

95. Paul Called Together the Jews in Rome

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand how the Lord protected and provided for Paul when he was shipwrecked on the island of Malta. He was bitten by a poisonous snake and the Lord kept that snake from harming him. When the governor of the island showed kindness and provided for their needs, Paul was able to minister to the father of the governor. Then, the Lord gave Paul the opportunity to heal all those who had diseases on the island. In this topic, we are going to see what happened as Paul traveled the last part of the trip to Rome and then called together the Jews that were living in the city of Rome.

Acts 28:11-14 says, “After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.” During the winter months, we have seen that it was very dangerous to travel on the Mediterranean Sea, by ship, since the ships in that day were very small compared to the ships today. As a result, those who were shipwrecked had to stay on the island of Malta until the early spring when it became safe to travel again.

A ship from Alexandria in Egypt had spent the winter at Malta. This ship had a figurehead called the Twin Brothers. Here, we see that the owners of the ship were very familiar with Greek religion. The Greeks said that their Greek god, Zeus, had twin sons named Castor and Pollux and they were supposed to protect sailors. This is a reminder that belief in the Greek gods was a very common religion in many of the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. The Roman centurion made arrangements for his soldiers and the prisoners to travel on this ship toward Rome.

The first place that they stopped was at the city of Syracuse on the island of Sicily. The ship stayed at that city for three days. From there the ship traveled to the city of Rhegium which is on the southern tip of the country of Italy. They had to stay there for a day until they got a wind that would help them to sail through the straits of Messina, which is a narrow water passage between Sicily and Italy. The next day, a south wind started blowing which made it possible for them to sail north; a day later, they reached the city of Puteoli. The city of Puteoli was the main port for both the country of Italy and the city of Rome, even though it was many miles south of Rome. The port closest to Rome was not deep enough for the grain ships to come into the harbor at that time so that was why the grain ships unloaded their grain at Puteoli.

In Puteoli, Paul found that there was a group of Christians. Paul and the team with him were invited to stay with these Christians, until the Roman centurion and the other prisoners were ready to leave for Rome. As a result, the Lord gave Paul and the team the opportunity to encourage these Christians for a period of seven days. Then, they began their trip by foot to the city of Rome.

Acts 28:15-16 says, “And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul

was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.” Since Paul had spent seven days in Puteoli, before starting toward Rome, the Christians in Rome heard that Paul was coming to Rome. As a result, some of the Christians in Rome came to meet Paul. Some of these Christians reached Appii Forum before they met Paul. That town was over forty miles south of Rome. Others met Paul at a town called Three Inns, because it was a place where travelers often stayed overnight. It was about thirty miles south of Rome.

Paul was filled with thanks to God when these Christians came to meet him. This was a great encouragement to Paul as he came to the city of Rome. A few years earlier, Paul had written the book of Romans to the church in the city of Rome. The fact that these Christians walked that far to meet Paul told him that his letter a few years earlier had been a great encouragement to them. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Now, they wanted to be an encouragement to Paul.

When Paul and the other prisoners arrived in the city of Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard. Apparently, Julius, the centurion, must have told the captain of the guard about Paul, because Paul was given different treatment than the rest of the prisoners. We see that Paul was allowed to stay by himself in a house and have a soldier guard him. Acts 28:30 says, “Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him.” This made it possible for others to freely visit Paul throughout the entire two-year period before Caesar heard his case.

Acts 28:17-20 says, “And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: ‘Men *and* brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against *it*, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see *you* and speak with *you*, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.’” Paul realized that it was very important to talk to the leaders of the Jews that were in Rome. He needed to know if the high priest had contacted them.

The Jewish leaders came to the house that Paul had rented after three days and Paul explained to them why he had been sent to Rome. These leaders would have been the leaders of the various synagogues in the city of Rome and would have represented the entire Jewish population in Rome. When the Romans gained control of the land of Israel in 63 BC, the Roman emperor took part of the Jews as slaves to Rome. Later, these slaves had been freed and formed a fairly large Jewish community in Rome.

Paul told these leaders that he had done nothing either against the Jewish people or against the customs of the fathers. Paul had told the Jews in Jerusalem, in Acts 22:3, “‘I am indeed a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, taught according to

the strictness of our fathers' law, and was zealous toward God as you all are today.” Then, the next day, Paul had told the Jewish Sanhedrin, in Acts 23:6, “Men *and* brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!” By these words to the Jews in Jerusalem, Paul had made it clear that he had not broken the customs (traditions) of the Jews. Instead, it was the hope of the resurrection for which he was being judged. In fact, the Pharisees said, “We find no evil in this man.” (Acts 23:9)

Paul said that he had been delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. The Romans had examined Paul and wanted to set him free, because the Romans did not find any reason to put Paul to death. In fact, Festus and Agrippa agreed, in Acts 26:31, “And when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, ‘This man is doing nothing deserving of death or chains.’” Festus had earlier said to Agrippa, in Acts 25:27, “For it seems to me unreasonable to send a prisoner and not to specify the charges against him.” These statements made it clear that the Romans did not feel that Paul had committed any crimes.

The Jews had made many accusations against Paul. Acts 25:7 says, “When he had come, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood about and laid many serious complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.” Here, we see that the Jews had not been able to prove any of the things of which they accused Paul. The Jewish religious leaders certainly did not want Paul to be released and so that was why Paul said that he had finally appealed his case to Caesar. Paul also made it clear that his appeal to Caesar did not mean that he was accusing the Jewish nation.

Paul had explained before the Sanhedrin, in Acts 23:6 quoted above, “Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!” Here, we see that Paul was able to summarize for the Jews in Rome the reason why he was in Rome. He was there because of his teaching about the resurrection of Jesus. We are going to see in our next topic that the Jews in Rome wanted to learn more about the resurrection of Jesus. In this discussion with the Jewish religious leaders in Rome, Paul made clear the reason why many of the Jews were opposed to the followers of Christ. That opposition was based on the message of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The message of the resurrection is the key message that we are to share with others also. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 says, “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to clearly explain the message of the resurrection from the Word of God. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn how to explain this message so clearly that everyone can understand.