

## LESSON THIRTEEN

(28:1-31)

### At Melita, 28:1-10

**28** *After we had escaped, we then learned that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. 3 Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, when a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. 4 When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live." 5 He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 They waited expecting him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead; but when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.*

*7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. 8 It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery; and Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. 9 And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. 10 They presented many gifts to us; and when we sailed, they put on board whatever we needed.*

28:1 - Melita/Malta, was an island some 75 miles south of the island of Sicily and about 100 miles from Syracuse on the island. They had been blown some 500 miles from the island of Crete.

V. 2 - **natives** - The Greek term is translated Barbarians in Romans 1:14. It simply meant a people who did not speak Greek, or whatever language was native to the listener (or writer).

**unusual kindness** - The Greek term is the two words love and man - love of man (the source of our word philanthropy). They were such by receiving them all, building a fire for their comfort, etc. See v. 7 also. Many other people would have taken advantage of the situation. Perhaps God caused these people to so act.

**viper** - John and Jesus (Matt. 3:7; 12:34; 23:33) used this same word in reference to people of their day.

**heat** - The Greek term is transliterated into our "thermos." Observe that Paul was also helping - not afraid to work.

V. 4 - The natives thought like most other people do at times - that physical calamities are an evidence of some sin in the lives of those being punished. However, it is not necessarily so. And every Christian should remember it. God often uses such things to teach lessons, even to the righteous. The very death of Jesus disproves the

thought (if nothing else does) - the just suffering for the unjust. It is pertinent that people thought the snake was poison, whether we can prove it was or was not.

V. 5 - Paul will show that their theology is bad. But that doesn't help, since they immediately draw another false conclusion,

V. 6. **harm** - the common Greek word for evil or bad.

**he had escaped** - "Paul had been 'saved' from the problem of the sea, but he was not going to escape his just punishment" was their thinking. How fickle is popular opinion! (Reread Acts 14:8-18).

V. 7 - **hospitably** - The Greek word is the word for lovingmindedly; or in a friendly manner.

V. 8 - **dysentery** - A transliteration of the Greek term. His "fever" was perhaps caused by the dysentery, or something else. Peter's mother-in-law had a fever, Luke 4:38,39.

V. 9 - Luke may have helped in the healing of those who came. The word for weakness is used of disease or a deficiency of some sort; often in a comparative sense, as in II Cor. 12:9,10 or Rom. 14:1-15:7.

### **At Syracuse, 28:11-12**

*11 After three months we set sail in a ship which had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the Twin Brothers as figurehead. 12 Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.*

V. 11 - The three winter months were probably December through February. Note that even if Malta was but a short distance from Sicily, another ship had wintered there, the captain probably afraid of the stormy sea. Some think that the ship's name was given because the sailors thought that the constellation was a good luck omen. It stood for the sons of Zeus, Castor and Pollux.

### **At Rhegium, 28:13a** **In Puteoli, 28:13b, 14**

*13 And from there we made a circuit and arrived at Rhegium; and after one day a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. 14 There we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome.*

V. 13 - Puteoli was an important seaport, and the chief port for Rome. It lay some 180 miles up the coast from Rhegium, which was about 75 miles north of Syracuse. Since it was such an important place, Christians were almost certain to be there, v. 14, although we know not how Christianity came to Italy. The faith of the Roman Christians was known everywhere, however. Some think that those from Rome in Jerusalem on

Pentecost could have been among those converted, and then took their faith back to Italy when they went.

### **Paul at Rome, 28:15-30**

*15 And the brethren there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage. 16 And when we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier that guarded him.*

*17 After three days he called together the local leaders of the Jews; and when they had gathered, he said to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against the people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 When they had examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case. 19 But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar - though I had no charge to bring against my nation. 20 For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain." 21 And they said to him, "We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brethren coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you. 22 But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against."*

*23 When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in great numbers. And he expounded the matter to them from morning till evening, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. 24 And some were convinced by what he said, while others disbelieved. 25 So, as they disagreed among themselves, they departed, after Paul had made one statement: "The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:*

*26 'Go to this people, and say,  
You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall indeed see  
but never perceive. 27 For this people's heart has grown dull, and their  
ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should  
perceive with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their  
heart, and turn for me to heal them.'*

*28 Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen."*

*30 And he lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ quite openly and unhindered.*

V. 15 - The Roman road is yet visible and used. The Christians came some 40 miles over the road, which was then over 300 years old. How they heard that Paul was coming is unknown. His letter to them some years earlier had introduced him to some, and he obviously knew some of them at the time of writing.

**Paul...took courage** - God may have been with Paul many times earlier, and have given him special revelations along, even to promising him that he would stand before Caesar, but Paul was still human and was encouraged by the brethren who loved him (even if perhaps not knowing him) enough to come and meet him. It is a good example for us.

V. 16 - As in Caesarea, and pretty much throughout the trip the prisoner was treated kindly.

V. 17 - Of course, multitudes of Jews were in Rome and thereabouts, and the Roman letter gives evidence that some were Christians. Paul, even if an apostle to the Gentiles, still attempts to win some of his brethren according to the flesh.

V. 19 - **Jews** - The first time that Paul so characterizes those who opposed him.

V. 20 - Note again: Paul's thrust was about the "hope of Israel" which was fully realized in Christ Jesus. For some, it would not help to so state.

V. 21 - As far as the Jews were concerned, they were not predisposed against Paul, though they may well have heard of him (see v. 22). They evidently did not know why he was in Rome until he informed them. This may say something indirectly about his case - the Jews in Judea considered their evidence so flimsy that they didn't bother to go to Rome to defend themselves.

