

Acts 27 – Paul trusts the Lord through the storm

I. Paul's Voyage to Rome and Shipwreck (27:1-28:16)

This chapter presents the thrilling saga of the apostle's voyage from Caesarea to Malta, in route to Rome. If Paul had not been a passenger, we would never have heard of the trip, or of the shipwreck. The passage is full of nautical terms and is therefore not always easy to follow. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Paul Sails for Rome

Act 27:1 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.

The journey began at Caesarea. Paul was placed in the custody of an officer named Julius. This centurion was attached to the Augustan Regiment, a distinguished legion of the Roman army. Like all the other centurions mentioned in the NT, he was a man of superior character in kindness, justice, and consideration for others. – Believers' Bible Commentary

This is the beginning of the voyage to Italy. Paul, along with other prisoners, is put in the charge of a centurion by the name of Julius. I would think it safe to say that Paul was the only one of the prisoners who was a Roman citizen. Probably the others were criminals who were sent to Rome for execution. Many of them would become gladiators and would be fed to the wild beasts. In that day there was a constant stream of human life from all corners of the empire that was being fed into the mall of this public vice there in the Colosseum in Rome. These prisoners would be utterly hopeless men. What an opportunity this gave Paul to bring the gospel of hope to this class of men. You will remember that the Lord Jesus Himself said that one of the reasons He came was to set the prisoners free—free spiritually, delivered from their sins and delivered from their guilt.

This centurion, Julius, was a very courteous pagan, as we shall see. - McGee

Act 27:2 So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.

There were other prisoners on board, who, like Paul, were being taken to Rome for trial. Also on the passenger list were the names of Aristarchus and Luke, both traveling companions of the apostle on earlier journeys. The ship on which they embarked was from Adramyttium, a city of Misa in the northwest corner of Asia Minor. It was scheduled to sail north and west, making stops at ports along the coasts of proconsular Asia, the western province of Asia Minor. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 27:3 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.

The ship sailed north along the coast of Palestine, putting in at Sidon, seventy miles from Caesarea. Julius, the centurion, kindly permitted Paul to go ashore and visit his friends and receive care. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Notice: God's has the ability to bless you even in chains and on rough journey through the storm. God has done this before blessing Joseph in prison.

Act 27:4-5 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.

From Sidon, the route cut across the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, passing Cyprus on the left, and thus taking advantage of the side of the island sheltered from the wind. In spite of the winds being contrary, the ship crossed over to the southern coast of Asia Minor, then sailed westward past Cilicia and Pamphylia till it arrived at Myra, a port city of Lycia. – Believers' Bible Commentary

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Act 27:6-8 *There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board. When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmon. Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.*

If you check your map, you will see that Myra is sort of a jumping-off place. This was the place at which they changed ships. The centurion found a ship of Alexandria, which means it had come up from northern Africa and was sailing to Italy.

They were headed for the island of Crete. Apparently, they were still having difficulty sailing. Contrary winds were the great difficulty for sailing vessels of that day. They passed on the south side of the island and came to Lasea, which is on the south shore of Crete. - McGee

Act 27:9-11 *Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, 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." Nevertheless, the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.*

By now considerable time had been lost due to unfavorable sailing conditions. The approach of winter weather made further travel dangerous. It must have been late September or early October, since the Fast (the Day of Atonement) was already over. Paul warned the crew that navigation was unsafe and that if this voyage were continued, there would be the danger of losing the cargo and ship, and even the lives of some on board. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 27:12 *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.*

However, the helmsman and the owner of the ship wanted to proceed. The centurion accepted their judgment, and most of the others agreed with them too. It was felt that the harbor was not as suitable as Phoenix would be as a place to spend the winter. Phoenix was located forty miles west of Fair Havens, at the southwest tip of Crete. Its harbor opened toward the southwest and northwest. – Believers' Bible Commentary

The Storm at Sea

Act 27:13-14 *When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.*

To them the voyage was guesswork. The south wind blew softly, so they "supposed." The captain was a man who looked to self and to the wisdom of men. Paul was looking to God. Later on, Paul would tell these men, "I believe God" (v. Act_27:25). Notice he would not say that he believed in God, but "I believe God."

