

35. Paul in Rome: Acts 28

Acts 27 ended with everyone reaching land in safety, just as Paul had promised. The centurion had kept the soldiers from killing the prisoners, including Paul, whose life he wanted to spare. Yet, it was the power and certainty of God's word that saved all the people, fulfilling the will of the Lord that the apostle would appear and testify before Caesar. The same power that allowed Paul to escape the threat of death at the hands of Jews now saved him from this terrible storm, and that power will save us from the storms of this life.

The threats of storm and sea passed, but dangers remained on the island of Malta located south of Sicily

A Viper Attaches Itself to Paul's Hand

Acts 28:1-6

1 Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta. 2 The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold. 3 Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. 4 When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." 5 But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects. 6 The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.

The people of Malta greeted Paul and his cohorts with unusual kindness. The cold and raining weather were not so accommodating. When a snake fastened itself to Paul's hand, the islanders took it as sign that Justice had spoken against him. However, when Paul showed no ill effects from the snakebite, they changed their minds and said that he was god. The purpose of miracles such as this and subsequent ones on Malta was, as miracles in Acts always were, to confirm the word that Paul spoke as the word of God. As noted before, the Lord promised his apostles certain miraculous abilities in Mark 16:17-18, one of which was that snakes picked up would not hurt them:

17 And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; 18 they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

In the same context, Mark 16:19-20, Mark recorded that the disciples used these gifts to confirm the word of the Lord:

19 After the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God. 20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it.

Heb 2:3-4 also teaches that the miracles confirmed the word:

how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. 4 God also



testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

The fact that the islanders looked upon Paul as a god, before they heard the word of God that he would preach, showed the power of the miracles to confirm the speaker as one speaking the word of God. That the islanders thought Paul a god shows that they recognized his power as power from God almighty, though misdirected to Paul. This had happened to Peter prior to the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10:25-26 where Luke had recorded, "25 As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. 26 But Peter made him get up. 'Stand up,' he said, 'I am only a man myself.'" Even angels could not be worshipped as God, according to the situation in which John found himself in Rev 22:8-9:

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Modern day clerics and their worshippers who bow down to them should take these lessons from the apostles and angels to learn the principle laid down by the Lord Jesus in Matt 23:9-12

9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Paul Heals the Sick of the Island

Acts 28:7-10

7 There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably. 8 His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. 9 When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured. 10 They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.

Paul's reception by the local official, Publius, was cordial and hospitable. The people of the island honored Paul and his companions and furnished them with needed supplies. The curing of the sick of the island was to confirm the word, as described above, and in no way was a mere accommodation.

Paul Arrives in Rome

Acts 28:11-16

11 After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. 12 We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. 13 From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. 14 There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. 15 The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged. 16 When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Paul and his companions stayed during the winter for three months. The storm that brought them here had been most likely a seasonal storm of the fall. Then they sailed, stopping at cities of Sicily and Italy, to Rome, finding brothers at Puteoli, where they stayed a week. The

brothers at Rome had heard that Paul was coming and came out to meet them at Forum of Appius, known as the market of Appius, a town about 40 miles south of Rome. Paul was encouraged by the sight of these men.

In Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with only a soldier to guard him.

Paul Presents Himself to the Leaders of the Jews

Acts 28:17-20

17 Three days later he called together the leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, Paul said to them: "My brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or against the customs of our ancestors, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. 18 They examined me and wanted to release me, because I was not guilty of any crime deserving death. 19 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar – not that I had any charge to bring against my own people. 20 For this reason I have asked to see you and talk with you. It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain."

As was Paul's custom in new towns, he went first to the Jews. When they arrived Paul rehearsed the events that had brought him to Rome, including his imprisonment, trials, and appeal to Caesar. Paul was bound with a chain even though he was allowed to live alone. When he states, "It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain," one knows from Paul's past experience that the Jews will reject his teaching of Christ risen from the dead as the first fruits of all who follow.

Acts 28:21-22

21 They replied, "We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported or said anything bad about you. 22 But we want to hear what your views are, for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect."

