

The Tuesday Afternoon Bible Study - Acts 28

Ashore on Malta, Arrival in Rome

Can you believe it that we've made it to the end of Acts? When we started back in January, did you think we'd ever get here? And we certainly couldn't imagine the pandemic which we would enter into, and how it would turn our lives upside down. We've been on our own dangerous journey!

Last week we left Paul and his 275 companions sputtering ashore on some unknown island - weak, wet, but alive after being trapped on the Mediterranean Sea by a hurricane for over 2 weeks. They will discover they have landed on Malta, which is about 60 miles south of Sicily, Italy.

Read Acts 28: 1-10 Safely Ashore on Malta

1. Luke writes that the natives of Malta (called Maltese, like the falcon) shown them unusual kindness. When has a stranger been kind to you? When have you offered kindness to a stranger?
2. Paul gets bit by a snake, a viper. I don't want to know if a snake has ever bitten you. I don't like snakes at all. Note the local logic: If God allows you to escape one catastrophe only to die in another, well, then you must be guilty after all.
3. But when Paul doesn't die... well then, he must be a god, they reason. Quite a turnaround.
4. Paul is able to repay their kindness by healing the father of the island's "leading man." And once they find out Paul has this gift from God, the line forms. Presumably, Dr. Luke also stepped in with his medical prowess. Various good deeds do lead to other good deeds, it seems, and when the group gets ready to leave, they are well supplied.
5. A question - um, how exactly did they leave? They sail (v.10), but not on their same ship, obviously. This is answered in v. 11.

Read Acts 28: 11-16 The Last Lap - the Final Voyage to Rome

6. They have to wait out the 3 months of winter before they complete their voyage to Rome, now in early spring, on another Alexandrian ship of the grain fleet which had harbored safely in Malta. The "Twin Brothers" who formed the figurehead of the ship were Castor and Pollux, patrons of navigation and favorite objects of sailors' devotion.
7. Luke accounts for how they made their way up the coast through the toe of Italy (Rhegium) to Naples (Puteoli), the principal port of southern Italy and the selling port for the Egyptian grain ships. Julius, the kind centurion, allows Paul to spend a week with the Christians there, before heading by land on the final journey to Rome on the famous Appian Way, accompanied by other Christians along the way - undoubtedly taking courage at the sight of these friends.

Read Acts 28: 17-28 The Attitude of the Jews in Rome

8. Wherever Paul went to preach, he would customarily begin with the Jews. Here, he still does so, even though for some 30 years they have been doing everything they can to hinder him, even kill him.

9. In their 2 separate meetings, notice their mixed reaction.
10. Take a close look - what does your verse 29 say? You probably don't have a verse 29. You may have a footnote at the bottom which says something like: *Other ancient authorities add verse 29, "And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, arguing vigorously among themselves."*

Thus, early manuscripts just went from verse 28 to verse 30, which seems all right. But then along the way, someone must have felt that adding a verse 29 to sum things up would make it sound even better. Thus, the verse is not added into the text of the Bible, but does exist in the footnote.

Read Acts 28: 30-31 A Brief Final Summary

11. As he waits for his case to be heard, Paul's final two years are summarized - he lives, guarded under house arrest in a rented house he pays for himself (v.16), probably by providing for his own means through his profession of tent making. Luke remains with him during this time (2 Timothy 4:11). Paul welcomes visitors, preaching and teaching with boldness and without hindrance. The gospel is now being preached in Rome, the capital of the world. From its early beginnings after the crucifixion, to the power displayed at Pentecost, from its spread across the continents, to the apex of worldly power - the gospel is unstoppable. This is nothing less than a miracle from God.
12. After these 2 years in Rome, it is not known what happened to Paul. Many believe that Paul did not die this time, was acquitted, and went on more journeys, perhaps even to Spain (Romans 15:24). Tradition places Paul back in Rome 7-8 years later, at which time he was martyred. It's interesting that Luke does not choose to end the book of the Acts of the Apostles with Paul's death.
13. Instead, Luke chooses to end the book with Paul in Rome - unhindered and faithfully ministering, allowed by the Roman authorities to preach and teach. Thus, we realize that the story never really came to an end. This is significant - the story of the book of Acts didn't end - it is still continuing today, now with you and me. God is still at work. The Holy Spirit is still acting. The church is still being built. The gospel is still being proclaimed. It didn't end in Acts...because it didn't end in Acts.
14. "The story's main character was never Paul to begin with. Nor Peter. Nor Philip. Nor Priscilla. All these people matter, but only insofar as they serve, speak, and embody the word of God... God won't permit bearing witness to the kingdom's new realities ever to come to an end." (Skinner)

Well, scholars, we've done it! You each deserve a huge pat on the back and we should each do something to celebrate. I am going to take a break from this for the rest of the summer while I consider what to study and how to move forward in the fall. Any ideas?

How should we week studying? Options include:

- a) keep on doing it like we are - each Tuesday I'll send out an email with questions for the chapter to read, or
- b) meet by Zoom at 1:00 on Tuesdays and do the study that way, or
- c) meet in person at church at this same time, but due to physical distancing we'd have to gather in the sanctuary, all spread out. Sitting 6 feet apart, we won't fit in Room 15 or even really in the Fellowship Hall. We'll have to check when the AC gets turned back on in the afternoons in the building; it is sometime after Labor Day...

Feel free to let me know what you prefer, and we'll see.

Thanks for being such a fun group. One day we will meet together again, and what a joy that will be! For now, stay safe, keep vigilant, and we will see how we all fare after school begins and the kids start going back to school. That seems to be our next indicator to watch for.