

## Rome at last – Acts 28: 11 – 31



After spending the winter months in Malta, Paul, along with his companions, fellow prisoners and guards, was able to continue his journey to Rome. The Roman Christians came to meet them, which was a great encouragement to Paul and his friends.

Paul was allowed to live under house arrest, with a soldier guarding him. He had not been convicted of any offence, and the authorities were presumably happy for him to stay in his own quarters, provided for by his friends. This saved them the expense of keeping him in prison.

Soon after his arrival Paul arranged a meeting with the Jewish leaders in Rome. They had not heard of his arrest in Jerusalem and the accusations made about him. Communications, of course, were much slower in those days than they are now, and would have been hampered by the onset of winter. This was another opportunity for Paul to proclaim his faith in the Lord Jesus. Some of the Jews were convinced by his words, which caused no little controversy with those who did not believe his message. Paul declared that although they might reject the Good News, the Gentiles would listen.

St Luke concludes Acts with Paul living for two years in Rome, in a house he rented for himself, welcoming visitors and speaking openly about the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. He was presumably on a waiting list for his case to come up. The Roman Empire covered a massive amount of territory, and there must have been many appeals for the Emperor to hear.

We call Luke's book "The Acts of the Apostles", but the greater part of it could be described as "The Acts of St Paul". This is hardly surprising, as Luke was with him and could write a firsthand account of his adventures. He concludes, nevertheless, without telling us what eventually happened to Paul.

Other writers from the early centuries of the Church tell us that Paul was acquitted of any wrongdoing and was able at last to journey to Spain. Later he returned to Rome, and was put to death during the persecution of Christians there by the Emperor Nero. As a Roman citizen, he was spared the torture meted out to many other Christians, and was probably beheaded, unlike St Peter, who was also caught up in the persecution and was probably crucified.

We cannot be sure when and how Paul met his end, and perhaps it is better to leave him, as St Luke does, preaching the same message to the Gentiles which he has preached throughout Acts, "with all boldness and freedom" (Acts 28:31). Luke wants to show us with these final words that nothing people may do can stop the progress and ultimate victory of the Gospel.

**A Prayer:**

I bind unto myself this day  
The power of God to hold and lead,  
His eye to watch, His might to stay,  
His ear to hearken to my need.  
The wisdom of my God to teach,  
His hand to guide, His shield to ward;  
The word of God to give me speech,  
His heavenly host to be my guard.

*(Translated from St Patrick's Breastplate by Cecil Frances Humphreys Alexander, 1818 – 95)*

**- Rev John Barnett**

**Image:** Paul in Rome, source unknown.