

Outline

1. Shipwreck on Malta
 1. Kindness of the locals
 2. Paul spared from snake bite
 1. First reaction: Justice is done
 2. Second take: A god is among us
 3. Healing of Publius and others
2. Sailing again
 1. From Malta to Syracuse
 2. From Syracuse to Rhegium
 3. From Rhegium to Puteoli
 4. March from Puteoli to Rome
3. Meeting the Jews
 1. Paul gives synopsis of why he is there
 1. Not guilty of offense
 2. Jewish objection to his release in Judea
 2. They didn't know who he was
 1. No letters received
 2. Want to know more "about this sect" since it is "spoken against everywhere"
4. Remains 2 years
 1. At his own expense
 2. Welcomed all who would come
 3. Proclaiming with boldness and without hindrance

Commentary

The word translated "natives" (ESV, NASB95, NJKV, and NRSV) or various forms of "barbarian" (ASV 1901, AV 1873, and KJV) should not cause us to think of these people as "savages." Rather, we should simply understand that to mean that they people who lived on

that part of the island were unable to speak Greek. The Pulpit Commentary on Acts 28:2 notes that:

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The phrase had especial reference to the strange language of the “barbarian.” See St. Paul’s use of it (Rom. 1:14; 1 Cor. 14:11; Col. 3:11); and compare Ovid’s saying (‘Trist.,’ iii. 10, 37), “Barbarus hic ego sum, quia non intelligor ulli;” and that of Herodotus (ii. 158), that the Egyptians call all *barbarians* who do not speak the Egyptian language (Kuinoel). The word is thought to be formed onomatopoeically, to express the confused sound which a strange language has in a man’s ears (Spence-Jones, 2:318).

Likewise, Lenski notes:

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“The barbarians” means neither savages nor barbarous people. In the language of the day mankind was made up of three groups of people: Jews, Greeks, and barbarians. All who did not speak Greek but native languages were termed “barbarians” in the sense of foreign people. These Maltese were a colony of Phoenicians who thus spoke Punic. Yet we should not think that none of them were at least to some degree conversant with the Greek. As far as the Punic itself was concerned, its relation to Hebrew is close enough so that Paul who was master of Hebrew (as distinct from Aramaic) could understand and could make himself understood even without relying on such knowledge of the Greek as the natives may have had (Lenski, 1098-1099).

In this, it would appear that the NIV’s translation of “the islanders” is probably closer to what Luke means than what we think of when we read “natives” or “barbarians.”

While it is easy to tie the reaction that the native Maltese had to Paul's snakebite, remember that Paul and Barnabus had earlier seen much the same reaction to a miracle by the inhabitants of Lystra (Acts 14:9-18). Thus, the reaction to this miracle should not be seen as any indication that the inhabitants of this island were somehow less sophisticated than the average person walking around Roman territory in Paul's day.

Acts 28:21-22 is significant in that it provides some level of insight into the events surrounding Luke's recitation in Acts 18:2 that the Jews had been expelled from Rome. Some commentators seem to try to discount the response of these Jews to Paul's arrival. For instance, Longenecker says:

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The immediate response of the Roman Jewish leaders to Paul's address is surprising. Apparently they did not want to get involved. They disclaimed having gotten any letters about him from the authorities at Jerusalem and said they had heard nothing, officially or unofficially, against him from any Jew who had come to them from Judea (v. 21). Yet Christianity had been known within the Jewish community at Rome for some time (cf. comments on 2:10). In fact, in the late forties Jews at Rome had been so sharply divided about Christianity that the emperor Claudius banished them all from the city to stop the riots there (cf. comments on 18:2). Certainly the Jewish leaders at Rome knew a great deal about Christianity generally and at least something about Paul, and their claim to know only “that people everywhere are talking against this sect” (v. 22) seems much too “diplomatic” in light of their knowledge.

It is, however, in the light of their recent experience that we should judge the Jewish leaders' response to Paul's words. Having been expelled from Rome in 49 or 50 because of riots about Christianity in their community, and having only recently returned to their city after Claudius's death in 54, they were simply not

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prepared in 61 to become involved in Paul's case one way or another. They doubtless had their own opinions about it. But (1) the Jerusalem authorities had not requested them to get involved; (2) Paul was a Roman citizen who had had essentially favorable hearings before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa II; and (3) his case was now to be tried before Caesar himself. So they wanted to have as little as possible to do with Paul and Christianity. But they did say that they were willing at some future time to hear his views on “this sect” (*hairesis*, from which the word “heresy” is derived) (Longenecker, 9570).

To me, this seems to discount the wording of the passage and minimize what Luke relates. While this line of thought is not without merit, it seems wholly unsatisfying. Lenski, on the other hand, seems to make more sense of the passage:

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We need not discuss the question as to whether the Sanhedrists had been able to send letters or documents to the Jews at Rome prior to the time of Paul's arrival, when we consider the difficulties Paul had encountered on his voyage. The fact is, the Sanhedrists did not pursue the matter any farther. As a body they themselves were divided in regard to Paul (23:6-9) and thus could take no united action; moreover, they had already failed twice, in the case of both Felix and Festus. All the leading Jews thus state that they are without official information about Paul and his difficulty with the Jewish authorities at Jerusalem.

But they are also without private information. No Jewish brother, “on getting here,” (παράγενομένος) has made a private report in any synagogue or has talked in private Jewish circles concerning anything wicked in regard to Paul. Πονηρόν is more than “harm” (our versions), it denotes something vicious or wicked, actively so. We take it that this statement covers the whole period of



Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea (two years), for the participle refers to actual arrivals in Rome of individual Jews from Jerusalem, and there had been not a few such arrivals. Some of the many Jews residing in Rome had certainly gone to the great festivals and returned, and others had come to Rome from abroad. The statement is thus rather important. After the riot precipitated by the Asiatic Jews (21:27, etc.), and after Paul was rushed to Caesarea, the Sanhedrists who were opposed to Paul had not advertised their opposition in Jerusalem. Their two attempts against Paul in Caesarea before Felix and before Festus had not become known. The Jews in Rome had heard nothing (Lenski, 1118-1119).

Thought Questions

Consider the following thought questions:

1. Why were the natives' actions in welcoming the shipwreck survivors and building them a fire termed by Luke to be "unusual kindness" (Acts 28:2 ESV)?
2. Why would Paul thank God and take courage upon meeting the brethren from Rome (Acts 28:15)?
3. Explain Paul's statement in Acts 28:19. Why was he compelled to appeal to Caesar even though "I had no charge to bring against my nation"?
4. What does Acts 28:22 indicate regarding the church in Rome during this time period?
5. Give the other passages of scripture which quote Isaiah 6:9-10. How does Paul's use of the prophet fit in with the others?