

Friends, don't get me wrong. By no means do I count myself as an expert in all of this, but I've got my eyes on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.

Philippians 3:13-14 The Message Bible

First Love Ministries, Inc.

Prayer Study #254

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

CHAPTER 28

Paul's Witness on Malta

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 along time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.
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.
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.

This incident on the Isle of Malta is remarkable. The natives were kind, but the weather was terrible with both rain and cold. Picking up wooden sticks for a fire, Paul is bitten by a viper. In the Greek language the word used for this particular type of viper means *a highly venomous snake*. Also the original language also indicates that the snake sunk its fangs deeply into Paul's hand and released its full load of venom in to his hand. The people believed that this was an act of God punishing Paul for what we would call some terrible sin, such of murder. But when he did not die, they believe he must be a God.

Publius, the most prominent man on the island, was so impressed that he took Paul, the prisoner, into his own house for three days. When Paul laid hands on Publius' sick father, revival broke out on the Isle of Malta and all those who had illnesses came and were healed. We are not sure if they were healed by Paul and his gift of healing or if some were treated by Dr. Luke, making him one of the first medical missionaries, because the Greek word used for healing here in verse 9 means *receiving medical attention*.

After three months, Paul's company found passage on another ship that had wintered at Malta. Ships in those days had carved figureheads. Two of the favorite god's of sailors were Castor and Pollux, the heavenly twins.

Puteoli was the seaport of Rome. Appii Forum is 43 miles from Rome. Ten miles closer to Rome from Apii Forum is Three Inns. Puteoli and Rome are connected by the Appian Way. As Paul traveled the Appian Way, a company of Roman Christians came to meet him. The Greek word used is that used for a city company going to welcome a general or king or a conqueror. They came to greet Paul as one of the great ones on the earth. This really gave Paul courage because he realized that his work had produced fruit for the Kingdom and that he was not alone.

Barclay tells us, "Christians are never alone. (1) They have the consciousness of the unseen cloud of witnesses around and about them. (2) They have the consciousness of belonging to a worldwide fellowship. (3) They have the consciousness that wherever they go there is God. (4) They have the certainty that their risen Lord is with them."

Paul's Witness at Rome

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. 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 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."
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 believed.
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.

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.

Notice again that for more than thirty years, Paul has always gone first to the Jews, even though they have hindered him and even tried to kill him. He recognizes that they are God's chosen people. But in the end he comes to the sad conclusion that they have rejected Jesus and closed the door to the Gospel message. The Good News is that God opened the door shut by the Jews to the Gentiles, and at the end there will be one body and one shepherd.

Verse 30 is a bit misleading, according to Bible scholars. What it means is that Paul lived at his own expense, that he had to work, even in prison, to supply his needs. It was here in prison that he wrote letters to the Philippians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to Philemon. He was never alone for Aristarchus had come with him as had Luke who remained with him until the very end (2nd Timothy 4:11). Also Timothy was a frequent visitor, and Tychicus, Epaphroditus, and Mark were sometimes there.

Even though Paul was in a private cell, there was always a member of the hand-picked Praetorian guard guarding him twenty-four/seven. No doubt some of these Roman soldiers came to Christ.

Luke ends his book without telling us what happens to Paul in the end. We know that he was taken somewhere along the Appian Road, and his head was cut off.

Barclay speaks of the Church: "The Church, which at the beginning of Acts could be numbered in tens, cannot now [at the end of Acts] be numbered in tens of thousands. The story of the crucified man of Nazareth has swept across the world in its conquering course until now. Without interference it is being preached in Rome, the capital of the world."

Summary of the Book of Acts

There is no way that I could summarize the Book of Acts in a paragraph or two. This book, which is not really completed because we still see acts of the Holy Spirit today, covers the beginnings of the Christian Church focusing mainly on the ministries of Peter and Paul. Acts shows us the rapid growth of the Church all over the known world, the introduction of the Gospel by Jews to the Gentiles—something shocking to those who lived during these times—, and the resistance to the acceptance of Christ Jesus as the Messiah.

To me, however, the central most important event in the Book of Acts is found in Acts 2 where the disciples are *filled* with the Holy Spirit. This is the source of the dunamis power that resided in the disciples and gave them the strength to share Jesus and not count the cost.

It is interesting to look at the time sequence leading up to this event. Jesus was crucified, rose again, and after 40 days ascended into heaven. During that time, he appeared to His followers only 10 times:

1. To Mary Magdalene in the garden (Matthew 16:19-11; John 20:11-18)
2. To the women, with the message *He is not here for He has risen* from the angel that Christ had risen, returning from the tomb to tell the disciples (Matthew 28:8-10)
3. To Peter, probably in the afternoon (Luke 24:34; 1st Corinthians 15:5)
4. To the Emmaus disciples towards evening of that first day (Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13-32)
5. To the disciples, Thomas being absent (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25)

These first five visits of the Resurrected Christ were on Sunday, the day of His resurrection.

6. A week later on a Sunday night to the disciples, Thomas being present (John 20:26-31; 1st Corinthians 15:5)
7. To the seven beside the Sea of Galilee (John 21)
8. To the Apostles and over 500 present (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:15-18; 1st Corinthians 15:6)
9. To James, the Lord's half-brother and leader of the Jerusalem Church (1st Corinthians 15:7)
10. To the eleven disciples, and those who were with them, at the ascension of Jesus into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19-20; Luke 24:49-53; Acts 1:3-12)

After 40 days, counting from his Resurrection to His Ascension, the disciples returned to the Upper Room where they waited and were in prayer and one accord for ten days. Luke tells us in Acts that the group included Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Thaddeus, and the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren. During this time of waiting for ten days, they chose Matthias to replace Judas, and he was there. In all there were 120 believers in the Upper Room on Mount Zion at Jerusalem.

On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. Pentecost is so named because it is the 50th day after Passover. It is an ancient Jewish

festival that is also called the Harvest Festival or the Feast of Weeks and celebrates the giving of the law on Mount Sinai. We as Christians, however, celebrate Pentecost Sunday because it was the day that the Holy Spirit was poured out and the Church birthed and begun, as Luke so adequately tells us in the book of Acts.

Give Them All To Jesus

**Are you tired of chasing pretty rainbows?
Are you tired of spinning round and round?
Wrap up all those shattered dreams of your life
And at the feet of Jesus, lay them down.**

**Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus
Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, and broken toys.
Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus
And He will turn your sorrows into joy.**

**He never said you'd only see sunshine,
He never said there would be no rain.
He only promised a heart full of singing
About the very thing that once brought pain.**

**Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus
Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, and broken toys.
Give them all, give them all, give them all to Jesus
And He will turn your sorrows into joy.**