

# Paul Ministers in Malta

**Bible Background • ACTS 28:1–10**

**Printed Text • ACTS 28:1–10 | Devotional Reading • EZEKIEL 34:11–16**

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## Aim for Change

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By the end of the lesson, we will: KNOW how Paul helped people on the island of Malta; APPRECIATE the ways others minister to us; and MINISTER to those in need.

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## In Focus

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Brenda knew she was driving too fast for the poor road conditions, but she just wanted to get home after a long day. She hit a particularly rough patch and suddenly, Brenda's car spun out of control on the slick highway. She nearly missed careening into a ditch before her car skidded to a halt. Thankfully, she was not hurt, but the car would not start. She used her cell phone to call for help, but was still waiting. Then, 10 minutes later a dark car pulled up and a man jumped out, offering his help. She was afraid to talk with him until he showed her his badge: He was an undercover detective on his way home from work. Sighing with relief, Brenda allowed him to check out the car. Although he couldn't help, he stayed with her until her emergency roadside assistance service arrived.

*We sometimes forgo help from others who do not look like us or because of the situation in which we find ourselves. Helping one another becomes easier as we realize God will often send unlikely strangers to help us in our times of need. Paul was such a helper to the sick islanders.*

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## Keep in Mind

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“And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.”  
(Acts 28:8, KJV)

## Focal Verses

**KJV** Acts 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but

after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Barbarous people.** The people of Malta were not barbarians as they are defined today. Rather, in biblical times, Greeks used the term for anyone who didn't speak Greek and was seen as an uncultured individual.

**Malta.** Also called Melita, it was an island located near both Sicily (60 miles away) and Syracuse (90 miles) and was in a strategic location for trade. It is clear that the island had an established government system and that its chief, Publius, was wealthy. He was able to lodge the 276 ship passengers at his estate (Acts 28:7).

## Background

After surviving a brutal northeast storm, Paul and the other passengers either swam to the island of Malta or floated there on boards or pieces of the destroyed ship (Acts

27:44). The inhabitants warmly welcomed the strangers out of the rain and cold. Rather than resting with the others, Paul gathered firewood. As he did, a snake rose from the fire and bit him. When the islanders witnessed the biting, they believed it was divine payback for some perceived crime and waited for Paul to die. Paul, however, simply shook the snake off. The fact that he was not harmed changed the islanders' opinion: They now thought he was a god.

## At-A-Glance

1. Receiving Help from Strangers (Acts 28:1–2)
2. Divine Protection (vv. 3–6)
3. Ministering to Others (vv. 7–10)

## In Depth

### 1. Receiving Help from Strangers (Acts 28:1–2)

While it is true that it is “more blessed to give than to receive” (from Acts 20:35, KJV), it is equally true that believers must learn to receive help during difficult situations. Family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors are among those who assist in time of need. And as Paul discovered on the island of Malta, strangers also may provide timely assistance.

Paul and the other passengers found this to be true as they landed on Malta, wet from the sea during winter. They had no clothing to change into, no firewood or matches by which to warm themselves, and no food to eat. The islanders, quickly assessing the situation, came to their aid. They built a fire, offering exactly what the stranded strangers needed most. They later provided lodging and months later gave the ship’s passengers needed resources to continue to Rome.

During stormy seasons of life, we learn there is no such thing as a “small blessing.” Anything and everything that helps make a difficult situation easier to bear is big to the recipient. The residents of Malta built a fire. The ship’s passengers were wise enough not to devalue the islanders’ help or to reject it because of the givers’ nationality. God recruits believers and nonbelievers to help Christians in distress. Learning to receive help from nonbelievers is especially difficult for some Christians.

It is not always how much we give or even what we give but that we are willing to be used by God to aid someone in distress. Our availability goes a long way in showing recipients God’s providence and care. Using the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus taught that a neighbor is anyone in need of help, and the “good” neighbor is the person who provides help in the time of trouble. The parable teaches that we should be grateful givers and receivers.

As others rush to assist you, joyfully receive their gifts of time, talent, or treasure. If you struggle with asking or receiving help from others, ask God to make you a gracious recipient.

### 2. Divine Protection (vv. 3–6)

Soon after surviving the tumultuous storm at sea, Paul found himself shipwrecked on an island. Rather than sit back and allow the islanders to serve him, Paul also got involved in collecting firewood for the needed fire. As he began serving others, a viper came out of the fire and bit him. The islanders took this as a sign that Paul was a murderer who was about to reap a requisite punishment. What was Paul’s response? He shook off the snake and continued his activities without any ill effects. That one action, more than any words, served to remove any doubt from the islanders’ minds that Paul was a criminal.

The fact that he was able to shake off the snake is reminiscent of Jesus’ teaching after His resurrection. Jesus appeared to the 11 original disciples and gave them what is commonly called the “Great Commission.” During His discourse, He discussed the signs that would follow believers. Among these, He said, “[T]hey will pick up snakes with their hands; and ... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well” (from Mark 16:18, NIV). Paul exhibited both of these miraculous signs while on Malta. He did not do so to benefit himself but to help others. The people recognized something different about Paul because of these signs, which was evidence of his faith in Christ.

