

"THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES"

(Acts 27:41-44)

28:-1-6).

V. 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."

Two currents converged on this spot, building up a reef, by bringing in sand, and on this reef the ship ran aground. The forepart plowing into the reef, was wedged tight, while the hinder part, stern, was free of the reef, but subject to the force of the seas and thus was broken off, or as the margin reads, "began to break up". The twisting action of the water loosed the sides, and apparently the stern of the ship began to fall apart under the "violence of the waves".

While I am fully aware of the fact that the nature of the breaking up of this ship was not designed as a type of a Christian making "ship wreck" "concerning the faith" (I Tim. 1:19)(And notice in this reference it is not the faith that was shipwrecked, but "a good conscience" in relation to "the faith"), but it may be used to point out how the testimony of the life may be wrecked, by comparing certain things common to both.

1. The rudder, in the stern of the ship, is of course, designed to steer the ship, but this it cannot do unless the foreship is free. James said, "Behold also the ships which though they be so great and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth" (James 3:4). Here the helm stands for the whole steering mechanism. Notice that there are three principal features in the wreck of the ship of our lesson, humanly speaking. (1) They were lost, as to their location. (2) They were without power. They had "straked sail" V. 17, that is, "lowered the sail" and V. 19 indicates that they threw it overboard, hence leaving the ship without power of locomotion, hence depriving the rudder of it's power to steer the ship, just as the rudder of an outboard motor depends on the power of the motor. (3) The forepart of the ship was held fast, rendering helpless the rest of the ship before the battering of "the contrary winds". Apply these three things to the Christian, and we have (1) "The child of God off course, out of "the path of the just", contrary to the "steps" divinely appointed for "a good man" (Ps. 37:23), and by which he is to "walk and to please God" (I Thess. 4:1). (2) He is without power, because the power for right living is furnished on the course, and in the race by "faith" (I Jno. 5:4). God says "Go ----- and I am with you always" (Matt. 28:19-20). The going must be in the prescribed way, that is, "strive lawfully" (II Tim. 2:5). "All Scripture "charts the course (II Tim. 3:16-17); grace gives strength therein (II Tim. 2:1), and victory crowns the arrangement (II Cor. 2:14). (3) If this be not the course of one's life, and the power of it, the part of man in which is to be manifest "the life of Jesus" (II Cor. 4:10-11), that is the body, will tell a story marked by wreckage. May the forepart of man, the spirit, be held fast, not by reefs, resulting from contrary seas, but by the knowledge of, and love for "the captain of their salvation" (Heb. 2:10), for though the seas be rough (II Cor. 11:23-28)(Heb. 11:36-37), the harbor is ahead (Col. 3:3-4)(I Jno. 3:2), and nothing (Rom. 8:35-39) shall prevent our arrival there (Heb. 2:10)(Rom. 9:23).

V. 42-44. "And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

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 :

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."

One can see from V. 42, how much confidence Julius, the centurion in charge of the prisoners, had in Paul when he "gave him liberty to go to his friends to refresh himself" (Acts 27:3), when they were at Sidon. Notice when the ship began to break up "the soldiers counsel was to kill the prisoners" V. 42. They were responsible for the prisoners under them, under Roman law, life for life. Compare Acts 12:19, and Acts 16:27.

The Centurion, "willing to save Paul kept them from their purpose". To the presence of Paul is attributed the preservation of life three times - Acts 27:24, 31, 43. The world isn't aware of it, of course, but the presence of God's people is preserving the world from the judgment of God today. "ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13). One might say, Why not give the credit to the centurion, to which we reply, We don't give the credit to either, but to God who had said to Paul, not to the centurion, "thou ---- must bear witness also at Rome " (Acts 23:11), and his "Counsel shall stand" (Isa. 46:10), yea, "every purpose of the Lord shall be performed" (Jer. 51:29).

The centurion, having prevented the killing of the prisoners, commanded them "which could swim" to "cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land". This was probably done so that they could help the others who would float by the help of "broken pieces of the ship". One can see how important the "pieces" were to those who could not swim. One may wonder if these very people, knowing the nature of unconverted men, and their tendency to charge God with all their trouble and at the same time live as though there were no God, had not cursed their luck, when the ship struck the reef. One may also wonder just how much thought they gave to the fact that each person, unable to swim, was promised a part of the broken ship on which to escape to land. Each day every ungodly person, if he but had eyes to see, could see evidences of God's providence. Such can fail to see only by deliberately closing his eyes. "And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." The "so" not only indicates how they escaped as observable to the human eye, but refers to the purpose of God, as made known to Paul, that they would all escape. The promise was "all them that sail with thee", V. 24. Paul had said, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me", V. 25, and "so ----they escaped all" V. 44 .

