

ACTS 28: THE FINAL CHAPTER; OR IS IT?

Well, here we are – the final chapter of Acts – or is it? In a way, it is. In another way, it isn't. We have been in this book for a good while now and have finally come to the closing of what Luke has written for us. We began with Pentecost and with a 'mission plan' in Acts 1:8:

Acts 1:8

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

This, along with much of what we have discussed throughout the book, can be missed if we aren't careful. The story began with Peter and the other Apostles in Jerusalem at Pentecost. We discussed how the nations listed equivocate with the nations listed at the dispersion at Babel. That is very important. Eventually, the Apostle Paul and his ministry became the focus of the book as the Word eventually made its way to the Gentiles. Paul, after his conversion, made his way to the Gentiles in Turkey, Greece and eventually Rome, as we see people groups, place names of cities being picked up and placed

back into sacred space and the kingdom of God. Paul is now toward the end of his ministry and journey, as he has taken the Gospel of the Kingdom to the northern arm of the Roman Empire – what to most people of the Near East, was the edge of the known world. As we pick up today, we see how Paul finally reached Rome, but not before he lands on Malta after surviving the shipwreck. Let's see what God had in store for him and the others as they, cold and wet, drag themselves from the water.

1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. 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. 4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live." 5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

- The find out they are on the island of Malta. (Show map of Malta.)
- The natives are kind and build a fire on the beach for the shipwrecked group.
- Paul is apparently helping with the gathering of firewood and is bitten by a snake.
- This is important. It goes to Paul's character. He is not a man to sit around and do nothing. He is always a servant, willing to work. All the way through Acts, we see these glimpses into Paul and his character. And it is this, along with his anointing, that makes him able to draw and hold people who don't know him – even those of a different culture. Servanthood goes a long with everyone, no matter where they are from.
- The people on Malta – a superstitious people, see Paul get bit bitten by the snake and believe it is a sort of poetic justice. He is, after all, a prisoner, most likely a murderer. And since he survived the shipwreck, cheating death, he is now getting justice from the snakebite.
- Theological messaging to the Jewish reader. Snakes in the OT. The nachash in the garden, the serpents in the Exodus and the serpent on the pole Moses used to heal the Israelites in the wilderness.

- Paul shakes off the snake and just keeps going. (John Wayne) He suffers no ill effects and the people think he is a god. To the natives, Paul must now be innocent. He can be trusted. Paul's reputation is being established. God will build on this shortly, as Paul ministers to the people on the island.

7 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

- Publius – a Roman name. Leader of at least, that part of Malta. Paul and Julius, and most likely Luke and Aristarchus are allowed to stay at the home of Publius. Being in the charge of the Roman in charge has its privileges.
- Paul heals Publius' father. He laid hands on him and he was healed.

- Now, as to be expected, as word got out a long procession of sick come for help. The Greek word used here in verse nine, is one used not only for miraculous healing, but also for medical help. Remember, Luke is a doctor. Most likely, they were both busy.
- Paul's thorn in the flesh. No relief. Beethoven made beautiful music, but never heard any of it for himself, as he was deaf. Sometimes the giftings one has, benefit others when do nothing for the one with the gift.
- Paul is ministering to people's needs wherever and whenever we find him. And for this, the people are grateful. When they eventually leave, three months later, the people bless them with provisions. And in the Greek, you can see that some of those provisions are monetary. (Presumably, for all the medical work done.)

The travelogue now begins.

11 After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. 12 And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. 13 From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind

blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, 14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

- After staying three months on Malta, when the weather cleared up and shipping lanes reopened, they all got on an Alexandrian ship that wintered there. Being from Alexandria, it was also transporting grain.
- Figurehead – (on the bow) the ‘heavenly twins’ Castor and Pollux, aka the Gemini zodiac sign. More details that tell us the account is legitimate and historical.
- They left Malta and went to Syracuse. (NY?) They then went to Rhegium and finally docked at Puteoli – not the main port of Rome which was Ostia, about 100 miles north along the Western coast of Italy, due West of Rome. They got off the boat here and walked the rest of the way, (100 miles or so) along the Appian Way, to Rome. (Show map of Paul’s journey.)
- In Puteoli, they find Believers and stay with them for a week. These fellow believers, along with others we

read about, would most likely have read or heard his letter to the Romans and come out to meet him.

- The church in Italy was growing.
- Along the way, other believers come to meet and greet him as they are walking. Three Inns, or Three Taverns was about 33 miles north of Puteoli and Appii Forum was about 43 miles north of Puteoli. These are all towns on the Appian Way, a main road along the Western coast of Italy – a main trade route running North and South.
- Paul is still ministering, whenever and wherever he is.

16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together.

- Once in Rome, Paul is handed over to the captain of the guard, but he isn't put into a prison. He was permitted to dwell by himself, which means what it says, in one sense, but it also means that he had to provide for himself while in Rome. He had to rent a place to stay, and to do that he would have had to

work, in order to pay expenses. While there, for two years, he had constantly had a guard with him. There were many Roman guards who heard Paul minister and speak to others. No doubt some of them were converted. Paul was ministering whenever and wherever he was.

