



### Time to Reflect

- How can we be an encourager to other people? Do we have family members or friends who need a word of encouragement at this time?
- Why do you think that, even today, there are different responses to the Gospel message?

Last week we reflected on Paul's time in Malta and we observed how miraculous healings occurred and the Good News of Jesus was demonstrated once more. This week our journey through Acts of the Apostles reaches its conclusion as we embark on our thirtieth study of this remarkable book of the Bible. Since September we have learnt more about mission on the frontline and we have witnessed how Paul was initially transformed by God and then used mightily to spread the Gospel. In this final Bible Study of the current season, we will see how Paul was faithful to his calling, even in the most incredible of circumstances.

**“Here is a reminder that the advancement of the gospel did not rest upon the shoulders of Paul alone. The hero of Acts is not Paul or Peter. It is God himself, who powerfully advanced the gospel throughout the known world.”**

(Albert Mohler Jr, *Acts 13-28 For You* p191)

### Passage Specifics

- Last week we were focused on Paul's time in Malta. As we approach this week's passage, we are told that three months have now passed since Paul arrived safely in Malta (v11). It would now have been the end of winter and sailing conditions were safe once more.
- Paul and his companions boarded an Alexandrian ship and the final leg of their journey now began. They travelled, initially, about 100 miles to Syracuse (on the east of Sicily) and they stayed there for three days (v12). They then sailed on to Rhegium and Puteoli (a harbour in Naples, Italy).
- Interestingly, Paul found some believers in Puteoli and he was invited to stay with them for a week (v14). We see hospitality being offered here.
- In an almost throw away remark, the passage then simply says “*And so we came to Rome*” (v14). This was the ultimate destination for Paul and it was also the fulfilment of Jesus's promise to Paul which we studied in Acts 23:11.
- Note how the Christian people in Rome and the surrounding areas had heard of Paul's imminent arrival and they travelled to meet him. Appius was a town about 43 miles from Rome and the Three Taverns was 33 miles away. These details indicate that these Christian people were prepared to travel a significant distance, on foot, to meet Paul.
- Paul was encouraged at the sight of these people and he thanked God for them (v15). Knowing the challenges that lay ahead of him, it is heart-warming that Paul experienced such encouragement.
- We all need to experience such encouragement at times in our lives, and as God's people we should strive to be encouragers.

- The passage tells us that Paul lived under house arrest (v17). This would have prevented him from engaging in his usual pattern of visiting the local synagogues when he went to new cities.
- Albert Mohler develops the importance of this for us. “Paul could not go to the synagogue in Rome, though, because he remained under house arrest. Paul, therefore, did the next best thing: he called the Jewish leaders to his house. He brought the synagogue to himself (v17).”
- Paul did this within three days of his arrival in Rome. He didn’t want to waste any time. There was an urgency in his mission and he knew it.
- Paul addressed the Jewish leaders as brothers (v17) and he spoke warmly to them. He outlined why he was a prisoner (v17-20) and he articulated his desire to share with them.
- (v21) highlights that the Jewish leaders in Rome had heard nothing negative about Paul and they were interested in hearing more from him (v22).
- When they regathered to hear Paul, they did so in increased numbers (v23) and he witnessed to them. Consistently, throughout Acts of the Apostles, Paul remained passionate about and faithful in communicating the Gospel message.
- Paul, as he so often did, grounded his message in the Scriptures. We are challenged, again, to be a biblical people – to read, learn, mark and inwardly digest the Word of God.
- The Jews were so inquisitive that they listened to Paul from morning until evening (v23). However, as we have discovered on other occasions in Acts, “Some were convinced by what he said, others would not believe” (v24).
- John-Michael Wong reminds us, “The gospel forces people to divide either for or against Christ.<sup>1</sup>” This was the case as Paul faithfully proclaimed the Good News in Rome.
- Paul used a passage from Isaiah 6:9-10 as he spoke to the Jewish leaders in Rome. (v26), in particular, is very revealing. There will be people who, when they encounter the Christian message, will be “...ever hearing but never understanding...ever seeing but never perceiving.”
- This is a heart-breaking situation and (v27) communicates a possible reason as to why this happens. “For this people’s heart has become calloused.” May we pray that God would give us open, warm, and receptive hearts to what He has to say to us.
- It can be so easy to become discouraged when we encounter such apathy to the Christian message. But the example of Paul encourages us to remain focused, to keep on keeping on, and to ensure that we finish well.
- Note how he concentrated on evangelising those who would listen, and for two years he welcomed all who came to him (v30). Paul continued to preach and proclaim the Kingdom of God. He persisted in teaching about the Lord Jesus with boldness and without hindrance (v31).
- His ministry was so profound that even the Roman guards around the Governor’s palace learned of Jesus (e.g. Philippians 1:13).
- God had Paul, in Rome, doing exactly what He has planned. Though Paul was in chains, he preached about a Saviour who would set the captives free.
- Luke’s conclusion to Acts of the Apostles is both challenging and encouraging. Paul remained focused to his calling, regardless of circumstance or situation, and so must we. He remained true to “...a faithful God who keeps his promises, preserves his church, advances his message, and established an eternal people.<sup>2</sup>”
- May we follow the example of Paul and dare to embrace the task which remains unfinished.

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<sup>1</sup> John-Michael Wong, *Opening Up Acts*, p171.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Mohler Jr, *Acts 13-28 For You*, p195.