

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”

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ACTS 27-28

Snorkeling and smorgasbords, deck chairs and dance floors, swimming pools, and shopping sprees - a cruise is suppose to be great fun. In 2008 a record 16.8 million people took their vacation on a cruise ship. The old cliché, "Cruises are for the overfed and almost dead" is apparently no longer the case. Lots of people seem to be cruising these days. And one of the most popular destinations is the Mediterranean. A "*Mediterranean Cruise*" sounds particularly glamorous. Yet after tonight's study you might have a different opinion! The Apostle Paul set sail on a Mediterranean *Cruise* that was more of a *bruise*. Passengers were *singing the blues* on this particular *cruise*!

At the outset of his ministry God told Paul he would preach to "gentiles and kings" – and the Emperor Nero was both. It was inevitable that *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles* would witness to *Nero, Ruler of the Gentiles*. But how do you arranged a meeting between a little guy like Paul and the head honcho in Rome? Paul was unable to even afford the passage. Once again God's providence worked to accomplish God's purposes. When Paul got tired of being a political football – getting kicked back and forth between *the Jews in Jerusalem* and *the Romans in Caesarea* – he appealed his case to Caesar. As a Roman citizen *Paul had the right* and as Roman governor *Festus foot the bill*. In Acts 27 Paul embarks on an all expenses paid Mediterranean Cruise courtesy of the Roman Treasury!

Verse 1, "And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment." "Augustus" was a title worn by the Emperor. "*The Augustan Regiment*" may've been a battalion assigned specifically to the royal household. If so, Paul was escorted by Caesar's secret service.

"So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia (or southern Turkey). Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us." Notice Luke writes "*we put to sea...*" Not only was Aristarchus traveling with Paul, so was Luke. It was not uncommon for Paul to travel with a number of friends. The apostle was a people person. It's been said, "*Paul had a genius for friendship. No man in the NT made fiercer enemies, but few men have had better friends.*"

"Two porcupine friends named Willie and Bill, were talking one day of porcupine ills. Said Willie to Bill, with a sorrowful moan, "Isn't is sad that we live all alone? The animals shun us; I have not a friend. Please tell me, Bill, oh, what is my sin?" "Don't sweat it my friend," said porcupine Bill. "It isn't your sin, it's just you sharp quills. We live all alone; that's just how it goes, cause no one wants quills in the end of their nose." "I've got it," said Willie; "The answer I know. I'd rather have friends, so my quills have to go." But Bill exclaimed, "It doesn't make sense. Without you sharp quills you'll have no defense." Willie thought and he thought, but he couldn't decide, should he give up his quills or save his own hide? And then in a flash he decided with glee; "I'll pull out my quills in the trunk of a tree." With all of his might he ran at the trunk, and into the bark went his quills with a thunk! His quills all came out in the trunk of the tree, and Willie exclaimed, "At last I am free!" "Free to be eaten," said Bill in disgust. "You'll find out real soon there's none you can trust." But Willie said firmly, "I must leave my cage. I'd rather risk friendship than die of old age." Far into the night they debated the matter; live safely alone or make someone fatter! The porcupine question remains to this day. Is it outreach or safety? Which one do you say?

Everybody will lose one or the other... *either quills or friends*. You can't keep both! If you want friends you've got to drop your guard, and loose your quills. Risk being known. Take a chance and reach out to God's people. Loose your quills and God will guide you into some good fellowship.

In verse 3 the voyage continues, “And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.” Once again, Paul is hanging out with his friends. I’ve heard it said, “Paul was both a great soul winner, and a great friend maker.” And notice Sergeant Julius trusted Paul. Apparently, he wasn’t worried that he would escape. He recognized that Paul was a man of his word!

Verse 4, “When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.” The ship’s navigator used the island of Cyprus to block the westerly winds. They swung around and docked in the port city of Myra. “There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy (this was a cargo ship carrying wheat from Egypt to Rome), and he put us on board. When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus...” The wind caused choppy seas and slow sailing. In smooth waters the 130 miles from Myra to Cnidus could’ve been covered in a short time. Instead, under these extreme conditions, it took “many days.”