Chap. 28.

V. 1-2. "And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

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. "

Here they learn the identity of the Island, for the first time. Remember, Paul had said before the wreck, "We must be cast upon a certain Island" (Acts 27:26). Of the land before them, when the ship struck the reef, "they knew not" (Acts 27:39), but in our text they learn, "that the Island was called Melita", our modern Malta. This Island is 17 miles long, and 9 miles wide at it's widest parts. It was, at the time Paul was there, "a dependency of the Roman Province of Sicily". The expression "the barbarous people", is applied to the occupants of the Island, not because of their civilization, but because of their language. The Greeks and Romans so designated those whose language differed from their own. (Note Rom. 1:14). They were very hospitable, building a fire so that the clothes of the ship wrecked men might be dried, from the results of the sea and a continuing rain, and also to protect against the cold.

V. 3-4. "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.

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. "

Paul gathered a "bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire. " The "bundle of sticks" here does not mean what it would mean to us. He did not pick up a stick at a time until he had a bundle, but rather it was a bundle of sticks already together as a roll or ball, perhaps washed up, and rolled by the action of the wind. Paul put this bundle on the fire and as it began to warm by the fire already burning, "there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand". Had Paul gathered the sticks one by one, there would have been no way for the snake to have been in the bundle. It had crawled in among the sticks already in a bundle, and when the fire thawed it out, it came out and struck Paul on the hand. The word "venomous" is not in the text, but the word "viper" in verse 3, shows it to be a snake, and the result that the natives expected from it's bite shows it to have been very poisonous. Paul was really bitten as the viper

"fastened on his hand" V. 3. Notice now, what the natives said, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance (justice) suffereth not to live" V. 4. Is this not like men who reason from appearances? They probably saw a chain on Paul and knew that he was a prisoner, and though he had escaped death by drowning, yet justice had finally run him to earth. So they reasoned, and so they were wrong. Paul once asked "Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? (II Cor. 10:7). Christ said "Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment." (Jno. 7:24). Circumstantial evidence may sometimes seem to point to certain guilt, but not necessarily so. Men who judge the actions of God through the eyes of paganism, invariably misjudge those who know the Lord.

V. 5-6. "And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 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."

Paul "shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm". This is exactly what the Lord said in Mark 16:18, concerning his confirmation of the message of the apostles. "They shall take up serpents ---- it shall not hurt them." Paul, an apostle, "felt no harm". This is what the Lord had promised. This is what happened. "No harm". The natives who had judged Paul to be a murderer "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. This is quite a change. From a murderer to a god, but such are the changes where the mind is fed on false assumptions. The "sound words" of Divine revelation (II Tim. 1:13), furnish that which produces a "sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7), which is essential to being "sound in faith" (Titus 1:13).

We may not as readily run the gamut of mental changes as did the natives of Melita, concerning Paul, but isn't it a fact that our judgment of others often is just about as easily changed as that of the people of Melita? We are subject to emotional change and unreasoning prejudices, when we forget that we, like those we judge, "must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10). Paul said, "Let us not therefore, judge one another any more" (Rom. 14:13), that is, in connection with those things wherein Christ has not bound us, but wherever judgment is required, let God's word settle the issue on the principle of Jno. 7:24, and not according to our prejudices and preferences. To fail to judge according to righteous principles, will render us as susceptible to perverted judgment, as were the natives of Melita, who could one minute brand a man a murderer, and the next, make him a god. Such is not the way of truth.

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"THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES"

(Acts 28:7-15).

V. 7-9. "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.

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.

So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:"

Here is an example of divine healing through the apostolic ministry. Publius, probably the governor of the Island, courteously received Paul and his companions and gave them lodging for three days. Pursuant to the promise of Christ to the apostles, "they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mk. 16:18), for it was thus that the Lord would be found "confirming the word" (Mk. 16:20), Paul went to the father of Publius, who was sick of a fever, and dysentery, and "prayed and laid hands on him, and healed him". How different this is from the paganism perpetuated in the name of Christ, by the healing charlatans of today. Remember that Luke, who wrote the Book of Acts, was a physician whom Paul called "the beloved Physician" (Col. 4:14), and he employed many medical terms in both Acts, and the gospel he wrote. The word, "fever" is plural, and means "a malady of repeated attacks". Publius, who showed such courtesy to the shipwrecked men, would, of course, be a man of affection for his own flesh and blood; thus Paul's healing of his father would be highly regarded. Paul, like Peter and John before the cripple at the gate of the Temple, could, by the power of the God of the heavens, say, "such as I have give I thee" (Acts 3:6).

