



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"RIDING THROUGH"

THE BOOK OF ACTS-LESSON 28

In lesson 27, we find Paul and the crew making their way to land. The men who knew how to swim were swimming, and the others were floating on debris. (I wonder if Paul could swim.) All 276 men made it to land safely, just as God had promised (Acts 27:22).

As we read chapter 28, we are tempted to scream, "He did it!" Paul made it to Rome, and in one piece! After many trials and much pain, Paul planted his feet in the city that he so desperately longed to share the Gospel in. But, then again, was there ever any doubt that he would make it? After all, didn't God promise Paul that he would get there?

Let's spend this last week of our lesson asking the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts in a mighty way. I want to learn and know and understand all that He has for me, don't you? Don't forget to begin each day in prayer, asking Him to reveal His truths to you, and show you how to apply those truths to your life.

First Day

1. Read Acts 28:1-31. We will break this chapter up into two sections.
Title each section, and answer the following questions:

Section I. Verses 1-16. Title _____.

- a. Describe the facts. What is happening?
- b. Who are the main characters in this section?
- c. Describe how the 276 men might be feeling when they reached the island.

- d. What is the central theme?
- e. Name one new fact or thought you learned from this section.
- f. Was Luke still there?

Section II. Verses 17-31. Title _____.

- a. Name the characters in this section.
- b. Where is this taking place?
- c. What is the key verse?
- d. How was Paul received?

2. Read Acts 28:1-2 again.
3. What's the name of the island?

Malta was a rugged Mediterranean island located 50 miles south of Sicily. It was 18 miles long and 8 miles wide. F.F. Bruce says that "Malta was the Canaanite word for "refuge." It has even been suggested that what Luke means by saying that the island was called Malta is "we recognize that it was well-named."

4. Who greeted them as they reached the island?

The word "**natives**" is "**barbaros**" in the Greek, which is where we get our word barbarian. In his commentary on the Book of Acts, William Barclay says that "to the Greek, the barbarian was a man who said bar-bar, that is, a man who spoke an unintelligible foreign language and not the beautiful Greek tongue."

5. How did these natives prove themselves to be anything but "barbaric"?

God was Paul's refuge from the storm. God provided a time and place for Paul (and the crew) to rest and recuperate from their traumatic sailing experience. God's refuge provided healing and refreshment for Paul.

God is our refuge too! He wants to provide us with healing and refreshment as we find our shelter in Him.

6. Define the word refuge.

7. Look up the following verses. What do they say about "refuge"?

a. Psalm 9:9-10

b. Psalm 46:1

c. Psalm 57:1

d. Psalm 59:16

e. Psalm 91:1-2

f. Deuteronomy 33:27a

g. Psalm 142:5

One important thing to note about a place of refuge is that you have to **GO** to it. You must actually go and seek it out.

8. Are you making God your refuge? Do you see Him as your shelter against harm? As protection? As a place of safety? Are you hiding in Him? (Think about this question in regard to a situation or trial you are in right now.)

9. What other "things" do we find our refuge in? Why is it wrong?

We will end today's discussion here. Let's spend some time today meditating on what it means to have God as our refuge. Just as the Lord wanted to refresh Paul, and give him some time to recuperate, God wants to refresh you too! Are you tired? Take a rest in your refuge -- God Himself!

Memory Verse of the Week: "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" Acts 28:28

Second Day

Review your memory verse. Have you heard the news?

Paul was a witness wherever he went, even on the island of Malta. He was a servant of the Most High God, and he never seemed to forget that.

1. Read Acts 28:1-6.
2. What was Paul doing in verse 3? Did he expect to be waited on? How is he an example of a good leader?

You would think that after the shipwreck incident, the rest of the crew would want to wait on Paul. They knew that he obviously was hearing from God. But Paul didn't ever want to receive any worship or special treatment. After all, doesn't being a servant mean that we are to serve?

3. Talk about a bad day, what happens to Paul in verse 3?
4. According to verse 4, what conclusion did the natives come to concerning Paul? Why?
5. How did Paul handle the snake? Was he harmed?
6. Read Mark 16:15-18. How did Paul fulfill prophecy?
7. Because he didn't get sick, what did the natives think of Paul?

