

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 21, Acts 28

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: When will you give up on Christ?

Chapter 28 The Kingdom Meets the Empire

Section 1: Acts 28:1-10 God Preserves Paul

28 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. ²The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. ³Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. ⁴When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, the goddess Justice has

not allowed him to live."⁵ But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. ⁶The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead; but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

⁷There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius¹, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and showed us generous hospitality for three days. ⁸His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. ⁹When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. ¹⁰They honored us in many ways; and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

Paul does not sit around and watch the others work. He jumps in and collects wood. He works hard with the others. This is a part of being a Christian. We don't sit back when there is work to be done. There have been non-Christian parents who became interested in Christ because they saw a significant change in the behavior of their

¹ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 1052

Christian children. Parents notice when their kids suddenly are more respectful, helpful around the house, and more efficient in their studies at school. Christians see their work as something they do for God with all their energy. When we do this, others notice.

We learn about the people of the island from what happens to Paul. First, the snake crawls out of the fire and bites Paul². They interpret this as the work of their goddess Justice, obviously a goddess who brings to all men their just deserts. The island is populated by polytheists, people who believe in many different gods who are responsible for different things. Secondly, when Paul is not affected by the snake that they all know is highly poisonous, they consider him to be a god visiting them. This same thing happened to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14. We are not told how Paul reacted to this, but we can assume that he tried to correct their false impression.

In Mark 16:18 we are told that Christians will hold snakes and not be harmed by them. Paul is not hurt by this snake because Jesus has made an appointment for him in Rome and nothing will stand in the way of this. Jesus is not going to allow Paul to fall before he completes his mission. Jesus is bigger than snakes.

We are not told how Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus end up in the rich governor's home. Most likely Julius (being a Roman official) was invited and brought Paul along. Being considered a god by the locals probably helped.

² A similar account can be found in *The Book of Acts*, by F. F. Bruce, pg. 521

At Publius' home, God heals the man's bed-ridden father through Paul.³ Notice how this is done. Paul prays first, asking God to do the healing. He lays hands on the man.⁴ This was not a magical act. It was symbolic. Throughout the Bible the laying on of hands was a symbol of transference. What is transferred here? It is health and wholeness from the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christians ought to pray and lay hands on people often for healing. Ultimately, the healing is in God's hands.

Richard Ngidi, was a Zulu evangelist, who saw healing as the opening for the gospel. When he went to a new area, he set up a tent. He prayed for God to show His power. It was said of his ministry: "They don't advertise services over there. They don't have magazines or radio in that part of the country. So first, Richard trusts the Lord to heal a sick person. Soon the people hear about this man praying for the sick. Since they are a needy people, they come. And God starts to heal."⁵

Section 2: Acts 28:11-16 Brotherhood Displayed

¹¹ After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island—it was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. ¹² We put in at Syracuse

³ *Malta fever was from a parasite in goat's milk.* The Book of Acts, F. F. Bruce, pg. 523

⁴ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 538

⁵ *Signs and Wonders Today*, pg. 57

and stayed there three days. ¹³From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. ¹⁴There we found some brothers and sisters who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵The brothers and sisters there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these people Paul thanked God and was encouraged.¹⁶When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

A Christian professor once explained, “When you are a Christian, you own thousands of homes. Everyone who is a Christian should open his or her home to their brothers and sisters. I can travel across the country without staying one night in a hotel. I stay with Christians who open their homes to me.”

The Christians of Italy are hospitable to Paul. They open their homes to him. They come to see him and encourage him. They treat him as a loved brother. This should be normal in the church. All who are in Christ have a common father. We are family. Our actions should show this.

Paul is allowed to stay in his own house with a soldier to guard him. It was during his imprisonment that he wrote the books of Ephesians and Colossians. Some feel that the soldier standing with him inspired Paul to explain the full armor of God in Ephesians 6.

Section 3: Acts 28:17-30 A New Base Camp

¹⁷Three days later he called together the local Jewish leaders. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: “My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. ¹⁸They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. ¹⁹The Jews objected, so I was compelled to make an appeal to Caesar. I certainly did not intend to bring any charge against my own people. ²⁰For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

²¹They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of our people who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you.²² But we want to

hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect.”

²³They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus. ²⁴Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. ²⁵They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your ancestors when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶“Go to this people and say,
“You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.”

²⁷For this people’s heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.
Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.’

²⁸“Therefore I want you to know that God’s salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!” ^[29]

³⁰For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. ³¹He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!

Paul knows that he must meet with the Jews first thing and try to explain what he has been up to. The Jews have been against him and seeking to kill him. The Jews in Rome have not heard anything about Paul or his case, but they are willing to hear him out.