Verse 8 continues, “The wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.” Look at a map and Italy was due west of Cnidus, but the headwinds were so strong the Captain sailed southwest, *crosswind*, to the island of Crete. They landed in Fair Havens on the southern coast of the island.

“Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over...” After mid-September sailing was dangerous. After mid-November it was impossible. “The fast” Luke refers to was Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement. That means it’s mid-to-late October. The conditions are dangerous, but not impossible. “Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.” Paul wasn’t a sailor by trade, but he was a seasoned traveler. This wasn’t his first cruise. In 2 Corinthians 11, when he lists the trials he’s endured, he says, “Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep...” The guy had experienced his share of *nautical nightmares*. Paul has no desire to spend another night as shark bait.

Sergeant Julius should’ve listened to Paul... But verse 11, “Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.” Once again, “*siding with the experts*” gets a person in trouble. “And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.” It wasn’t just the harbor... the sailors didn’t want to be stuck in Fair Havens for the winter. Fair Havens was a hamlet, whereas Phoenix had stuff to do – the NBA was in Phoenix! *You could take in a Suns game!* Phoenix had a nightlife - bars, and revelry, and women. Notice, *lust* had tainted their *logic*. They’ve stopped thinking rationally. The crew members take a vote and the majority says, “*sail for Phoenix.*” Always be leery of the majority. *God’s will* often conflicts with the *majority opinion*. At times following God requires us to go against the grain.

Verse 13, “When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.” Notice the wording, “*the south wind blew softly*” – the easy path isn’t always God’s path. We think just because a door opens, or circumstances become convenient, God must be in it – not so. Here the crew gets duped. Proverbs 14:12 tells us, “*There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*” Be careful that you don’t get duped by ease. And notice here, the four ways we can miss out on God’s will...

First, **get impatient...** We’ve got to get to Phoenix. Let’s push it... Second, **take a vote...** *Side with the majority* instead of *seek the Lord*... Third, **test the winds...** Let circumstances instead of principles dictate your decisions. Look for the easy way out – the path of least resistance... Fourth, **let your lusts take over...** The sailors wanted to make Phoenix for the wrong reasons. *Their glands* got in the way of *God’s guidance*.

In contrast if you want to walk in the center of God’s will... **Be patient**, learn to wait... **Rely on God’s wisdom** even if it’s unpopular with your friends... **Base your decisions on conviction** not convenience... And **walk in the Spirit**, rely on God to satisfy your needs.

Verse 14, “But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon...” We get our word “*typhoon*” from the Greek word translated “*tempestuous*.” The sailors named these winds after the direction of their origin. “*Eurocydon*” means “*the northeasterner*.” They arose suddenly... “*So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.*” Phoenix was 45 miles up the coast of Crete from Fair Havens. But the winds shift.

Soft southern winds turn into a violent northeasterly. Huge swells were slamming against the wooden hull. If they fought the storm and held their course the boat would break apart. The sailors only option was to sail with the wind - stop resisting and try to ride out the storm.

Verse 16, “And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty.” Up to this point they were dragging a lifeboat. They didn’t want to lose the dinghy, so they tied it to the main ship. “When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship...” As the waves slapped against the side of the ship they could hear the timbers creak and crack. They strung ropes under the hull in hopes of stabilizing the frame, and keeping the ship from breaking apart. “And fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis-Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.” The more they fought the northeastern winds the further south they were pushed. The sailors feared “*the Syrtis Sands*” – quick sands off the coast of North Africa. The area was nicknamed, “*The Ships Graveyard.*” To avoid the danger the seaman lowered their sails and just drifted. This made them completely vulnerable.

Verse 18, “And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. On the third day we threw the ship’s tackle overboard with our own hands.” The more weight the more momentum in the wrong direction, so they started ditching cargo to lighten their load. “Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us , all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.” Remember, this was before the age of electronic navigational devices. Ancient mariners plotted their course by the stars. But it had been weeks since they’d had a break in the clouds. There was no clue as to where they were, or how far they’d drifted off course. Salty seaman were terrified. Their desperation had given way to despair. The experts onboard had given up.