Paul goes from being a murderer to being a god in two verses! Imagine that! But this sounds a little familiar, doesn't it? Do you remember what happened to him in Acts chapter 14? Go back and refresh your memory.

Paul is encountering spiritual warfare everywhere he turns. He didn't drown -- maybe the snake will kill him! But Paul kept going strong, knowing that God was with

him, protecting and guiding him. I believe that Paul was watchful and alert at all times. He didn't travel on his journey slothfully, or sluggishly. He was ready for action at all times, knowing that the enemy was always waiting to pounce.

8. How are you handling your journey? Are you watchful and alert to the dangers that you may encounter, or are you sluggish, slothful, and unprepared? How does being alert help us in the battle?

Acts 28:5 says that Paul shook off the viper into the fire. Our sins remind me of this viper. They attach themselves to us, and the only way to get rid of them is to "shake them off into the fire." Hebrews 12:1 says to lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us. Shake it off!

9. If we don't "shake it off," what can happen?
10. Is there a sin in your life that is "hanging on"? Does it keep rearing its ugly head? Shake it off into the fire. Don't feed it or play with it. Don't entertain others with it -- shake it off! Are you ready and willing to do it today?

This ends our study for today. What's your "**Reason to Rejoice**"? I rejoice that God gave Paul the supernatural strength, courage, and hope to continue despite the circumstances. That reminds me that God wants to do the same for me!

Third Day

What's your memory verse? Tell it to someone today. Rejoice in it!

1. Read Acts 28:7-16.
2. Who invited the travelers to stay with him?

It is most likely that the "leading citizen" or the "chief" of the island was an official title. This man may have been a native dignitary, or a local representative of the Roman government. Publius probably invited them to stay until more permanent arrangements for the winter could be made.

3. What happened to Publius' father? (Notice Dr. Luke's detailed medical description.)

** This fever may have been "gastric fever," which is still common in Malta today.

4. What does Paul do?

Isn't God great? They have a medical doctor in their midst, but God chooses to heal this man supernaturally, through Paul. The man, who had to bear an affliction himself without being healed (2 Corinthians 12:7-10), got the opportunity to be used to relieve someone else of their pain. We note here that obviously Paul could not just "heal" anyone he wanted to, at any time, but it was a work of the Holy Spirit, not of Paul, or he certainly would have healed himself.

5. When the people on the island heard about the healing, what did they do? (vs 9)

The Greek word for healed in verse 8 is "**iaomai**," but in verse 9, Luke uses a different word, "**therapeua**." From this word we derive our word "**therapy**," translated here as "**healed**" or "**cured**." This word can also mean "**to treat medically**." This may infer that Luke was involved in Paul's healing ministry, perhaps using natural means also to heal. (A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament, Fritz Rienecker)

Whatever the text exactly means, God was definitely using Paul and Luke to minister to the physical needs of the people as a sign of His power and the truth of the Gospel.

6. The men had lost everything at sea. What did the natives do for them? (vs 10)

7. How long were they there? (vs 11)

The travelers set sail once more on another Alexandrian ship that had spent the winter on Malta. The ship had a figurehead called "**Twin Brothers**" on it. The Twin Brothers were Castor and Pollux, the heavenly twins of Greek mythology. These sons of Zeus and Leda were regarded by sailors as their patron deities, and a glimpse of the constellation Gemini was said to bring good luck in stormy weather. (William Neil)

8. Where did they land?

Syracuse is the port on the east coast of Sicily, about 80 miles from Malta, which was about a day's sail. After three days, they continued 70 miles to Rhegium, a port at the toe of Italy. The south wind helped the ship make the 180-mile trip to Puteolin, in just two days. Puteolin was located by the Bay of Naples and was the regular port for the Alexandrian grain fleet. Once they get to the city of Puteolin, they find some believers who invite them to stay until their trip resumes (vs 14a).

After a week, Julius leads the men by land to the Appian Way, which was the famous road leading from Rome across the south of Italy. They had about 100 more miles to go to reach Rome. The Three Inns were about 30 miles from Rome, and 10 miles further down the road was the Market of Appius.