Paul speaks to them about the gospel for a whole day. He convinces some, but others reject the message of salvation. Paul explains that even their rejection was foretold in the Old Testament, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10. This is what God told Isaiah when he called him to ministry. Paul is showing that the Jews have a history of rejecting those who God sends to bring them enlightenment.

Although he could not teach publically, as he had in Athens, nor could he travel freely as he had on his three journeys, Paul saw his current estate as one for advancing the gospel (Philippians 1:12). He was still fulfilling God’s will in his life. Paul’s imprisonment resulted in him having a new home-base in Rome. He spent two years receiving visitors, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about Jesus. He wrote the prison letters here (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon). Not only this, but Paul had

converted many of the soldiers who were assigned to guard him. These guards were young wealthy men who were doing their government service. They were with Paul for many hours, hearing the gospel (Philippians 1:12-13). His influence had reached the palace. Paul tells the Philippians, "All God's people here send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." (Philippians 4:22).

What have we learned?

God is in charge of the gospel. He has a plan for Paul which includes him being imprisoned in Rome, a city of three million, the center hub of the Roman Empire.

Paul has aligned his life with the purpose of God. He is God's instrument to communicate to a lost world the incredible offer of salvation through faith in Jesus and his death and resurrection. May we also align our hearts and lives with the purposes of God and share this good news with everyone so that they might also be saved.

What the Text Says

Section 1 Acts 28:1-10

All through this journey to Rome, Paul relies on Jesus' words that he must testify to the Lord in Rome. This has kept him calm and ready to see God's hand.

Two hundred and seventy-six people left the ship in a terrible rainstorm. They were greeted by friendly natives on the island of Malta. Paul gets to work with the others and is bitten by a snake. The natives expect him to swell up and die, but he does not. They change their view of him from criminal who could not escape the goddess Justice, to god who cannot be hurt by snakes. Paul is invited to stay with the governor. God heals the governor's father through him. God goes on to cure many in this place through Paul. The natives respond with parting gifts for Paul and the men.

Section 2 Acts 28:11-16

When Paul arrives in Italy, he is greeted by brothers and sisters in Christ. They give him encouragement.

Section 3 Acts 28:17-31

The first thing Paul wants to do is to talk to the Jews, to explain himself to them. They haven't heard from their brothers in Jerusalem, so Paul takes advantage of speaking to them while their minds are still open. Paul shares the message of Christ from the Old Testament, proving that Jesus was to come. He talks all day! Some of the Jews believe, while others harden their hearts and reject him.

Connecting to the Scripture

When we see a work of art, we can wonder at its meaning. I wrote a poem that people scratched their heads about. It was fun to hear people inject their own ideas of what my poem meant.

When we want to know what a work of art means, we ask the artist. God is the creator of all things, the artist. He alone can tell us what his universe is for, and what we are for.

God explains in His Word that all was made for His pleasure. We were made in the image of God to be in relationship with Him, a growing relationship for all eternity. Through Christ the sin that separated us from God is forgiven and we are again united.

Our purpose now toward God is 1) To worship God daily, at every opportunity. Spend time each day looking to the heavens and pouring out your awe-filled love for God. 2) To pray continuously. Be in moment by moment dialogue with God. 3) To listen to God, to be ready to hear His voice and follow His direction.

Our purpose toward our brothers and sisters in Christ is 1) To encourage them to continue in the faith through teaching and sharing our experiences in Christ. 2) To share with those in need. 3) To join together in worship and fellowship and become the body (corporeal physical habitation) of Christ, where the Spirit can show Christ in us.

Our purpose toward those outside of Christ is to share with them the gospel to give them the opportunity to participate in this glorious purpose—to be back in fellowship with God now and forever.

Questions to Ask During the Study

Section 1 Read Acts 28:1-10

1. What does Paul do when they are on shore? What does this tell you about Christians being helpful? What can you do to be more helpful in your life?
2. What did the islanders think about Paul being bit by the snake? What does this tell you about the beliefs of others? How important is it for Christians to know how others think?
3. God heals again through Paul. Who can you pray for healing?

Section 2 Read Acts 28:11-16

1. The Christians in Rome are supportive to Paul. Who can you support right now in Christ? Who can you give encouragement to?

Section 3 Read Acts 28:17-31

1. Paul goes right to the Jews. Why is it important to address problems right away?
2. Paul explains salvation using the Old Testament. He speaks all day. How can we get to the point where we could share our faith for a whole day to those who would be interested?
3. Was Paul surprised when some of the Jews rejected the message of Christ? What can we expect when we share the gospel? How can we handle this?
4. Paul uses Rome as a new home base for his teaching. In what way is your home a base of operations for the gospel?