

PAUL'S MINISTRY AT MELITA AND ROME

BIBLE TEXT : Acts 27:1-44; 28:1-31.

LESSON 371 Senior Course

MEMORY VERSE: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (II Timothy 4:2).

BIBLE TEXT in King James Version

Acts 27:1-44

1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto *one* named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; *one* Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

3 And the next *day* we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave *him* liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, *a city* of Lycia.

6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.

7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;

8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished *them*,

10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, *and there* to winter; *which is* an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.

13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained *their* purpose, loosing *thence*, they sailed close

Bible References:

I Perilous Journey

1. Paul and other prisoners were put into the custody of a centurion who was responsible for their being delivered to Rome, Acts 27:1;

Acts 26:32

32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.

2. Paul was given kind treatment by the centurion, Acts 27:3; 28:16, 30, 31.

Acts 24:23

23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let *him* have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

3. Paul's ship was much delayed by adverse winds, and finally wrecked on the island of Melita, Acts 27:1-20, 27-44; Acts 28:1.

4. Paul had advised the centurion and ship's master against sailing, but they had ignored his advice, Acts 27:10, 11, 21.

5. Paul was encouraged by the Lord that all persons would be saved, but the ship would be lost, Acts 27:22-26;

Luke 8:23-25

23 But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake; and they were filled *with water*, and were in jeopardy.

24 And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish. Then he arose, and rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm.

25 And he said unto them, Where is your faith? And they being afraid wondered, saying one to another, What manner of man is this! for he commandeth even the winds and water, and they obey him.

Psalms 107:25-30

25 For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof.

26 They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths: their soul is melted because of trouble.

27 They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.

28 Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.

29 He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.

30 Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.

II Journeys from Melita to Rome

1. At Melita God was with Paul in protecting him from a venomous serpent, and in healing the sick, Acts 28:1-10;

Mark 16:17

17 And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues;

Mark 16:18

18 They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on

by Crete.

14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let *her* drive.

16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:

17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. 18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next *day* they lightened the ship;

19 And the third *day* we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on *us*, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of *any man's* life among you, but of the ship.

23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

28 And sounded, and found *it* twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found *it* fifteen fathoms.

29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

the sick, and they shall recover.

2. Paul was encouraged by brethren at Puteoli, and by brethren who met him at Rome, Acts 28:11-15.

3. Paul was allowed to dwell in his own hired house at Rome for two years. Here he preached the Gospel, no man forbidding him, Acts 28:16, 30, 31.

4. Paul reasoned with the Jews at Rome, but many of the Jews would not believe, Acts 28:17-29.

Notes:

Troubled Waters

The events of Paul's voyage to Melita and its subsequent ending by shipwreck is a story with a potent lesson. It is extremely dangerous to ignore the counsel of God. The centurion who had the custody of Paul was advised by him that their journey would be hazardous, if undertaken at that time. Paul was in touch with the Lord and his advice was of such quality that it deserved mature consideration. However, the centurion chose to listen to the shipmaster, and they set sail. Nevertheless, the ending of their journey proved the correctness of Paul's predictions. It was only the presence of Paul on board the ill-fated ship that caused the Lord to save the lives of all those on board.

Because of a few righteous, God will oftentimes spare the while, as God promised in the case of Abraham's pleading with God for his nephew Lot. (Read Genesis 18:20-32.) Because it was the will of God that Paul should stand before Caesar and kings, God spared his life. Because of Paul's fasting and prayer for the safety of the lives of those who sailed with him, the Lord spared their lives, and not one was lost.

How much the world has been spared from harm and injury because of God's people in their midst and their intercessory prayers, God alone knows. Again, only God knows how many unwary people have been spared from certain death because of the importunity of some Christian's prayers.

This truth is brought out in a similar manner by the Prophet Isaiah when he said, "Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all" (Isaiah 65:8).

The argument can be raised that if it was God's will for Paul to be brought to Rome, and he is the Master of the elements, why did He let the storms wreck Paul's ship in the first place? The Scripture answers such arguments thus: "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?" (Romans 11:33, 34).

The centurion had been advised by Paul, who had been warned of the Lord not to undertake the voyage. The voyage was undertaken anyway; yet God's mercy, which is from everlasting to everlasting, was extended to them and they escaped with their lives. After their experience, all on board were undoubtedly convinced of God's saving grace. As a secondary result, the residents of Melita received the Gospel from Paul and their sick were healed, which probably would not have been accomplished had not Paul been shipwrecked upon their island. Once again the Scripture bears proof that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought *them* all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34 Wherefore I pray you to take *some* meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat.

36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took *some* meat.