### 3. Ministering to Others (vv. 7–10)

Paul was able to minister to others in spite of finding himself in a trying predicament. Rather than fall prey to depression and selfishness because of his circumstances, Paul continued to use his gifts and talents in executing the ministry God had given him, with signs

following. When it became known that the chief's father was sick, Paul did what he knew to do. He laid hands on the man and healed him. That ability to rise above the circumstances and continue to flow in God's anointing was critical to the islanders' perception that there was something extraordinary about Paul. His example teaches that we, too, can rise above our situations to help others in need. Further, it proves that in spite of any difficulties we encounter, God's gifts and callings can still work through us if we allow them to.

### Search the Scriptures

1. Why did the islanders believe Paul was a murderer (Acts 28:3–6)?
2. What critical help did Paul provide to Publius's father and others (vv. 8–9)?

### Discuss the Meaning

News reports are filled with stories about the dangers of helping or receiving help from strangers. What strategies have you discovered to overcome fear of danger while helping others?

### Liberating Lesson

Distrust between races makes it hard for some people to receive help from people who aren't "their kind." How can God's love help believers break down barriers to communication and care for others?

### Application for Activation

Paul did not allow his life storm to stop him from ministering to others. Is there an area of ministry or outreach that you have given up because of pressures from a difficult situation? If so, prayerfully ask God to help you resume using your gift to help others. Then, make an appointment with the appropriate ministry leaders to see what steps you must take to resume service.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## Say It Correctly

Melita. muh-LEE-tuh.  
Publius. **POOB**-lee-uhs.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

The Failure to Minister  
(Ezekiel 34:1–6)

### TUESDAY

God's Ministry to the Flock  
(Ezekiel 34:11–16)

### WEDNESDAY

God's Judgment of the Privileged  
(Ezekiel 34:17–22)

### THURSDAY

Extend Hospitality to Strangers  
(Romans 12:9–13)

### FRIDAY

Ready for Every Good Work  
(2 Timothy 2:20–26)

### SATURDAY

Do Good to All  
(1 Thessalonians 5:12–22)

### SUNDAY

Ministering to the Sick  
(Acts 28:1–10)

## Notes

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# Paul Evangelizes in Rome

**Bible Background • ACTS 28:16–31**

**Printed Text • ACTS 28:23–31 | Devotional Reading • DEUTERONOMY 4:32–40**

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: SUMMARIZE the points of Paul's Gospel message; BE CONFIDENT in our ability to use Scripture to bring others to knowledge of Christ; and IDENTIFY ways we can tell resistant listeners about Christ.

## In Focus

During the past year, Monique started recognizing that her grandma Jean was becoming more and more forgetful. Jean started to forget where she placed items in the house. She would start teaching and get so confused the students could not understand what she was saying. She would get in her car to run an errand, but not remember where she was going. She also frequently put food on the stove and forgot about it. The house almost caught fire numerous times.

At Monique's urging, Jean went to the doctor, who examined her and ran some tests. A few weeks later, the results of the tests came back. Jean was in the early stages of dementia. He told her the condition would progressively get worse over time. Jean felt devastated by the news. How long could she continue teaching? She had served as the church's Sunday School Superintendent for more than 25 years. She was a faithful and committed worker. She wondered whether to stop now or wait until things got worse.

*Sometimes challenging circumstances can make it difficult to carry out our commitments. At such times, we may need to persevere in faith in spite of the difficulties we experience. In today's lesson, Paul is imprisoned but keeps his commitment to share the Gospel, which leads to souls coming to Christ.*

## Keep in Mind

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it."  
(Acts 28:28, KJV)

## Focal Verses

**KJV** Acts 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers,

26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes

have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Rome.** Rome was the capital city of the Roman Empire. Its population exceeded one million people. The city was wealthy, literate, and artistic. The Romans worshiped many pagan gods and even some of the emperors.

Jews who had come to believe apparently started the Roman church during Pentecost (Acts 2:41–47). They spread the Gospel on their return to Rome and the church grew. While in Corinth, Paul wrote a letter to the Romans to encourage the believers. After taking money to Jerusalem for the poor Christians there, he desired to visit the Roman believers on his way to Spain (Romans 15:23–28), but his visit did not happen as he had planned. Years later, Paul was taken to Rome as a prisoner.

## Background

Finally, after a 2,000-mile journey that started in Caesarea, Paul arrived in Rome.

He was permitted to live in his own quarters under house arrest or with a light chain. This fairly good treatment resulted from a favorable report from a Roman official, Porcius Festus, and the goodwill of the centurion (Acts 24:23). This proves God can grant us favor even with our enemies.