9. Who comes to greet them in verse 15? What did Paul do?
10. Why did Paul "take courage" when he saw these brethren?
11. Can you remember a time when seeing friends brought you courage? Do you have a friend who is going through a major trial? Have you given her courage by letting her know that you are there for her? How can you come alongside her to support her? How does knowing that we're not alone strengthen and encourage us?

Sometimes we forget that Paul needed encouragement too. Just knowing that he had support helped him to face the road ahead.

12. When Julius delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard, what special treatment did Paul receive? (vs 16)

Even though Paul got special treatment, I wonder if he thought that this is what God had meant when He said He would get him to Rome. He was restricted to this room for two years (vs 30), leashed to a Roman guard. Even though he was not being treated as the other prisoners, he still had no freedom to roam the streets of Rome, preaching the Gospel as he so desired. He could probably hear the hustle and bustle of the busy city outside, but here he sat, isolated, in a one-room apartment. Could God have a plan? You bet!

Tomorrow we will read about that plan, but for now, let's rejoice that Paul made it safely to Rome, and that God's timing is perfect. God gave Paul grace in the sight of the centurion, and grace in the sight of the natives. Isn't it interesting that everyone liked Paul, except his own people?

Fourth Day

Review your memory verse.

We made it. We are now safely in Rome, where we've been headed for many chapters. God has a plan for Paul to get the Gospel out. Let's see what it is ...

1. Read Acts 28:17-29.
2. What did Paul do after three days?
3. What do you think Paul did during those first three days?

Paul continues to minister to the Jews first. For more than 30 years, the Jews had opposed and hindered Paul and rejected the Gospel. Yet still, after all this time, he continues to offer God's salvation to the Jews first. His love for his own people remains with him until the end.

4. How does this encourage us not to give up hope as we share with people? Have you grown weary lately in sharing with someone?
5. Paul invites the Jewish leaders to see him. In your own words, briefly describe what he tells them in verses 17-20.
6. Why does Paul say that he appealed to Caesar?
7. Does Paul imply any bad feelings towards the Jews?
8. Had they heard any evil about Paul?

They had heard of the new sect called "The Way," which Paul was part of. They were curious. Tell us more, they said! Paul arranged a second meeting, this time including more of the townspeople.

9. At this second meeting, what things did Paul tell them? (vs 23)

Paul communicates the Gospel three ways, in verse 23. The text says that he was "explaining," "testifying," and "persuading." The Greek word for "explaining" means "to lay out, to set forth." Paul laid out the Gospel in an orderly sequence.

Next, the word "testifying" in the Greek means "to declare emphatically." We can certainly picture Paul doing this, can't we? He is passionately making point after point.

Thirdly, Paul is trying to "persuade" them, or "effect a change." Paul is very accurately and thoroughly presenting the argument for Christ. We can take the example of Paul as we present the Gospel to others. We can explain, testify, and persuade.

10. How did the people respond? (vs 24)

11. Read Verse 25-27. Whom is he talking about? What is he saying?

12. Paul then throws in the clincher, verse 28. How did they respond to that statement? (vs 29) Why?

Paul is quoting the prophet Isaiah from Isaiah 6:9-10. Jesus had used this same quote in Matthew 13:14-15, as John did in John 12:40-41. It spoke of Israel's refusal to believe God's message in spite of repeated opportunities. They were following the pattern of their fathers 700 years earlier.

The Jews had been given the opportunity for salvation, but had turned it down. The Jews' refusal of the Gospel didn't ruin God's plan of salvation, but opened the door for the Gentiles.

As always, the people leave, disputing among themselves (vs 29). People respond the same way today -- they either reject or accept. There's no in between; there's no maybe; there's no half believing. God says that you are either for Him or against Him. I pray that you have made the decision to be for Him. If you have not yet accepted Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Savior of the world, I pray that you go no further before you do that today. There is no bigger or more important decision

that you will ever be asked to make in your entire life. Will you decide to follow Jesus today?

Fifth Day

Write your verse from memory. Why is this verse so important?

Today we will end our study in the Book of Acts. (I think I might cry!) Before we wrap it up, let's read two more important verses.

