

The Acts of the Apostles

“A study of the application of theology to the work of the church as a group”

God Continues in Plan A From Malta to Rome

Chapter Twenty-Eight

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Acts 28:1 “And when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.

Acts 28:2 And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.

Acts 28:3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Acts 28:4 And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live."

Acts 28:5 However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

Acts 28:6 But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.”

At first nobody knew the name of the island but later they found out that it was Malta. It was really a miracle that nobody died during this trip. The natives welcomed them onto the cold, rainy beach by building a fire for them. Paul was never one to just sit back and let someone else do all the work so he pitched in and gathered wood for the fire. There are a number of stories about snakes being as though frozen because of the cold rain and being picked up as pieces of wood. The fire wakens them and they try to get away from their new situation. Evidently one of the snakes was in the pile of wood that Paul picked up and the fire brought the snake into activity. There are no vipers on Malta today but that does not mean there were none then. However a viper bites quickly and then removes himself from the wound. There is another nonpoisonous snake that has rows of small teeth that will bite and hold on and they can easily be mistaken to be a viper. So whether or not the snake was a viper we really do not know. We do know that Jesus had promised Paul that he would defend the Gospel in Rome so even if it were poisonous God was not going to let a snake spoil His plan! Physicians in Paul's day were also very knowledgeable about the type of snakes in the areas so perhaps Luke did recognize it as a viper. Whatever the case, this event is certainly not a promise that we can today just pick up a poisonous snake and expect God to protect us from the bite. We are not to tempt God.

Acts 28:7 “Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.

Acts 28:8 And it came about that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.

Acts 28:9 And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

Acts 28:10 And they also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.”

The fever that the man had was caused by a parasite found in goat’s milk. Probably Luke helped in the healing of the people to go along with the gift of healing God gave to Paul. Certainly God is involved in all healing from sicknesses and He works through the talents of physicians today. Publius was the magistrate of the island and probably Paul, Julius, and Aristarchus were invited to the main house and the others were spread about in the cabins in the area. The people were all very appreciative of the help with their health problems and supplied them with all that they needed for the remainder of their trip.

Acts 28:11 “And at the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.

Acts 28:12 And after we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.

Acts 28:13 And from there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli.

Acts 28:14 There we found some brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.

Acts 28:15 And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.”

The Alexandrian ship would have been one of the grain ships that had waited through the winter months and as the winds became favorable it was ready to continue with its voyage. This was probably a major grain ship. Ships took their names from their mast heads and the Twin Brothers on this ship were Castor and Pollux, patrons of navigation and favorite objects of sailors’ devotion. The constellation for these “brothers” was Gemini that was considered a sign of good fortune in storms. Syracuse was a major port on the east coast of Sicily where they waited for an appropriate wind. Rhegium is on the toe of Italy where they only had to wait one day for an appropriate wind. Presumably the centurion had business there that kept him busy for a week for, because of his rank, he was in charge of the voyage. As he had previously done, he gave Paul considerably freedom to meet with his fellow Christians. From here they continued to Rome by road. They traveled to Rome on the famous road the Appian Way. News of their travel had reached Christians from Rome who traveled with him the rest of the way to Rome. Since Paul had not planted any churches in Rome he was greatly encouraged to meet with

fellow Christians in such an encouraging way. God is great!! The Three Inns is a halting place on the Appian Way about 33 miles from Rome.

Acts 28:16 “And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.”

At long last, Paul gets to Rome. He had wanted to make this trip for a long time but not in chains. However he was given a lot of freedom. He would have been turned over to the commander of the military camp and then allowed to stay outside of the camp area. The soldiers would rotate every four hours guarding him but he was allowed to stay under house arrest in his own place. The “we” stops being used here but if the letters from Paul to Philemon and Colossians were sent from Rome, as we think, then Luke did stay with Paul for some time.

Acts 28:17 “And it happened that after three days he called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they had come together, he began saying to them, “Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

Acts 28:18 And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death.

Acts 28:19 “But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation.

Acts 28:20 “For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel.”

Acts 28:21 And they said to him, “We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you.

Acts 28:22 “But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere.””

