

## ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

### LXIV. God's Nurturing Amid Strong Trials

(Acts 28:11-16)

#### I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 351. We can thus learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the book of Acts.
- B. Acts 28:11-16 records a series of events that provided spiritual nurture and encouragement for Paul to offset the past trial of shipwreck and the future crisis of trial before the emperor. We view the passage for insight:

#### II. God's Nurturing Amid Strong Trials, Acts 28:11-16.

- A. The Apostle Paul had come through a harrowing storm that had driven him and his ministry team 600 miles across the Mediterranean Sea only to be shipwrecked on the Island of Malta, cf. Acts 27:1-28:1; *Ibid.*, p. 429. In the future, he was also going to stand trial before the Roman Emperor, cf. Acts 25:11-12 with 27:22-24.
- B. From just the human perspective, having come through a great trial of the ship voyage and shipwreck, not to mention the life-threatening incident with the viper in Acts 28:3-5, only to face trial before the leader of the Roman Empire, the mental, emotional and physical toll on the apostle would have been significant.
- C. Accordingly, between the shipwreck and his arrival in Rome, God provided some nurturing encouragements as a means of refreshing Paul, Acts 28:11-16:
  - 1. First, Luke recorded a detail about the ship they would use to sail from Malta toward Rome that would act as a spiritual encouragement to Paul and to the believers who accompanied him, Acts 28:11:
    - a. A ship from Alexandria had wintered on Malta, so the centurion who was transporting Paul chose to use it to take his prisoners to Rome, Acts 28:11a. The ship in which Paul had been shipwrecked was also from Alexandria (Acts 27:6), similarly a grain ship (Acts 27:38), what would recall their traumatic shipwreck!
    - b. Significantly, this ship had as its figurehead "the heavenly twin sons of Zeus and Leda according to Greek mythology" who "supposedly . . . brought good fortune to mariners," and if "their constellation, Gemini, was seen during a storm it was an omen of good luck," *Ibid.*
    - c. Luke possibly mentioned this "detail to contrast the superstition of the people of Malta, Rome, Greece, and Egypt with Christianity," *Ibid.* Only God had brought Paul's companions safely to Malta when the pagan sailors had lost all hope (Acts 27:20-44), so Luke, Paul and other believers who had come with them were reminded of their security that was based in the plan and purpose of God instead of pagan superstitions.
  - 2. Second, Luke reported how they safely sailed northeast from the Island of Malta to Syracuse on the Island of Sicily, then on further north to Rhegium on the "toe" of the "boot" of southern Italy before catching a south wind that brought them up north along Italy's western coast to land at Puteoli, v. 12-13; *Ibid.*, p. 425. This peaceful sail in a ship like the one in which they had suffered shipwreck would have been therapeutic.
  - 3. Third, at Puteoli, since the centurion apparently had some business there, Paul and his believing travelling companions were able to accept an invitation by believers there to stay with them for a week, Acts 28:14.
  - 4. Fourth, "Ostia, Rome's harbor wasn't a deep enough harbor at this time to receive Alexandrian grain ships," so they left Puteoli, a port on the bay of Naples, and went by land toward Rome, *Ibid.*, Ryrie, fn. to Acts 28:13. This land travel gave opportunity for encouragement from other believers, Acts 28:14-15:
    - a. News spread rapidly to believers in Rome that Paul and his believing companions were headed their way, so many of them came to meet Paul's party as far away as the Forum of Appius, a market town 43 miles south of Rome, and the Three Taverns 33 miles from Rome, Acts 28:15a; *Ibid.*, B. K. C., N. T., p. 429.
    - b. "The noun *apantesin*, translated as an infinitive, 'to meet,' was used in Greek literature of an entourage coming out of a city to meet an official going to the city" (*Ibid.*, p. 430), so Paul "received courage," the noun "courage" (*tharsos*) is used in its verb form *tharseo* in the Septuagint of people in distress who were then encouraged, *Ibid.* Being so honored by believers he had never met was indeed therapeutic for Paul!
  - 5. Fifth, once in Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him, Acts 28:16 NIV. Paul had proved himself to the centurion to be a trusted prisoner, so he was allowed to live comfortably.

**Lesson:** *Between the past crisis of a great shipwreck and the future ordeal of standing trial before Caesar, Paul needed nurturing encouragement, so God provided it in various edifying ways.*

**Application:** *May we rely on the Lord to provide the mental, emotional, and spiritual nurture we need amid trials.*