

A twig snapped somewhere across the icy street. Hannah's back stiffened.

"What was that?" She whispered to Ashley, her breath coming out in misty puffs. Ashley's pupils shrank down into specks.

"I don't know." She replied, her voice thin and wispy.

They both stood in utter silence for what felt like minutes. Only one dim streetlight shown over the road, creating a small beam of light in the pitch black night.

The lightly falling snow was blown gently by the wind, and whistled through Ashley's hair and froze her ears. Chimes clashed restlessly together somewhere in the distance.

Hannah reached for Ashley's gloved hand, but she batted it away.

"Don't be a wimp." Ashley hissed. Another twig snapped, louder and sounding closer this time. Hannah whimpered.

Ashley's eyes slowly shifted toward the streetlight. A dark shadow darted behind it. Ashley's heart stopped. She turned to face Hannah.

"We have to get out of here," she said staring at her with a crazed look in her eye, "Now."

She began to take a step away from the street, but Hannah put a hand out to stop her.

"We can't," She insisted. Her breath was ice cold on Ashley's face, "If we go, whoever the heck is out there is going to hear us. And they're going to follow us."

Ashley stared at Hannah with her big blue eyes. The light behind them flickered and they both spun their heads around. Within an instant, everything was utterly and completely black. A shot rang out!

(Acts 28:1) Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called **Malta**.

(Acts 28:2) 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.

"unusual" = not common or uncommon

(Acts 28:3) But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid *them* on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

Probably 300+ people and Paul the Apostle is the one gathering sticks...

(Acts 28:4) 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.**"

Native superstition or religious legalism – sometimes it's difficult to tell the difference: You get hurt so it must be karma or justice or some other nonsense...

They were evidently aware that Paul was a prisoner...and if he was bit by a deadly snake then he must have been a murderer!

(Acts 28:5) But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.

Paul just shakes it off as if it were a mosquito or bee. I suppose if you've been thru what Paul has been thru...it was just another event in his anything but boring life...

The good news is: the viper is fried!

(Acts 28:6) 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.**

Paul showed no signs of being bit by the venomous snake...so, of course, he's not a criminal....he must be a god!

Isn't it comforting to know a True and Living God that doesn't cause us to change our thinking about reality ???

(Acts 28:7) 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.

(Acts 28:8) 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.

(Acts 28:9) So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

(Acts 28:10) They also **honored us in many ways**; and when we departed, **they provided such things as were necessary.**

(Acts 28:11) After **three** months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.

(Acts 28:12) And landing at Syracuse, we stayed **three** days.

(Acts 28:13) From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,

(Acts 28:14) where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them **seven** days. And so we went toward Rome.

(Acts 28:15) 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.

(Acts 28:16) 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.

(Acts 28:17) And it came to pass after **three** days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. 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,

(Acts 28:18) who, when they had examined me, wanted to let *me* go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.

(Acts 28:19) 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.

(Acts 28:20) 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."

(Jeremiah 14:8) O the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble, Why should You be like a stranger in the land, And like a traveler *who* turns aside to tarry for a night?

(Jeremiah 17:13) O LORD, the hope of Israel, All who forsake You shall be ashamed. "Those who depart from Me Shall be written in the earth, Because they have forsaken the LORD, The fountain of living waters."

(Acts 28:21) 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.

i. **We neither received letters** shows that the religious leaders who accused Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea knew their case was hopeless. They made no effort to send ahead documents confirming their case against him.

(Acts 28:22) But we desire to hear from you what you think; for **concerning this sect**,

we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

(Acts 28:23) 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.

People seem to forget that people came to the LORD until the second century from what was written in the OT. But, it was the teaching of the revelation of Jesus in those Scriptures that made it possible for those whose hearts were ready to receive to understand the truth of Jesus. They had to be taught about the necessity of a changed heart before they would see a changed world!

(Acts 28:24) And **some were persuaded** by the things which were spoken, and **some disbelieved**.

As it has been for thousands of years.

GUZIK: What did Paul teach regarding **the kingdom of God**? Undoubtedly, Paul taught exactly what Jesus taught: That now, God was bringing a spiritual kingdom that would take root in men's hearts before it took over the governments of this world. The Jews of Jesus' day and of Paul's day were looking for a political kingdom, not a spiritual kingdom.

