

Part 61 A Snakebite and to Rome

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney Wednesday, Dec. 14, 2016

+ Acts 28:1-31

Last week we covered all of Chapter 27 which dealt with Paul sailing toward Rome on a ship with other prisoners along with his friends, Luke and Aristarchus and was guarded by a Roman Centurion named Julius. We saw in their travels that the weather did not cooperate and Paul warned them not to proceed but they would not listen to the preacher and sailed anyway. Then they were hit by a hurricane which caused them to be driven for 14 days across the sea fighting the entire time to keep the ship afloat. Everyone on the ship survived when it did finally run aground and began breaking apart and that is where we pick up in our study tonight.

1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

All 276 men swim to shore and end up on a small island called Melita. We know the island today as Malta. It is a small island just about 17 miles long and 10 miles wide. It would be about like driving from here to Luttrell, not very big at all.

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.

The word "barbarous" here is not the way that we usually imagine it to mean. We typically think of some kind of African native wearing a grass skirt and war paint running around and eating people. But the word as used here simply means a people that did not speak their language. Their speech was not understandable.

Notice that even these strangers treated Paul and the men with great hospitality and kindness. That's what that phrase means, "shewed us no little kindness." That means their kindness wasn't little, it was GREAT BIG! Even in the rain and winds they built a fire and invited them to sit around it for warmth.

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.

Paul was busy gathering bundles of wood for the fire and one of them, unbeknownst to him, had a viper clinging to it. Once he threw the wood on the fire the viper became heated up and jumped out of the fire and latched on to Paul's hand. Now, some people try to say that the viper simply wrapped itself around Paul's hand and that is why it didn't hurt him. I don't believe that for one minute. Otherwise, why would they have been expecting him to die from it as we see in the next 2 verses?

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.

We see the superstition in the residents of Miletus. They believe that this is a sign that Paul was a murderer and because he escaped a shipwreck the gods or karma, or whatever they believed in was not going to allow Paul to escape death and so that is why it bit him.

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.

So they wait and watch for Paul's hand to swell up from the poisonous venom which

would kill him. But that doesn't happen. Instead Paul shakes the viper loose and is unharmed by the bite. And just like that, these people change their mind about Paul. He went from being a murderer to a god!

A few things to note here. In the days of the Apostles the Lord gave them the power to overcome snakebites and poison. We see that in a couple of passages of Scripture: **Mark 16:17-18: And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; 18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.**

Luke 10:19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

So in the days of the Apostles the Lord gave them powers that you and I do not have claim to today. We are no longer in the apostolic age. The Lord used things like this as signs to the unbelievers.

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.

Not only did the Apostles have the ability to overcome snake bites and poison but through the Holy Spirit they also were able to perform miracles of healing. We see that here. Paul was able to pray, lay hands on, and heal this man's father.

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.

Naturally when the residents of the island find out that Paul has the power to heal the sick, they go around gathering up the sick folks and bringing them to Paul to be healed. They also were very generous to Paul and provided him with things that he needed to continue his journey to Rome.

11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

So, they stayed in Miletus for 3-months during the winter when traveling was too difficult and then they find another ship that had anchored there for the winter that was headed to Rome. It says that the ship's sign was "Castor and Pollux." This would have been images of two Roman gods that were carved into the ship. According to Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible he says this about these gods:

Castor and Pollux - These were two semi-deities. They were reputed to be twin brothers, sons of Jupiter and Leda, the wife of Tyndarus, king of Sparta. After their death, they are fabled to have been transported to heaven, and made constellations under the name of Gemini, or the Twins. They then received divine honors, and were called the sons of Jupiter. They were supposed to preside over sailors, and to be their protectors; hence it was not uncommon to place their image on ships. ⁱ

12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

They travel about 70 miles the first day and stop off in Sicily, Syracuse for 3-days. Syracuse is the capital of Sicily and not much is said of what they did for those 3-days but I'm sure Paul stayed busy telling folks about Jesus.

13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: 14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

They are now about 145 miles from Rome. They stay in Puteoli for a week and even found some folks that they knew living there and stayed with them.

15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

While they are in Puteoli some fellow Christians in Rome hear that Paul is there. So they decide to come and meet him on the way. One place is in Appii forum and the three taverns. These are places about 50 and 45 miles from Rome. Seeing them has brought Paul and his friends' great encouragement. It's always good to see folks that you know and have the same interests.

16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

Now, from reading this it appears to be a bad thing because it uses that word "suffered." But the word "suffered" means "to be permitted." So, it is actually a good thing that Paul has been separated from the other prisoners and into the care of his own personal guard. The Roman centurion that has been watching over Paul on this journey is the one that has made sure Paul is taken care of. Paul would most likely be chained to this guard at all times.

17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. 20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

Paul waits for 3-days and then calls for the chief Jews in Rome to come and hear him. He tells the same story yet once again. I have lost count of the number of times Paul has had to tell this same story but it has to be at least 4 or 5 times.

He was wrongfully accused and arrested. He was put on trial by both the Jews and the Romans and was not found guilty. He had to appeal to Caesar or the Jews would have killed him and that is why he is in Rome.

21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

I find it odd that none of those Jews in Jerusalem that hated Paul so much, hadn't waged some kind of complaint against him in Rome. You would think people so determined to bring somebody down like they were with Paul that they would have sent a letter or a messenger ahead of Paul to Rome to get the Jews stirred up against him when he got there. But apparently these Jews in Rome hadn't heard a thing about all of this.

22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

But, they have heard of Paul and they know that he knows about this "sect" as they call it. They are of course referring to Christianity. They are curious to hear what Paul has to say about it.

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.

Don't miss this. Paul at this very moment in time is fulfilling a desire that he has had for years, and that is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Rome. The Lord has allowed Paul to finally achieve his most sought after desire. While it may have taken years before he ever got there, he is now at the end of his ministry and he will live out the end of his life doing what he does best, telling people about Jesus. There were some of the Jews that did believe the Gospel and some that did 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.

Paul reminds them that this was exactly what Isiah the Prophet was talking about in his writings when God commissioned him to go and warn the people: **Isaiah 6:8-10:** Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. 9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Even after all of these years the Jews have not changed. They are still a stubborn people and will not hear the truth.

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.

Then Paul having done all he could do to try and convince his fellow Jews of the truth, lets them know that since they rejected it that God will send his salvation unto the Gentiles, and they WILL hear it and be saved. Same as (Acts 13:46 and 18:6)

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.

And so we end the Book of Acts. Luke writes no more about Paul. It is believed that after 2-years of being a prisoner in Rome that Paul was released and continued preaching in various places another 4-years until he was finally back in Rome as a prisoner and then beheaded outside of the city. Of course the Bible does not speak of

Paul's death so we cannot say for sure what happened after those 2-years that Luke speaks of. One thing is for certain, the Apostle Paul was one of the greatest ambassadors for Christ to ever live.

And, so, we end our 61 week Bible study of the Book of Acts. I hope it has been as exciting and fulfilling for you as it has been for me. We are going to start something new next Week Lord willing and I trust it will be just as exciting.

¹ All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible

ⁱ Albert Barnes Notes on the Bible, Acts 28:11