- How did he work if he was under house arrest?
Worked from home or was possibly able to move around the city to some extent.
- Until now, Paul has only dealt with other Christians, most likely both Jew and Gentile, but once in Rome, he continues his habit of going first to the Jews. After being in Rome for three days, Paul called the local Jewish leaders to his house.

17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, 18 who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 19 But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have

called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”

21 Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.

22 But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

- Paul explains why he is there. He is there for no reason other than the Hope of Israel. He now has their attention. He lets them know he is not there because he has charged his own people with any crime.
- Remember, it was only about 10 years earlier that the Jews were expelled from Rome because they were associated with riots, which, according to Seutonius, were caused by their interaction with Christians. (Acts 18:2. This is how Paul met Priscilla and Acquilla.) Claudius is no longer Emperor, Nero is. And while he started out pretty well, as Roman emperors go, he quickly descended into madness.
- Paul wants to minister to the Jews in Rome, just as he has in every other city to which he has been. He doesn't know if they know of him or any of his history. I believe he is sort of 'feeling them out' in

order to know start the conversation. He is being practical. Things were still tense between the Jews and Rome, (as they tended to be most of the time) and in order for Paul to preach the Kingdom of God to them, he was going to have to broach the subject of Gentile inclusion. That was a trigger point. And he needed to make sure they saw him as a fellow Jew. He was a Jew, but he had been so misunderstood by zealous Judaizers. Many of them seemed to be fine with Jesus as Messiah, which was a big hill to climb, in and of itself, but when they heard that the Gentiles were to be included in the kingdom, and how that came about through faith and not the works of the Law, literally, all Hell would break loose.

- **21 Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”**
- But these leaders had heard nothing from Jerusalem of Paul and his ministry – neither good nor bad. But they had heard of Christianity, the Way. Once again, they were expelled from Rome because of them.

23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.

- Paul tells them about the Kingdom of God. This is the full unabridged Gospel. And it is the same thing Jesus taught. There is no difference between Paul's Gospel and that of Jesus. Every time we read of Paul preaching the Gospel, this is what he is teaching – Peter also. This includes, of course, that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel and how the kingdom also consists of Gentiles.
- As per the norm, some are persuaded, and some are not. Even when you are speaking the truth, no matter how ironclad the case, there will be some who don't buy into it. If Jesus couldn't persuade everyone, neither can Paul, or any of us, for that matter. At any rate, this caused a division within the local Jewish community, but Paul was accustomed to that, and he will have the next two years to speak individually and to small groups concerning it. But he

still isn't done. He drops the hammer and the mic on those who don't believe, as they are leaving.

25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,

26 saying,

'Go to this people and say:

"Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand;

And seeing you will see, and not perceive;

27 For the hearts of this people have grown dull.

Their ears are hard of hearing,

And their eyes they have closed,

Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears,

Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them." '

28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

- Paul quotes Isa. 6:9,10. This is also quoted in all four Gospels and Paul alludes to something similar in Romans 11:11 – 32, where he already dealt with the issue, though these Jews haven't read his letter.

- If they won't believe that Jesus is Israel's Messiah and that His kingdom includes all who believe this in faith – even Gentiles, then maybe they will become jealous and eventually come to that same faith.
- As usual, wherever Paul goes, there is tension. Telling the truth always seems to do this.

30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

- And this is how Luke ends the book. Paul lived for the next two years in his own rented house, at his own expense, preaching the Kingdom of God and all things related to it, which concerned Jesus, to anyone who would listen.
- But where is the end? What happened to Paul? How can he just leave us hanging? That is what most of us want to know, right? How can Luke do that?
- Is this an improper ending?

Needless to say, this isn't the way most of us would have ending the book. It's almost as if Luke is leaving room for a sequel. And maybe, in some ways he is. But we have to

realize that Acts, while it is historical, is not just a history book. It was written for the theological messaging as well as the history. It isn't a novel. The book isn't merely Paul's story or the story of the Apostles. The point is that the story of the book goes back to Acts 1:8.

Acts 1:8

8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The story doesn't end with Paul's death. It must continue. Paul's mission is our mission. And it must continue with us sharing the Gospel of the kingdom until Jesus returns! The story is still unfolding! But some of us still want the "proper ending."

Throughout this book, I've tried to emphasize that it's about the journey and not just about the destination. (The difference about Robin and me on a trip.)

Paul's final destination was Rome, but there were all kinds of adventures on the way. And that is what our lives as believers are all about. The destination, a future restoration of the Heavens and earth – we already know

how that turns out. But where do we go and what are we to do between now and then? The answer is that we are to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom and all the things pertaining to Jesus as they are found in the scriptures. How all that comes about and in what circumstances, we just can't know. But I promise you one thing, it's a heck of a ride with a great retirement plan.

Let's be like Jesus and Paul – ministering to others, no matter whenever or wherever we find ourselves.