Everyone had given up except Paul, verse 21, “But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.” Paul jumps out on deck and shouts, “Hey, I told you so!” They would’ve thrown him overboard if it was not for what he said next. “And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve...” I love this terminology! “*The God to whom I belong...*” Know to whom you belong and it’s less likely you’ll become someone else’s pawn. You can’t be pushed around.

The angel appeared to Paul, “saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ Evidently, Paul asked God to save the passengers and crew. He concludes, “Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.” In a crisis, real leadership rises to the surface. Everyone else had *given up* hope, but Paul *steps up!* He says, “*Take heart... for I believe God...*”

Verse 27, “Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea...” Today the Adriatic Sea between Italy and Eastern Europe. In Paul’s day it referred to the eastern Mediterranean. And “about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.” Could be they heard the breakers slapping the shoreline. “And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms.” The Greek word translated “soundings” means “to heave the lead.” They were dropping lead anchors and timing them to see how long it took to hit bottom. They could tell the water was getting shallower. A fathom is about six feet. Here they go from 120 feet of water to 90 feet in short order. They’re moving toward the rocky shore at a pretty fast clip.

Verse 29, “Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.” This was a terrifying. It’s pitch black. No one can see. It’s like driving with no headlights. You’re know you’re going to crash, but you don’t know when. They drop four anchors off the stern, and pray for sunrise!

Verse 30, “And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Note you had to stay put to be saved. Jump ship in an attempt to save yourself and you’ll drown. This is like our salvation. We have to remain “in Christ” to be saved. Jump ship – fail to abide – launch out on your own – *and you’ll drown.*

“Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.” The crew members were about to burn some calories floundering in the surf. They’d received *the Lord’s promise*. Now they need some *protein*.

“And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.” Notice, the crew now has a new captain. *Prisoner Paul* has become *Captain Paul*. “And in all we were 276 persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.” They knew they were in for a rough landing, so they throw over the cargo. “When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.” The plan is to pick up a head of steam and try to run the ship onto the beach. “And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. But striking a place where two seas met (they hit a sandbar), they ran the ship aground (the ship got stuck); and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.” It’s been a tough voyage. By now the wooden ship is barely intact. Once it gets stuck, the waves begin to disassemble what’s left.

Verse 42, “And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.” According to Roman law if a prisoner escaped the soldier assigned to guard him had to finish his sentence. These soldiers plan to kill the prisoners in order to save their own skin.

“But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose (Julius came to Paul’s rescue), and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.” Just as God promised – all who stayed with the ship made it safely. Ironically, the ship’s boards and timbers acted as life rafts to get the crew to shore. This is why it’s always crucial to stay with the boat. Don’t jump ship. Don’t give up on God, or bail out on His will. Stay exactly where God has called you – in that marriage, on that job, in that neighborhood. Even if its a turbulent situation - even if a relationship breaks apart – even if your life seems to be falling apart – remain in Christ. It’s the lessons you learn - and even the pain you endure - that will become the very thing that saves you from future troubles.

Chapter 28, “Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.” The island of Malta is 58 miles south of Sicily. Recall their original destination was the Cretan port of Phoenix - 45 miles west of Fair Havens. This trip should’ve taken less than a day. Instead they were at sea two weeks and traveled 645 miles. Talk about a detour! And this is what happens when we follow the wrong voices. Satan’s plan for our lives starts out a shortcut, but it ends up a long, hard, costly voyage.

Once a professional racecar driver was hired to drive a 15 block section of Colorado Springs. The driver was extremely careful to observe all the speed and traffic laws. His time was time was 9 minutes, 35.1 seconds. After he was finished, he was allowed to drive the same 15 block course as fast and as reckless as possible. With police permission he drove at illegal speeds and was guilty of 52 traffic violations. Yet, here was the surprising results... He was able to shave only 3.9 seconds off his time. We assume laws are in place to slow us down. In reality we lose very little time doing the right thing. Even the little bit of time you do lose is worth it when you consider the safety and protection that comes with obedience. If you think God’s rules are getting in your way, or slowing you down, or cramping your style - you’ve been deceived. In the long run God’s way makes life easier, not harder. Just ask the crew members on Paul’s ship.

