

Thoughts on Acts Twenty-Eight

One benefit of reading scriptures daily is becoming familiar with God's Word. Another reason is that we often find passages that help us understand the actions taught in other passages. Many difficult-to-understand verses become clear when we see examples in another chapter or Book of the Bible. The Gentiles on the island of Malta we read about in Acts 28 are doing the Works of God that Israel should have done. Comparing how these "barbarians," without the Old Testament scriptures, cared for Paul and the other shipwreck survivors shows the kind of love and care addressed by Moses in the Law and by Paul in Romans 12. Luke writes, *"The natives showed us extraordinary kindness"* (Acts 28:2).

In his reference to the inhabitants of Malta, Luke used the Greek word βάρβαρος (Barbaros), from which we derive the word barbarian. It referred to an individual that did not speak Greek. That word here shows how the Holy Spirit aligns scripture with the writer's education. Had Luke not been Greek, another word from Hebrew, Aramaic, or Latin would have been used to conform to his background. The term is without any idea of reproach but only to show that the people of Malta were not under the influence of Hellenism. Later translators use the word Islanders, Natives, Foreigners, or "the people who lived there" rather than the Ethnic concept of being different from the world around them.

An interesting characteristic of the people of Malta was their desire to care for others, devoting themselves to looking after strangers sheltering there during the winter storms. From building fires and providing blankets for warmth to providing shelter and food for the winter, to showering the survivors with what they would need as they departed, they showed true agape love. As Paul had previously written to the Romans, *"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good. Be warmly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another"* (Romans 12:9-10). Considering these islanders, we are also reminded that *"When Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them"* (Romans 2:14-15). Their works will not save them, but their example testifies that people can act in Godly ways. How much more so when taught the Gospel of Christ?

After spending three months on the island, the journey continued by sea to Puteoli, Italy, about 170 miles from Rome. There were disciples there that provided for the needs of travelers. The disciples in Italy knew Paul wanted to come to them since Paul's letter arrived from Corinth at the hands of Phoebe (Romans 16:1) several years before. Many of the Christians in Rome rushed to meet Paul along the way. *"And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage"* (Acts 28:15). The depression Paul had suffered in Macedonia may have returned as Paul is marching to Rome under legionary guard, (2 Corinthians 7:5-7). Meeting the Christians on the road significantly boosted Paul's courage.

Some have wondered why there were so many Christians in Rome at that time. Although Claudius expelled the Jews in 49 CE, the next emperor, Nero, welcomed them back after 54 CE. At that time, Christians were still considered to be a division of the Jews as the Sadducees and Pharisees, and therefore, Rome treated Christians as Jews. Jews and Gentiles had heard the gospel in the East and

moved to Rome when the Jews returned following Nero's decree. Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3); (1 Corinthians 16:19) are examples of those driven out but returning to Rome as Christians. Therefore, when Paul arrived in Italy around 61-62 CE, there were many Christians in Rome, anxious to see him.

From what Rome's Jewish leaders said when they met with Paul, they also wanted to see him and hear about his teaching, for they said, *"We desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere"* (Acts 28:22). Paul explained Jesus, using the Law and prophets as Stephen had done in Acts 7 and as Paul himself had done in many synagogues. The results were the same as they had been in every city Paul spoke in. Some believed while others refused to believe (Acts 28:24). However, under Roman protection, Paul could teach unhindered for two years (Acts 28:30-31).

As we conclude this study of Luke's writings, we reflect upon the wisdom and providence of God. God had a wonderful plan to save people from the eternal death they earned by sinning (Romans 3:23, 6:23). In that plan, God assigned tasks to be done, such as hearing or reading His Word, believing in Him and His Son, giving up our evil ways, submitting to baptism, and obeying his directions. As he made a way for Paul to accomplish all he was given to do, there is also a way for us to follow Christ and enter heaven.