The Jewish leaders had not received bad reports from Jerusalem about Paul, but they did know that all men everywhere were talking against this sect. Therefore, they wanted to hear more.

The Jews Disagree about Paul's Final Statement

Acts 23:23-28

23 They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God and tried to convince them about Jesus from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. 24 Some were convinced by what he said, but others would not believe. 25 They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: "The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet:

*26 "'Go to this people and say,
"You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.*

*" 27 For this people's heart has become calloused;
they hardly hear with their ears,
and they have closed their eyes.*

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,*

*understand with their hearts
and turn, and I would heal them.'*

28 "Therefore I want you to know that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will listen!"

Paul used the law of Moses and the prophets and tried to convince them about the kingdom of God and Jesus. After he quoted Isaiah, he said that God's salvation would go to the Gentiles who would listen. The Jews left (See the footnote on verse 29).

Peter and Paul Spend their Final Days Teaching and Writing

Acts 28:30-31

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Last Days of Paul

Secular traditions are the only source for finding out what might have happened to Paul in the very end, for the scriptures are silent. However, in his letters from Rome, he wrote of his wants, need, and attitudes, as he waited for the end.

The tradition has it that Paul, as a Roman citizen, was beheaded on the Ostian Road just outside of Rome. Nero died June, 68 A.D., so that Paul was executed before that date, perhaps in the late spring of that year (or 67). Perhaps Luke and Timothy were with him. [Notes taken from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.]

In 2 Tim 4:11-13, Paul told who was with him and asks for his cloak and scrolls:

11 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. 12 I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. 13 When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

In 2 Tim 4:21, he hurried Timothy to get there before winter (perhaps, he really needed that cloak): "21 Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers."

At the beginning of the letter to Timothy in 2 Tim 1:15-18, Paul's reflection has a hint of melancholy as he talks of those who have deserted him:

15 You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

16 May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. 17 On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. 18 May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

Finally, at the end of his life on earth in 2 Tim 4:6-8, Paul speaks of the time of his departure:

6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the

righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

The Last Days of Peter

Peter's last days find few mentions after the conference in Acts 15. With no evidence, the tradition is that he died a martyr at Rome about 67 A.D., when about 75 years old. The Lord had predicted a violent death for him (John 21:18-19), which it is thought to have come to pass by crucifixion under Nero. It is said that at his own desire he was crucified head downward, feeling himself unworthy to resemble his Master in his death. Paul said Peter was in Antioch while the circumcision controversy was going on in Gal 2:11-13: "11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face . . ." (Ibid).

Peter spoke of his putting aside "the tent of this body" in 2 Peter 1:12-15:

12 So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. 13 I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, 14 because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me.

Although there is no evidence of his crucifixion in Rome, there is a prophecy by Christ that he would die a martyr's death in John 21:17-19

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

The Last Days of James, John, and Luke

Jesus prophesied that both James and John would die a martyr's death, perhaps even by crucifixion, since Jesus describes it as "the cup I drink" in Mark 10:39-40:

Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."

John was with Peter during the opening scenes of Acts. He was also with Peter when Peter healed the crippled man (Acts 3:1 ff) and when Peter went up to Samaria after Philip's success in preaching (Acts 8:14 ff). John was with Peter and James, the Lord's brother, with Paul in Gal 2. This showed that John survived his own brother James, whose death Luke recorded in Acts 12. According to the tradition universally accepted in the church, John survived till the time of Trajan (98 A.D.). (Ibid).

Luke chronicled James death, making it the death of an apostle of which we can be certain. The account by Luke is in Acts 12:1-3:

1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. 3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also.

Thus ended the Acts of the Apostles, as recorded by Luke the physician, Paul's dear friend in Col 4:14-15: "14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor . . ." He alone was with Paul in 2 Tim 4:11: "11 Only Luke is with me." In Philem 24, he is a fellow worker: "24 And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers." The extensive use of the 1st person plural *we* in the last chapters of Acts indicates that Luke probably spent his later years with Paul.