

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES NOTES ON CHAPTER 28 - AND A FINAL WORD

Part 29 Chapter 28

The ship was finally wrecked on the island of Malta, a hundred miles south of Italy, and many hundreds of miles from where the storm began. Just as God in His goodness had provided a kind centurion who eventually responded to Paul's lead, so now He allowed the ship's company to come ashore among friendly people who cared for them after what had been two weeks of terror for all but the Christians who knew God was in charge.(28:1,2) One more drama occurred in what had already been a highly eventful journey. Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake. The local people assumed as do most cultures even today that bad things only happen to bad people, and that Paul was being punished for some unknown crime.(28:3,4) When he showed no effect from snake bite they reversed their verdict and promoted him to a god!(28:5,6) This is the only recorded fulfilment of Jesus' promise in Mark 16:18 of protection from poisonous snakes as being one of the things He will do as a sign of the truth of the gospel. It obviously does not mean that Christians would never be harmed by snakes as many a missionary has discovered since. God in His sovereignty does these things when He chooses.

Paul was given the privilege of performing a miracle of healing for the chief's father and then for many others on the island. As always Paul would have used the opportunity to explain the miracle in terms of the gospel rather than his own work. The Maltese were very responsive to him so that we can assume that this was the beginning of the church of Jesus Christ on Malta.(28:7-10) The shipwreck had not been a waste of time. 'God causes all things to work together for good...'(Rom.8:28)

After three fruitful months a new ship took them on the final leg of the voyage to Rome. As usual Luke gives us some detail of the ship, the route to Rome and the weather. The gospel was still being worked out in the real world.(28:11-13) There was one more port of call which gave opportunity for fellowship with a little group of believers. And so to Rome... Can you imagine Paul's mixed emotions of excitement and apprehension as his long term dream was finally a reality? Again God who knows just what we need provided the encouragement of fellow believers exactly at the right moment. (28:14,15)

Paul's imprisonment in the capital city began easily enough as house arrest with the freedom for visitors to come and go. As usual Paul did not waste such an opportunity and immediately made contact with the Jewish community, concerned to the very end to fulfil his calling first to his own people. Once again he did not hesitate to defend his ministry by explaining why he is in Rome as a prisoner. He endeavoured to identify with them as a fellow Jew, faithful to the Old Testament, but the victim of fellow Jews. (28:16-20) To his delight the Jewish leaders proved to be open to his message, though they had heard bad rumours about the Christian gospel.(28:21,22) As so often before his audience was divided by Paul's explanation after a whole day seminar in which he sought to persuade them that that the Old Testament Christ is indeed Jesus of Nazareth.(28:23,24)

Seeing the mixed reaction of the Jews and being saddened by it, Paul delivered one last impassioned warning from Isaiah 6:9,10. He used the same words Jesus used in Matt.13 to explain the mystery that people can know everything and yet in terms of real spiritual understanding know nothing. This was why, Paul said, God was now sending missionaries to those who would listen, the Gentiles. The row between the Jews became even more heated - and has been ever since!(28:25-29)

The last two verses of this amazing book are an extraordinary anticlimax. Luke could have told us much more of the closing events of Paul's life, of his trial before the Emperor, of any further journeys if he was released for a time, and of his death. He could have told us so much more of the lives of the other apostles. Why doesn't he? Because the story is meant to be unfinished. God intends that more chapters are being written every day in the lives of His present day disciples, us! Is He still allowed to 'do and say' through our lives?