V. 22 - **sect** - the same word as in 24:5. It also occurs in Galatians 5:20. As used then, it seemed to mean a party or faction of a larger group (i.e., Jewish Pharisees, Sadducees, etc.). Now, we use it various ways, sometimes making it equal to heresy (which word transliterates the Greek term rather than translating it). Heresy means, generally, either a position held contrary to a revealed truth, or a doctrine considered to be untrue, and to which a group adheres, making it a major part of their belief. It is fair to say, however, that it is defined various ways, though generally the above is true. It obviously relates to what is considered as essential and truth rather than opinion.

In the early years of Christianity, those considered heretics were anathematized from the fellowship.

In later years of the church, that which was considered essential and normative for the members was called "dogma" or sometimes (essential) doctrine or confession of faith. Wrapped up in this problem is the question of infallibility (Whose interpretation shall be held as correct?) which rightly must be considered, since the basic principle upon which the Protestantism stands is that every man is his own interpreter and no one has the right to lord it over another. Hence, for these and other reasons, heresy and sect are difficult concepts to handle. For instance, one might be divisive (schismatic) and not over any major doctrine, or even a minor doctrine, etc. Various positions might be held on certain things, and yet no one would be accused of heresy. One ought to be careful about terms, being biblical if possible, and correct according to current usage as well.

The Jewish men doubtless knew of the Christians in Rome, and also knew that the report about Christians were generally bad.

V. 23 - **the kingdom of God** - It seems to me that from Paul's testimony in Acts, the kingdom of God and the church were equal in his thinking. At least he never distinguishes between them (see v. 31).

**trying to convince** - The Greek term meant persuade, which we have pointed out many times before, was and is the method most used by Paul. Those unpersuaded are then called "unbelievers."

V. 24 - Two groups as always: some persuaded, some still unbelieving. In v. 25, Luke describes the two groups as being unable to speak together (i.e. agree with each other by speaking the same thing).

V. 25 - Notice the evidence and manner of inspiration of the prophet (another reason why I think it is misleading to say *prophet* and *preacher* are synonymous) Isaiah, and Paul's judgment that what was said 700 years earlier yet had a present-day application. The general text occurs in Matthew 13:14,15; Rom. 11:8. Or, in the words of Stephen in Acts 7, and Jesus in Matt. 23:29ff., the Jewish people were characteristically unbelieving, resistant to the Holy Spirit speaking through men to them. Note again Romans 10:18-21, where the indictment of guilty is placed upon them, because they were responsible for their hearts and unbelief. Note the idea "and turn" (i.e., repent. See Acts 20:21; 26:20 etc.).

V 28 - Another item the Jews, as a whole could not get straight: that God loved the Gentiles just like he loved Jews. Observe that Paul stated that the Gentiles would listen; perhaps in contrast to Jews who would not listen.

V. 30 - As is clear elsewhere, many supported Paul in his ministry, which, it seems to me, establishes the right of a congregation to support someone, or the right of someone to be supported by a congregation or individuals.

V. 31 - Note again "the kingdom of God" and "the things concerning Jesus Christ." To me, to do the one is to do the other (i.e., to preach Christ is to preach the kingdom, and vice versa).

**unhindered** - Most commentators remark about this word with which the book of Acts ends, since it has so many interesting connotations. For instance, through many trials, Paul yet arrived in Rome, and continued to preach Christ, allowing nothing to hinder him. Again, the Gospels, Acts and all the epistles tell how God tried to lead the Jews from their allegiance to the law to the gospel, which alone makes men free and unhindered. Certainly the book of Acts is an engrossing history of the early Christians, so often hindered in their understanding, or by their culture, and their attempts to remove all obstacles so that the gospel might "run and have free course" (Phil. 1:12-14; II Thess. 3:1).

We might recall in passing that some of the epistles were written here, such as Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, and perhaps others of which we do not know. We should also consider that the surroundings in this imprisonment seem to be much more pleasant than those reflected in II Timothy.

Various people came to see Paul, or work with him, like Epaphroditus, Onesimus, Epaphras, Tychicus, Demos and Timothy among others.

Acts is truly a great book - may we be grateful to God for using Luke to write it for mankind, and that we have been privileged to study it for our edification and upbuilding in faith.

## QUESTIONS

202. How did the people on Malta contrast to the Jews with whom Paul had been dealing?

203. Does it seem to you that the stay on Malta was rather encouraging to the travelers, even after three months?

204. Did the news of Paul's coming travel ahead of him?

205. Does God sometimes work through others to encourage us?

206. How does Paul plead his case (before the state) in Rome?

207. Why did Paul say he was in chains?

208. Were the Roman Jews cordial to him?

209. What were the sources of Paul's presentation to the Jewish brethren?

210. What does Paul see as being true in Isaiah's day and also in his day?

211. Had God spoken in Isaiah's day of a salvation of the Jews which they were rejecting and would reject?

212. What would be true of (some) Gentiles that would not be true of (some) Jews in regard to this promised salvation?

213. How does Luke describe Paul's two years in Rome?

214. What do you see in the word "unhindered"?

### **ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 13**

1. Where is Melita/Malta located?

2. What does the Greek term "natives/barbarians" mean?

3. What is dysentery?
4. Explain the term “Twin Brothers”.
5. Where was Puteoli located?
6. What does “sect/heresy” mean?
7. Describe the brief stay on Malta/Melita.
8. Summarize Paul’s two years in Rome.
9. What is significant about the word “unhindered”?



10. Memorize Acts 28:30-31 in your favorite translation.