Life is a great sea, and our lives are little boats. We can sail our boats by human supposition if we so choose. Friend, there is a storm blowing out there, a bit of a gale. The tragedy is that, amid confusion, world chaos, and darkness, most men are still guessing. There are a thousand human plans for building a better world. Yet everywhere we look we see failure. We need men who know God. It was Gladstone who said, "The mark of a great statesman is a man who knows the way God is going for the next fifty years." We don't seem to find many such men around today.

How about you? Do you just look outside at the conditions and go full steam ahead without inquiring or praying for wisdom first?

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What is Euroclydon? Dr. Luke is using a very technical navigational term of that day. It has to do with the north wind, and it actually came north by east. In other words, the storm came down out of Europe. This was wintertime and the stormy season. It was a “tempestuous wind”, and it is in this storm that Paul and all those on the ship with him are caught.

Now I want to stop here to point out something very interesting. You will remember that when Paul was in Ephesus, which was a time of triumph for the gospel, he expressed a great desire to visit Rome. It was the great yearning of his heart. “After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome” (Act_19:21). The hour of darkness came for Paul in Jerusalem. It looked as if he would never see Rome at all. In that hour of darkness, despair, and defeat, God appeared to him to reassure him. “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Act_23:11). The Lord had assured Paul that he would go to Rome. - McGee

Calm within.

1. If the world would listen to the words of God’s children warning of the nearness of danger, many an “injury and loss” even worse than this would be avoided.
2. If there is any loss, it will only be a financial and temporal and comparatively insignificant one to those who commit themselves fully to God’s keeping.
3. If we as Christians lose anything in the storms of this world, it can at worst be nothing more than the loss of the ship in which we sail, the body in which we dwell. Our souls will be saved into God’s presence. – Biblical Illustrator

Act 27:15-19 So, when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. And, running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven. 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.

They were out there in the Mediterranean Sea being driven westward from the island of Crete. It looked very much as if they would be wrecked on the little island of Clauda, which, by the way, is a very small island south of Crete. They had to let the wind take the ship. They threw all the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. They completely stripped the ship of everything that had any weight. – McGee

4. If we are ever so much adrift, God can still find us. Says Matthew Henry: “Paul knows not where he is himself, yet God’s angel knows where to find him out.”
5. If God has promised that we shall in the body stand before Caesar, we need not fear the blows of the tempest. We are immortal until that promise of God is fulfilled. – Biblical Illustrator

How about you, in the midst of the storm, are you willing to throw your possessions overboard or do you possession have you so much that you are willing to go down with the ship?

Act 27:20 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.

For many days they were tossed about helplessly without sight of sun or stars, and thus without the ability to take bearings and find out where they were. Hope of survival was finally given up. – Believers Bible Commentary

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Is this not a situation many of us have either been in or know of people that are there today? Metaphorically, all they see in this world is darkness and depression, and they give up all hope.

Act 27:21-26 *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. 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, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore, take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it had told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island."*

Despair was accentuated by hunger. The men had not eaten for many days. Doubtless they spent their time working for the preservation of the ship and bailing out water. Perhaps there were no facilities for cooking. Sickness, fear, and discouragement probably robbed them of their appetite. There was no shortage of food, but neither was there an inclination to eat.

Then Paul stood in the midst of them with a message of hope. First, he gently reminded them that they should ... not have sailed from Crete. Then he assured them that though the ship would be lost, there would be no loss of life. How did he know? An angel of the Lord had appeared to him that night, assuring him that he would yet stand before Caesar in Rome. God had granted the apostle all those who sailed with him, in the sense that they, too, would be preserved. Therefore, they should cheer up. Paul believed that all would be well, even though they would be shipwrecked on a certain island.

A. W. Tozer writes insightfully:

When the "south wind blew softly," the ship that carried Paul sailed smoothly enough and no one on board knew who Paul was or how much strength of character lay hidden behind that rather plain exterior. But when the mighty tempest, Euroclydon, burst upon them, Paul's greatness was soon the talk of everyone on the ship. The apostle, though himself a prisoner, quite literally took command of the vessel, made decisions and issued orders that meant life or death to the people. And I think the crisis brought to a head something in Paul that had not been clear even to him. Beautiful theory was quickly crystallized into hard fact when the tempest struck. – Believers' Bible Commentary

6. If there is a praying Paul on board, the fact may be worth more to the ship's crew than all their labor at the pumps. Jonah, running away from duty, endangers the ship and its crew; Paul, pursuing the course of duty, is a saving companion to the ship's crew.