1. Read Acts 28:30-31. What did Paul do for 2 years?

2. Did anyone stop him?

It's exciting to see God's plan unfold. Here Paul gets the opportunity to preach to many people, without anyone forbidding or hindering him. Isn't God's plan perfect? He was a prisoner, but he was free in Christ! No one was stoning him, scourging him, hassling him, or trying to kill him. He preached to his heart's content. And because he always had a Roman guard with him, imagine how many of the guards heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ! How many had softened their hearts to receive?

3. How was this plan better than if Paul was a free man?

4. Read Acts 1:3b together with Acts 28:31. How do they relate?

These two years were not wasted time for Paul. It was in this prison that he wrote the letters to the Philippians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon. He wasn't always alone. Luke and Aristarchus had come with him, and to the end Luke remained (2 Timothy 4:11). Timothy was often with him (Philippians 1:1, Colossians 1:1, Philemon 1). Sometimes Tychicus was with him (Ephesians 6:21). For a while he had the company of Epaphroditus (Philippians 4:18), and sometimes Mark was with him (Colossians 4:10).

The story about Jesus of Nazareth swept across the world and was now being preached in Rome, the capital of the world.

5. Read Philippians 1:12-13. Why does Paul tell the Philippians that all this had happened to him?

6. Do you remember what the theme of the Book of Acts is?

Luke ended his book before Paul's case had been tried, so we don't get to read the results. Most believe that Paul was released in about 62 A.D. It is thought that Paul traveled as far as Spain to preach the Gospel (Romans 15:24,28). He may have also gone to visit his friend Philemon as he promised in Philemon 22. He may have met Timothy in Ephesus to commission him as their pastor (1 Timothy 1:3). We know that he traveled through Macedonia, writing his first letter to Timothy, and taking Titus to Crete, where he left him to organize a ministry there (Titus 1:5). From Crete, he would have sailed to Greece and written his letter to Titus while planning to winter in Nicopolis (Titus 3:12-13).

In A.D. 64, things changed. Nero fiercely opposed Christianity, blaming the Christians for the fire in Rome that he himself had ordered. It is thought that Paul may have been dragged off to prison again at this time, being taken once more to Rome.

This time Paul did not get to live in a house, but was chained in a prison and treated like a criminal (2 Timothy 1:16, 2:9). Deserted by many of his supporters and falsely accused by his enemies (2 Timothy 4:16-17, 4:10-11) Paul didn't have much chance of being acquitted a second time.

7. Read 2 Timothy 4:9-18. Who was with him? What did he want Timothy to bring to him? Why? Even though most had deserted him, what did he stand on?

Tradition tells us that Paul was beheaded in a Mamertine prison in A.D. 68. He was identified with Christ even in his death.

It breaks my heart to think that Paul had been deserted by his friends. He risked his life over and over again for the Gospel, only to be left in his time of need to die alone, and as a criminal.

How much more does it break our hearts considering what Christ did for us? I pray that we can learn to identify with Christ as Paul did, by our life. Can we be daring like Paul? Can we be committed like Paul? Can we be zealous like Paul? Can we be willing to surrender our rights and our desires like Paul?

8. What was the greatest truth you learned from the Book of Acts?

9. What did you learn about God through this book?

10. What is the greatest thing that you learned about yourself from this book?
11. How were you encouraged as:
- a. a wife?
 - b. a mother?
 - c. a single?
 - d. a woman?
12. How did studying the Book of Acts change your life? (If it didn't, read it again!)
13. Write a prayer to the Lord, praising Him for the things He has shown you through this study. Praise is a life-long occupation. Hebrews 13:15 says, "By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."

We are living in the Book of Acts. Are you ready to pick up Paul's baton, catch his passion, and allow the Holy Spirit to set a fire under your heart? **Are you ready to let your life today be about God, and not about yourself?** That's my prayer for each of you that have studied this book with us. May God richly bless you and draw you closer to Him each day.

Let me ask you one final question:

14. What is your "Reason to Rejoice"?

**"Your Words were found and I ate them,
and Your Word was to me the joy and
rejoicing of my heart."**

Jeremiah 15:16