“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.” In mid-October night-time temps on Malta are in the low 50s, and that’s not including the breeze blowing in off the ocean. It gets chilly. It was great that the locals welcomed the water-soaked survivors with a roaring fire. *But notice who’s gathering firewood?* Verse 3, “But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks...” Notice, the apostle was a servant first. The author of 14 of the 27 NT books was not above collecting sticks.

“And (when he) laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.” When a poisonous viper hibernates the snake stiffens. Paul picked him up inadvertently from a pile of sticks. But when the snake got near the fire he woke up and took a bite out of Paul. The venom was

deadly. Thus, the locals expected Paul to keel over. We're told in verse 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." The Maltese worshipped a goddess named "Justice." Here they assume she's finally caught up to Paul and rewarded him with the fate he deserved.

"But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm." I love what Paul does with this snake - *he just shakes it off!* Of course, he could've been rushed to the doctor, or someone could've apply a tourniquet. At least, Julius could've pulled out his knife, cut across the bite marks, and sucked out the venom. That's what John Wayne would've done. But Paul shakes the snake off in the fire and carries on! Rather than focus on the wound, he shakes it off and carries on.

And this is a huge lesson for anyone who serves the Lord. You're being a servant - giving to others in practical ways - when out of nowhere the old serpent, Satan, slithers along and sinks his poisoned fangs into your arm. Often our attempts to do good can come back to bite us. And understand why Satan attacks... He can discourage our service to others by getting us to focus on ourselves, our hurt, our wound. He distracts us. This is why the best way to handle a hurt, or an attack, is to just shake it off. If you take the time to nurse it or fixate on it you play into Satan's hands. Just shake it off and keep serving the Lord. God protected Paul and God will protect you. The bite won't be as bad as you think. God will neutralize the poison if you refuse to pamper the pain. Just keep on serving Him!

"However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god." Here's a legitimate fulfillment of Mark 16:17-18. Jesus predicted, "These signs will follow those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them." And notice the line, "*They will take up serpents; and it will by no means hurt them.*" We've all heard about snake handlers in Appalachia. They literally pick up poisonous snakes to test the veracity of this verse. But rather than test God's faithfulness - or their own faith - what they're really testing is God's patience. Such acts are not faith, they're presumption and foolishness. I don't believe, God ever intended for believers to go out looking for cotton-mouths and copperheads. He knew that as the Church marched out into the remotest parts of the world – into the backwoods and jungles - snakes and other dangers would be lurking. Here God is promising supernatural protection to His witnesses.

David Brainerd was a missionary to the Delaware Indians. The Indians made contact with Brainerd, long before he made contact with them. One day a group of warriors slipped up quietly to his tent, armed with knives and tomahawks. Their aim was to kill the stranger. But when they peered into the tent they were stunned by what they saw. Brainerd was on his knees in prayer, but just behind him was a poisonous rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike. The missionary, oblivious to the snake, continued to pray while the snake lowered its head and slithered away. The Indians were so amazed they forgot their intent to murder him, and went back to camp with news of what they had seen. When Brainerd finally approached the Indians he was amazed at how well he was received. He thought they might kill him, but instead the tribe treated him with great respect. Years later he was told about what the warriors had seen in his tent. It convinced them he was God's messenger.

When the men from Malta witness Paul's encounter with the viper they go even further with their conclusions. They assume he must be a god. As he did in Lystra, I'm sure Paul set the record straight, and used the occasion to witness to the Maltese of the truth and grace of Jesus Christ.

Verse 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." Recall there were 276 folks on the ship – and not a single person lost their life. Here we're told Publius feeds and entertains the survivors for three days. He must've been very wealthy.

"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. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed." Publius' father became the poster boy for God's power. "They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

What had been a detour, God turned into a vital stop. The Gospel came to Malta as a result of a *storm* and a shipwreck. Whenever you get knocked off

course, remember it could be God rerouting you in a new direction.

Verse 11, “After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.” Ancient ships were identified by carvings in the bow. The “Twin Brothers” were the sons of Jupiter - Castor and Pollox. In Greek mythology the twins protected distressed sailors. But Paul and his crew knew better. They learned firsthand it only takes one Son – the Son of God - to save drowning sailors. And that One Son is God's only Son, Jesus of Nazareth.