"When this (the healing of Publius' father) was done, others also which had diseases in the island, came and were healed" V. 9. Here, there is no healing line, with those in line having been previously examined and given a card as in the case of the healing quacks of modern healing campaigns, but just the exercising of divine power doing exactly what was promised. "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mk. 16:18). No cowardly laying off on the Lord the failure of an unscriptural practice, but success every time, after the ministry had been given to them as per Jno. 17:18, Heb. 2:3-4. "The signs of an apostle" (II Cor. 12:12) never did fail. Not one case of failure is recorded. One wonders how these cheap God-dishonoring traffickers in human ills of today can continue to deceive even the mentally weak. Notice, there was no "oil" used in this healing, as was enjoined in James 5:14. Why? Because it was never used in connection with miraculous healing of any but "the twelve tribes" (James 1:1)(Mk. 6:13). No Gentile was ever anointed with oil for any purpose through the apostolic ministry. Yet today, these healing quacks never anoint any one else. Like in everything else they do, they are exactly opposite the truth.

V. 10-15. "Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

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

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:

Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

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."

After three months the ship-wrecked group sailed away in "a ship of Alexandria". It was in such a ship that they had been ship-wrecked before. (Acts 27:6). This ship, however, had wintered in the isle whose sign was Castor and Pollux". This ship had been compelled to winter at Malta, probably by the same wind which had wrecked the other ship. It had been in the harbor of Valetta on the north east side of the Island, and is still today the harbor of the Island. The "sign of Castor and Pollux" means that an image of these twin brothers of heathen mythology had been either erected on the prow of the ship, or painted on

the sides. Castor and Pollux were in heathen mythology, the sons of Jupiter and Leda and were variously represented, "sometimes as stars, but often as young men on horseback, or, their heads simply given" (George W. Clark). This ship would naturally be large in order to be able to take on board the 276 members of the party with Paul, besides her own crew. The ship sailed away and landed at Syracuse, about 80 miles distant from Malta. Syracuse was the famous capitol of Sicily, on its southeastern coast. The ship could have easily made this distance in less than a day. There they tarried three days, and "from thence we fetched a compass (making a circuit) and came to Rhegium" V. 13. The circuitous route was made necessary by the nature of the wind. It wasn't favorable to any other course. "After one day the South wind blew (without which wind they could not proceed through the straits of Messina). Notice on the map, the straits between Italy and Sicilia and you will see why favorable winds would be necessary to negotiate the passage. Having gone through the straits after waiting one day at Rhegium, the entrance of the straits, under the favor of the south wind, they sailed up the coast to Puteoli, about 180 miles from Rhegium.

It was at Puteoli that Luke says "We found brethren and were desired to tarry with them seven days" V. 14. Notice that this language does not include the whole crew, but Paul and his christian companions. Notice, also, they did not simply desire to tarry a while. It was "desired" by the brethren who were already there. The love of Christ binds the hearts of his people together, unless that love is quenched by sin in the life. The inhabitants of the isle of Melita, out of their gratitude for the healing of their sick, had "honoured" Paul and companions with "many honors", while with them, and when the time for departure arrived, they "laded us with such things as were necessary" V. 10, that is, for the trip, which was a wonderful thing to do, and it was probably more than the christians in Puteoli were able to do, but the fellowship in Puteoli was based, not on what one does for another, but the consciousness of the wonderful truth, that both were alike, the mutual recipients of God's saving grace, the "common salvation" (Jude 3). That is, they belonged to someone else to whom they were eternally indebted and yet eternally free. There is no fellowship in the world like that which exists among the children of God, when the things of God are reigning in their hearts. At Melita, at the hands of men, they "found meat and drink", but in Puteoli, they found "righteousness and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17) reigning in the hearts of brethren who "desired" them, because of the common bond. This is the difference which only they who have eyes to see are able to discern.