37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed *themselves* unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from *their* purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast *themselves* first *into the sea*, and get to land:

44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on *broken pieces* of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

Acts 28:1-31

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

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.

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.

When a man is doing the will of God so much as lieth in him, God's protection is invoked in his behalf. Shipwreck and all its hazards did not harm Paul, neither did a viper, suddenly fastening itself upon Paul, do him any harm. It was not because Paul had any great power within himself to counteract the serpent's poisons, but because God's omnipotent power was able to nullify any ill effects. Jesus had promised: "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16:18). What God has promised, God will perform. There are those who have twisted this passage of Scripture to mean that they can take up deadly serpents at their own will and that God is honour-bound not to let them be injured. Some such snake-handlers have died from snake bites for their rash presuming on God's mercy and their twisting the true meaning of God's Word into something else. The Lord protected Paul, as He has and will again protect any of His own who are accidentally bitten by a serpent or who accidentally drink a poisonous substance.

Satan tempted Christ by quoting the Scripture passage to him regarding the charge, which God gave the angels concerning him -- that they would bear Him up in their hands lest at any time He should dash His foot against a stone. Satan thought to tempt Christ into throwing Himself off a pinnacle of the Temple to prove that the angels would indeed pick Him up before He was injured, and thereby prove He was the Son of God. Anyone who misapplies the Scripture in order to carry on some fanatical procedure is tempting God rather than invoking divine protection in his own behalf. (**Matthew 4:5-7** 5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, 6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. 7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.)

On to Rome

Paul's journey from Melita to Rome was uneventful, and they met brethren on the way who gave courage to Paul. After arriving at Rome, Paul was permitted to dwell in his own hired house for two years. Although he was guarded continually by a centurion, and apparently wore a chain, or was chained to the centurion, he was given freedom to receive any and all visitors he chose. Furthermore, his freedom was not restricted in publishing the Gospel.

Imprisonment, instead of being a great hindrance to Paul, only helped to intensify the preaching of the Gospel in Rome and surrounding areas. His house became the headquarters of much activity. It was from there that he wrote his Epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians and to Philemon. Paul wrote that he was an ambassador in bonds; and so he was, both spiritually and physically. He was in bonds of love to his Lord, and he was in physical bonds because of his love and service for his Lord.

(**Ephesians 6:20** 20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.) With perfect faith in God's working in his life, Paul accepted his imprisonment as being within God's guiding providence for him, and wrote to the church at Philippi: "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places" (Philippians 1:12, 13).

Paul could see that God was being glorified by his imprisonment. Many who would not have known of the Lord

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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

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.

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.

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.

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,

were seeing at firsthand the workings of the Lord, were meeting and seeing the men with whom Paul daily met. Those in the palace were daily confronted with godly faith in contrast to the rich, sinful, idolatrous ways of pagan Rome and the degenerate practices of the Caesars. Christ was preached in the face of sin, and successfully preached to the salvation of men's souls. Paul was a prisoner of Rome, yet God was able to make the mighty Roman empire bow to His will and let Paul preach the Gospel successfully in the palace of the Caesars. (**Philippians 4:22** 22 All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.) Paul, meditating upon the workings of God, continued to write in encouragement, "Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Philippians 1:14-18).

Paul set the example of fortitude in the face of imprisonment, and retained an enthusiasm and faith in God, which stirred many more to arise to the challenge of the Gospel. Although enemies arose also, thinking to hinder and cause Paul more harm, the Gospel was only the more forcibly preached. The world, the flesh, and the devil, since the sin of Adam, have sought to lock up, to hinder, and to make powerless the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By the killing of its preachers, they have thought to silence forever the voice of God, only to learn that the Lord can indeed raise up voices from the very rocks to praise Him if need be, and to carry on His work.

The Book of Acts is a record of men of God, who, supremely confident in their Lord, and rejoicing in the salvation He had brought to them, went out into all the world to preach the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Let modern-day Christians be as bold in their faith as were the Apostles of old, who feared neither men nor devils who opposed them, and longed only for the approval and commendation of their Lord for their reward. How fitting are the closing words of the Book of Acts! The writer speaks of the prisoner Paul as "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:31).

QUESTIONS

1. Why was Paul being sent to Rome?
2. How was Paul treated on his voyage under custody of a Roman centurion?
3. Why did Paul advise the centurion not to sail when they did?
4. What kind of voyage did they have?
5. Who was responsible for saving the lives of those aboard ship?
6. What happened to Paul at Melita that proved the truth of the words of Christ?
7. How was Paul treated at Rome by the Romans?
8. With what kind of success did Paul preach at Rome?
9. How did Paul manage to preach while he was chained to a Roman soldier?
10. Name two of the Epistles Paul wrote while in imprisonment.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