As usual, Paul’s first contact was with the Jewish community. However he was not able to go to a synagogue so he invited people to come see him. He seems to want to “feel out” the Jews here to see what they know about what has happened to him. His comment in verse 17 is a very mild description of how he was rescued from a mob that was trying to kill him. He is quick to say that he had done nothing wrong to anyone, not even Rome although he had to appeal to Caesar. He says that he is in chains for the hope of Israel. He always defended the Gospel in that it was a fulfillment of the promise to Israel and not a destructive action toward Israel. Since he knew that Jesus was the promised Messiah, indeed true Christianity is the fulfilled promise to Israel. The local leaders told Paul that they had not heard anything from Judea concerning Paul and no witnesses from Jerusalem had come to make bad reports about him. They had heard about the “sect” of Christianity and they said that it had received bad reports so they were very interested in hearing what Paul had to say. I would think that their reply was somewhat good news but they comment also would have put him on the defensive. Of course Paul was never at a loss to talk about God’s revealed plan for salvation. They may have been a bit too

diplomatic in their reply to Paul for they certainly had to know about the local Christian groups in Rome. We do not know exactly when Christianity came to Rome but Paul sent his letter to the church at Rome in 57 A.D. when it was already well known throughout the region as a strong church. It may have been one of the first churches formed outside Judaea and Syria and would have been active 10 or 11 years prior to Paul's arrival in Rome. All of this information makes the comments of the Jews very suspect.

Acts 28:23 "And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

Acts 28:24 And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

Acts 28:25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

Acts 28:26 saying, ' Go to this people and say, "You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive;

Acts 28:27 For the heart of this people has become dull, And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes; Lest they should see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart and return, And I should heal them. "'

Acts 28:28 "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

Acts 28:29 [And when he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]"

So on the set day there was a crowd to hear Paul and to discuss issues with him. Also remember that the Roman soldier would have been there also and the discussion might have been very meaningful to him. We are not told the details of Paul's talk but from earlier discussions we can infer much of it. No doubt he told them of the fulfillment of the prophets in the presence of Jesus and how throughout all the ages from Abraham to that day God's plan was being worked to its fulfillment in the resurrection of Jesus as proof of Him being God's son and the promised Messiah. Probably there would have been heated discussions about all that he said and some of them gave serious attention to what he had to say. We know that only when God acts can people believe the truth and many of them did not believe Paul.

Paul had come to expect rejection from the Jews and he would not be disappointed. Paul spoke the departing word that was the same as given by His Lord:

John 12:39 "For this cause they could not believe, for Isaiah said again,

John 12:40 "He has blinded their eyes, and He hardened their heart; lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and be converted, and I heal them."

John 12:41 These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him."

Jesus also spoke of those who had physical vision but no spiritual vision:

John 9:39 "And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see; and that those who see may become blind.""

These words were not meant to make friends! It is also as was said earlier about the prepared supper:

Matt 22:2 "'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son.

Matt 22:3 "And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.

Matt 22:4 "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited,' Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are all butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast. '"

Matt 22:5 "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,

Matt 22:6 and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.

Matt 22:7 "But the king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire.

Matt 22:8 "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.

Matt 22:9 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.'

Matt 22:10 "And those slaves went out into the streets, and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

Matt 22:11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes,

Matt 22:12 and he said to him, ' Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless.

Matt 22:13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matt 22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen.'"

The Word went first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. But only those who are specifically called will be allowed to sit at the heavenly feast with their Lord.

After the Jews heard these words of Paul they left.

Acts 28:30 "And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, Acts 28:31 preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered."

Luke thus ends his commentary of the spread of the Gospel from the appearing of Jesus to the apostles and disciples, the choosing of deacons, and some of the hardships of the

establishment of the church of Jesus Christ. There is considerable dispute about what happened to Paul after this ending by Luke. It seems that he was released after this two year term of imprisonment and preaching as God let him have this time unhindered in the teaching of the new testament of grace for everyone regardless of race. There is evidence that he went to Spain but none that he went to Britain. Some think that he came back to Rome in 64 A.D. after the great fire that many blamed on the Christians and then he was martyred.

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