7. If we believe God, we shall have little to dread even in such storms as this which shipwrecked Paul. We shall believe that God will bring us through just as He has promised. "Is not God upon the ocean, just the same as on the land?" (S. S. Times.) – Biblical Illustrator

As a Christian in the storms of this world, are you more like Jonah or Paul?

Act 27:27 *Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.*

"Adria" is the Adriatic Sea. The Adriatic Sea lies between Italy and Macedonia or Greece. Apparently, they have been driven up and down the Adriatic in the storm, passing between Crete and Sicily. They are out in the deep, out in the open sea. On the fourteenth night at about midnight, it becomes apparent that they are being driven near some land. - McGee

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Act 27:28-29 *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. Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.*

When they first measured the depth, they found it was twenty fathoms (120 feet), then a little later it was fifteen fathoms. To prevent running the ship aground, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for daylight. –

Believers Bible Commentary

Act 27:30-31 *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."*

The crew was trying to abandon the ship, you see. They acted as if they were dropping anchor, but actually they were going overboard. They were leaving a sinking ship as the rats leave it. They were doing something which they should never have done.

Paul tells the centurion that the only assurance of safety is for all to remain with the ship. Paul has put his trust in God. What a wonderful thing it is to trust the Word of God. The angel of God had told Paul that he and the men would be saved. But they couldn't be saved their way. They must be saved God's way. God's way was for them to stay with the ship. It was a question of believing that God would save them or not believing and taking matters into their own hands. Paul had told them that he believed God. And he tells them that if they want to be saved, they all will need to stay on board the ship. – McGee

Luke 17:33 (CSB) *Whoever tries to make his life secure will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*

Act 27:32 *Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.*

Paul has given the information to the centurion. The centurion is beginning to listen to Paul now. He gives the command and the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboats. Now everyone must stay on board. - McGee

Note: Don't ever think you are lowly in rank or status to make a difference! Paul, likely in an orange prison jump suit, is giving advice and the Roman Centurion is hanging on every word at this point.

Act 27:33-34 *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."*

Phillips titles verses 33-37 "Paul's sturdy common sense." To appreciate the drama of the moment, we should really know something of the terror of a violent storm at sea. Then too, we should remember that Paul was not the captain of the ship but only a captive passenger.

Shortly before daybreak Paul implored the people to eat, reminding them that they had gone two weeks without food. The time had come to eat; their well-being depended on it. The apostle assured them that not a hair of anyone's head would be lost. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 27:35 *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.*

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Paul gave thanks to God in the presence of them all. This again is a wonderful testimony. This is Paul's prosperous journey to Rome. Perhaps you are saying, "It doesn't sound very prosperous to me! It seems to me he is out of the will of God!" No, my friend, Paul is not out of the will of God.

Do you remember another instance back in the Gospels when the Lord Jesus put His own disciples into a boat one night and sent them across the Sea of Galilee? He told them to go to the other side, and on the way over a storm arose on the sea. He sent them right into a storm. Now don't say that Jesus didn't know the storm was coming. He deliberately sent them into the storm! He is God. He knew about the storm, and He knew what He was doing. I personally believe that oftentimes the Lord deliberately sends us into a storm. We need to remember that we can be in the storm and still be in the will of God. He has never said we will miss the storms of life, but He has promised us that we will make the harbor. And He will be right there with us through the storm. That is the comfort that should come to the child of God in the time of the storm. – McGee

Do you promptly praise God in the good times and in the bad?

Act 27:36-37 Then, they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.

Thus encouraged, they took food themselves. There were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 27:38-41 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea. 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. 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 ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners to prevent escape, but the centurion, wanting to save Paul, overruled. He ordered all who could swim to make for shore. The rest were told to float in on boards or other parts of the ship. In this way, every one of the crew and passengers escaped safely to land. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Act 27:42-44 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, 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.

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Note: A soft landing is never promised, but if God says you are going to make it, you will even if you have to swim to get there.