Paul called together Rome's Jewish leaders. The Jews were back; the decree of Claudius expelling them from the city had expired (18:2). Paul addressed the leaders as "my brothers" to acknowledge the common Jewish blood he shared with them (from 28:17, NIV). Paul wanted the leaders to feel connected to him. In doing so, they may have enough compassion toward him to try to understand the ordeal that created his unjust imprisonment. He explained to them that he was bound because of the hope of Israel, which is the Messiah. He grabbed their attention because they wanted to know more about Jesus. There was a great dispute about

Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. They agreed to listen to Paul's presentation of the Gospel.

The Jewish leaders' agreement to hear the Gospel was in fulfillment of Paul's calling to share the Good News with the world, starting in Jerusalem (9:13, 28). God planned that through the seed of Abraham, He would send the Messiah into the world. Now that the Messiah had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ, the entire world needed to know about Him. That is why Paul traveled on missionary journeys during his lifetime. He wanted everyone to have the opportunity to receive Jesus Christ. In spite of the way he arrived in Rome, Paul knew God had a purpose for his imprisonment. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28, KJV). Therefore, what was intended for evil, God worked it into good in Paul's life and ministry.

## At-A-Glance

1. Paul Shares the Gospel with the Jews (Acts 28:23–25a)
2. The Jews Turn Away (vv. 25b–27)
3. Paul Preaches to the Gentiles (vv. 28–31)

## In Depth

### 1. Paul Shares the Gospel with the Jews (Acts 28:23–25a)

On the agreed-upon day, the Jewish leaders came back to the place where Paul resided with an even larger group than expected. Paul testified and taught them about the kingdom of God all day into the evening. He tried to persuade them that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament (Acts 28:23). Romans, written some years earlier,

reveals Paul's ongoing dialogue with the Jews in Rome.

Some of the Jews were persuaded while others were not. Everyone has to make a choice to either accept or reject the Gospel. The most important fact is that we share the Gospel with people no matter the circumstances in which we find ourselves. God was faithful in preserving Paul's life so he could share the Gospel in Rome. He was imprisoned but did not complain. He used the opportunity to keep his commitment to spreading the Word.

### 2. The Jews Turn Away (vv. 25b–27)

Verses 26 and 27 are quoted from Isaiah 6:9, 10. They are also quoted by Jesus in Matthew 13:14, 15; Mark 4:12; Luke 8:10; and John 12:40. We can picture in these verses people covering their eyes and ears so they can't perceive or hear because they are so adamantly against the message and will do what they think will stop the message from getting through. It was predicted that the majority of the Jews would not accept their Messiah, but they are also responsible because they are refusing to look and listen. But don't forget the significant number of Jews who believe, including Paul and the apostles.

### 3. Paul Preaches to the Gentiles (vv. 28–31)

Because the Jews rejected the message of salvation, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles. He knew the Gentiles would listen, so he spent two years teaching, preaching, counseling, and receiving visitors (Luke, Timothy, Tychicus, Epaphroditus, and Mark) while confined. During his imprisonment, Paul wrote many of his epistles: Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philippians. Paul did not let his imprisonment hinder him from proclaiming the Gospel. He did not worry about the outcome of his upcoming trial. Instead, he committed his life into the hands of God.



For Paul, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain” (from Philippians 1:21). His faithfulness was rewarded through souls coming to Christ.

### Search the Scriptures

1. How did Paul preach the Gospel to the Jews (Acts 28:23)?
2. What prophet foretold the Jews not listening to God’s message (v. 25)?
3. How did Paul spend his time while in prison (vv. 30–31)?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. How was God’s favor shown toward Paul in Rome?
2. How did Paul keep his commitment to God while imprisoned?
3. How was his faithfulness rewarded?

### Liberating Lesson

Commitment to ministry is sometimes hard. We have so many distractions and hindrances that can cause us to lapse in our responsibilities. Jesus also had a lot of adversity to deal with as He walked the Earth. However, He never allowed anything or anyone to stop Him from reaching the place He was destined to go, the Cross. If Jesus can remain faithful in spite of all He had to endure, surely we can, too. We must not allow family drama, workplace stress, or personal issues to hinder us from keeping our commitment to minister to others. The world may not understand how we can remain faithful, but we know God can and will sustain us.

### Application for Activation

This week, pray God will give you the strength to keep your commitments. Always remember, God is present and in control over your circumstances. Testify to others of the faithfulness of God and how He helped you keep your commitments.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## Say It Correctly

Esaias. eh-sah-EE-as.  
Expounded. ik-SPOUND-ed.

## Daily Bible Readings

### MONDAY

Will They Listen to Me?  
(Exodus 6:6–13)

### TUESDAY

I Told You So!  
(Deuteronomy 1:41–45)

### WEDNESDAY

Charged to Teach  
(Deuteronomy 4:5–14)

### THURSDAY

The Voice of Discipline  
(Deuteronomy 4:32–40)

### FRIDAY

The Word Is Very Near  
(Deuteronomy 30:6–14)

### SATURDAY

We Would Like to Hear  
(Acts 28:16–22)

### SUNDAY

Teaching Boldly and without Hindrance  
(Acts 28:23–31)

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