"And so we went toward Rome" V. 14. The adverb "so" refers to the manner of going to Rome. Doubtless even Paul hadn't the slightest idea of the ruggedness of the journey necessary to fulfill the words of the Lord, "so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11). This is of God's mercy. Most of us, if we knew the things that would confront us in fulfilling the will of God, required by the walk of faith, wouldn't have the courage to attempt it. God, however, gives grace day by day to do his Will day by day. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). The prophet cried, "O, Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning" (Isa. 33:2). Our strength to start the day is our Lord, and is sufficient to accomplish his will (Phil. 4:13). We are not to complain of our lot as though it were peculiarly hard, for it is written "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12). No, there is nothing happening to us that is not happening to others, and there is nothing happening to us, that God's grace is not able to support our infirmities before it, but rather, "the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:9). What is the answer? "The God of all grace" V. 10.

"And so we went to Rome". Contrary winds, shipwreck, yes, but God had spoken and all that nature or men could throw in the path must dissolve before that word, and "so we went toward Rome." Irresistably they went, because God had said he must and when God says a thing shall be done, it shall be according to the confidence of Paul, "even as it was told me" (Acts 27:25).

Now from "thence", that is from Rome, toward which Paul moved, "When the brethren heard of us they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and the three taverns" V. 15. "The Appii forum" was a station on the way from Rome to the neighborhood of the Bay of Naples. This was called the Appian way. The station referred to was 43 miles from Rome. When Paul saw the brethren "he thanked God and took courage." Three years before, he had written to these brethren, "I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Rom. 1:11-12). He said, "Often times I purposed to come unto you (but was let (hindered) hitherto)" (Rom. 1:13) . I am sure that if many of us had encountered the difficulties Paul did in going, we would have decided that God didn't want us to go. It is easy, before opposition, to read into it the will of God leading down easier paths. Paul, however, never interpreted opposition as meaning that the will of God was against the thing opposed. He said, "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." (I Cor. 16:9). It is easy for one who lives by his feelings, and capitalizes on the work of others, to fail to see a "great door", especially if surrounded by "many adversaries". Caleb and Joshua saw a "great door", and they saw many adversaries, just as the other ten spies did, but they saw something else. They saw the Lord of Glory and looked to him for victory. Wherever God opens a door, there will be many adversaries. Many religionists are entering doors that God has never opened, for purposes he never ordained, and thus no opposition is encountered; rather, the world praises them on the principle of I Jno. 4:5. The world will hear it's own; but Paul entered doors which God opened for the purpose of accomplishing the will of God, and while there were many adversaries, there was also great joy in the path of the Just. This is the way. Walk ye in it, for it shineth more and more unto the perfect day . (Jer. 6:16)(Prov. 4:18).

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are rebuked by the Lord as evidencing "little faith":

1. "They had forgotten to take bread" (Matt. 16: 5).
2. Christ warned them concerning "the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees," (Matt. 16: 6).
3. They erroneously "reasoned" concerning the leaven, associating it with material bread and concluded falsely, "It (what he had said) is because we have taken no bread" (Matt. 16: 7).
4. Christ showed their illogical reasoning by what they knew he had done, and was able to do again, (Matt. 16: 7-10), in supposing he would warn them against an element in material bread.
5. He told them what he meant. He meant what he said, and said what he meant, "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." They knew that the leaven in literal bread was never so designated. Instead of waiting for a divine interpretation of what they did not know, they just "reasoned among themselves", and as is always the case, they were wrong. Where men reason in ignorance about what God means, when they don't know what he has said, they always come up with the wrong answer.
6. Notice when Christ erases from their mind what he had not said, namely, "bread" (Matt. 16:5, 7), and called their attention to the fact that he had not said "beware of the leaven of bread", but did say, "beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16: 11), compare with Matt. 16:6, and note the exact wording common to both, "the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees."
7. "Then understood they" (Matt. 16: 12) what he meant, What had Christ done in order to get them to understand? He simply took away the false basis of their reasoning. He denied saying what they reasoned about, and when he repeated what he actually said, "Then understood they". Isn't this the cause of all error today? Reasoning about what God has not said, and using this perversion to support what men want to believe.

V. 30-31.

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,
Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

In verse 23, Paul had expounded, testified and persuaded, with the result "some believed" V. 24, and in verse 31, he continued to preach the Kingdom, that is, proclaim as a herald, the Kingdom that was to survive the Roman empire, for the consideration of those outside, but for the believers he was found "teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him". So the Book closes, but the message goes on. The apostle is dead. The despotic Roman empire was divided and her power is naught, but men as Paul, "with all confidence" have preached the truth that has liberated the souls of men for these nearly two thousand years, "no man forbidding". Until "His appearing and His Kingdom" (II Tim. 4:1), let us "Watch for the moving" and "Walk with the King".

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