(Acts 28:25) 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,**

(Acts 28:26) saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY: "HEARING YOU WILL HEAR, AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE, AND NOT PERCEIVE;

(Acts 28:27) 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 6:9-10 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. (10) Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Matthew 13:13-15 Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. (14) And in them

the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'HEARING YOU WILL HEAR AND SHALL NOT UNDERSTAND, AND SEEING YOU WILL SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE; (15) 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.'

(Acts 28:28) "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"

"I always came to you first! The offer of salvation was always given but rarely received – especially with the leaders of the Nation of Israel - the priests and scribes!" whose hearts were hardened by envy, jealousy, power and fear!

But remember, not every Gentile accepted Messiah and His Gifts!

(Acts 28:29) And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

(Acts 28:30) Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,

(Acts 28:31) preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

WAIT!

What about Nero? What about the trial? Why did Luke stop here?

The bottom line is: We don't know!

Why Luke did not give the history and the results of that trial, and why he did not refer to the causes of its delay, are matters of conjecture and would be useless to expound upon. But 2 passages from 2 of the letters he wrote while a prisoner in Rome give us a few clues"

2 Timothy 4:16-18 At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them. (17) But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. (18) And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve *me* for His heavenly kingdom. To Him *be* glory forever and ever. Amen!

Philippians 1:21-26 For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. (22) But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what *I* shall choose *I* cannot tell. (23) For *I* am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. (24) Nevertheless to remain in the

flesh *is* more needful for you. (25) And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, (26) that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Altogether, during this imprisonment, he wrote, according to many scholars, the following epistles between 61 and 63 AD

Ephesians,

2 Timothy,

Philippians,

Colossians,

Philemon,

And possibly Hebrews [if you believe like many that this was an epistle of Paul's.

How, when and where did the apostle Paul die?

There's no Biblical answer to these questions. Even history doesn't say for sure. However, some evidence highly suggests the apostle Paul's death occurred after a fifth missionary journey ended in 67 A.D. (some believe he travelled to Spain; some believe he revisited the churches he planted and still some others believe both. It is also believed that Paul was beheaded by the Romans, under Emperor Nero, in 68AD.

This brings this wonderful Book to a close. Let's not spend too much time pondering what we don't know but rather what we do know:

1. The church was born when Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples. The church might have been created without Him, but it would not last more than a couple of years!
2. The church, from the beginning was almost always under persecution by the Jewish leadership and the pagans as well.
3. The Good News spread from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria and into the world. The Good News was empowered by the Holy Spirit, for it would have been impossible to persuade anyone without Him and His working on the hearts and minds of the hearers.
4. We witnessed great transformations in the persons of Peter and Paul. Again, the work of Jesus by the Spirit! You can't transform yourself because it is accomplished from the inside out.
5. Like OT people who have been called "types of Christ" (Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah, David etc), Paul's life mirrored Jesus's life of sacrifice, of persecution, of great highs and deep walks in the valley of the shadow of death. This is seen in his constant suffering at the hands of the enemies of the Gospel.

All this and more became a story of the Acts of the Holy Spirit thru Jesus's servants who simply obeyed His commandments to preach the gospel to a lost and perishing world.

We too can do all these things and more! We are no different than those we read about these past several months. The same Holy Spirit that was in them is in us! The issue always boils down to:

Are we going to yield our wills to His perfect will? Are we going to obey His promptings, His Voice, His Word? Are we going to 'walk His Way'? 'Live His TRUTH'? and most importantly, 'Share His LIFE'? All those men and women we read about weren't building a church, they were building a Body for our Savior and our LORD. All of those people truly KNEW their Messiah, BELIEVED their Messiah and were SERVANTS of their Messiah because He proved, time and time again, up to and including TODAY that He is the True and Faithful God who loved us and desired a real relationship with His creation! A relationship that He made possible by His atoning death and His resurrection and ascension to our Home.

[Song of Solomon 6:2-3](#) My beloved has gone to his garden, To the beds of spices, To feed *his flock* in the gardens, And to gather lilies. (3) I *am* my beloved's, And my beloved *is* mine. He feeds *his flock* among the lilies.