritual advisor for the whole ship, letting them know that an angel has appeared to him and said the ship will be lost, but not a single soul will perish. (See Darrel L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 738.) Paul has won the centurion over enough so that the centurion is able to stop a plot by his soldiers to kill all the prisoners so they will not escape. After they are shipwrecked, the natives help to build fires. Paul throws some wood on the fire, and a viper latches onto his hand. The natives are sure that Paul is a murderer and will soon die. When Paul does not, however, the natives decide he must be a god. Then Paul heals the chief's father and many others in the village. The natives are so grateful that they provide all that is needed to continue the journey to Rome.

Consider This:

1. What kinds of things hold us back from trusting one another?
2. Suppose someone cannot trust the person who is sharing the gospel. What effect does that distrust have on the person listening to the gospel and that individual's receptivity to the good news?
3. Which is easier to overcome when it comes to sharing the gospel: physical circumstances or matters of trust? Explain.

III. Paul Meets With the Jewish Leaders in Rome (Review Acts 28:17–31 with your class.)

Finally arriving in Rome, Paul is still in chains, most likely chained to a Roman guard, but apparently under house arrest. (See Darrel L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, p. 757.) People are allowed to come and visit with Paul, and the Jewish leaders accept the invitation. Paul presents the gospel to them. Letting them know that he has not broken any of their traditions but holds to the same hope as Israel (the resurrection of the dead), Paul presents Jesus Christ as the longed-for Messiah. Some of the leaders are convinced, and others are not. They leave Paul, arguing among themselves, and Paul quotes

Isaiah 6:9, 10 to warn them of the hardness of their hearts. (See Darrel L. Bock, *Acts: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, pp. 754, 755.) He then declares the gospel of Jesus Christ to be unstoppable. Even if the Jews reject it, the message will go on to the Gentiles. Paul has made it to Rome, and he will testify to the highest officials of the land.

Consider This:

1. Why is the gospel truly unstoppable? Does the rejection of the gospel cease its progress? Explain.
2. If Paul is martyred after testifying in Rome, does this mean that his testimony is stopped? Why, or why not?
3. What are the successes of the early church in sharing the gospel as related in the book of Acts?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: The only obstacle that can actually stop the gospel is an individual’s refusal to accept it. It is essential to think through the obstacles of the heart for the sharer and the receiver.

Application Questions:

- ❶ What obstacles has the gospel faced in your own heart and mind?
- ❷ How can understanding these “heart problems” help us in sharing the gospel with others?
- ❸ What circumstantial obstacles have you seen the gospel overcome?

► **STEP 4—Create**

Just for Teachers: Do as many of the listed activities as time, space, supplies, and preference will allow.

Activities:

- ❶ Have your class act out the story of Paul’s journey to Rome for the next children’s story in your church.
- ❷ Set up an obstacle course with different obstacles, representing Paul’s struggles.
- ❸ Create a large painting of the shipwreck, using a bedsheet and house paint.
- ❹ What insights into Paul’s journey do these activities help you to find? How do these activities encourage you never to allow any obstacle to stop you from sharing your faith?