“And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.” From Malta to Syracuse was 80 miles. Syracuse to Rhegium 70 miles. And from Rhegium to Puteoli, the port city of Naples, it was 180 miles. It's interesting, Paul even found Christians in a small Italian city, Puteoli. It just goes to prove how fast the Gospel was spreading across the empire.

They're headed to Rome. “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.” The ship docked in Puteoli, and Paul traveled overland the remaining 125 miles. The road from the coast to Rome was the famed Appian Way. It was there that a large body of Roman Christians came to greet him. Not only had they heard of Paul – they'd received a letter from him - one of the most brilliant theological treatises written. His letter to the Romans.

Verse 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.” Paul was spared the dungeon. He was placed under house arrest, where he was allowed visitors and provisions. His only restriction was to stay chained to a Roman soldier. A different soldier was chained to Paul every six hours - that's four a day. This helps us understand Philippians 1:12. Paul writes of his internment in Rome, “I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard... that my chains are in Christ.”

Guess, what Paul talked about with the guards each time they swapped shifts? He preached the Gospel. Imagine, being chained to Paul for six hours. Either you'd *got saved* or *went crazy*. You definitely heard the truth. Paul turned a *personal inconvenience* into a *powerful opportunity*. I love how Paul signs off to the Philippians. In 4:22 he says, “All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household.” Many of the Emperor's personal staff were led to Christ by Paul!

“And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together.” This was always Paul's strategy – he preached to the Jew first, then the Gentiles. “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, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. 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. 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.” Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

There were probably letters sent by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, but God made sure they were lost in the shipwreck. God wanted the Jews in Rome to hear Paul, and the Gospel of Jesus, with an open and unbiased mind.

Verse 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.” I only wish we had the CD! “And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. 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, saying, ‘ Go to this people and say:..”

And here Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9-10... *"Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; 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."* Isaiah bemoans the hard-hearts of his people. "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves." All it took to break up the party was that God had targeted the Gentiles for salvation! The Jews couldn't accept that God's love was big enough for all people.

"Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him." This is how Jesus should always be preached – *"with all confidence."*

Paul's stay in Rome was quite profitable. During the two years, he wrote four *prison epistles* - **Ephesians**, **Philippians**, **Colossians**, and **Philemon**. Eventually Paul was tried before Nero and released. We don't have the transcript of the trial, but you can bet Paul shared the Gospel. Nero's rejection of Paul's message could've been the turning point in his life. It was about this time that Nero went nuts. He went mad. He became vicious and angry - *and guess how he chose to vent his frustrations? He started killing Christians.* He threw them to the lions. He dipped them in wax and burned them as candles to light his lewd parties. When a fire ravaged the city – Nero blamed the disaster on the Christians.

During the five years following his release Paul continued to preach the Gospel - possibly going to Spain. He wrote letters to Titus and Timothy. Eventually, Paul was rearrested by Nero, and thrown into Rome's maritime dungeon. It was there he wrote his second and final letter to Timothy. Tradition tells us in 67 AD Paul was beheaded for Jesus' sake.

Through the centuries people have criticized Luke for ending the life of Paul so abruptly. But keep in mind, Luke was not writing, *"The Life and Times of Paul."* The theme of the book of Acts is the spread of the Gospel. The Gospel began on the edge of the empire - on the outskirts - in a far-away province known as Judea. But in less than 30 years it worked its way to the capitol city. At the heart of the empire, under the Caesar's own roof, Christianity's chief spokesman spread the good news of Jesus to the citizens of Rome. Paul could've said, *"We've come a long way, baby!"*

Before Jesus ascended, He said to His disciples, *"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* By Acts 28 the first wave of the mission was complete. The ends of the earth had heard... *Of course, there's still much work for us to do...* It's been said, *"Every generation of Christians is responsible for their own generation of heathen."* *Have we taken the Gospel to our world?* Let me close by asking you to think of friend or neighbor who's not a Christian... Will you go out of your way to show them a kindness? Will you pray for their salvation? Will you speak to them about their soul? In a sense the book of Acts is still being written... by you and by me!