



Paul Begins the Voyage to Rome Acts 27

Introduction

Can you imagine the excitement and relief in Paul's heart as he finally climbed aboard the ship which would take him toward Rome! For over two years he had endured unjustified imprisonment in Caesarea. He had been patient and faithful in trusting God. Now he was finally beginning to taste the fulfillment of God's promise to him (Acts 23:11) which was also his own heart's desire (Acts 19:21). He would see Rome and witness for Christ in that great city.

Luke's account of the voyage to Rome is an eyewitness report. Notice that the third "we" section of Acts begins in Acts 27:1, revealing that Luke was with Paul on this journey. Luke gives a very detailed account of the voyage. In fact, Acts 27 is considered the best historical account of an ancient sea voyage. An experienced yachtsman and classical scholar of the nineteenth century, James Smith *made a careful study of Luke's narrative in relation to the route which it maps out — a part of the Mediterranean with which he himself was acquainted — and formed the most favorable estimate of the accuracy of Luke's account of each stage of the voyage* (The Book of Acts, F.F. Bruce). Smith then wrote a book on the subject entitled The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul.

But Luke does more than give an accurate account of the voyage. He shows Paul's continued faithfulness and trust in God even in the roughest circumstances, the kind of circumstances which bring out true character. Paul turns out to be the hero of the voyage. He gives a solemn warning of disaster, encouragement when disaster comes, and he helps save the lives of both passengers and crew.

Even beyond the account of the voyage and the insight into Paul's personality, Luke paints a powerful picture of God's sovereign protection and direction of Paul and his ministry. This depiction of God's loving and limitless care for His own should be an encouragement to all who place their trust in Him.

Outline of Acts 27

- I. Setting Sail - Acts 27:1-8
- II. Storm at Sea - Acts 27:9-38
- III. Shipwrecked but Safe - Acts 27:39-44

I. Setting Sail - Acts 27:1-8

After Paul gave his defense before King Agrippa, the decision to send him to Rome was finalized. Luke accompanied Paul, as did Aristarchus, one of Paul's converts from Thessalonica. Aristarchus apparently stayed with Paul, as he is mentioned in Paul's letter to the Colossians as a *fellow prisoner* in Rome.

A. Delivered to Julius, a centurion - Acts 27:1

Paul and some other prisoners were put under the authority of a Roman centurion (commander of 100 men) named Julius who belonged to the *Augustan Regiment*. This was a title of honor, meaning literally "His Imperial Majesty's Regiment."

B. On a "coasting vessel" - Acts 27:2-5

The ship they boarded was from Adramyttium, a port southeast of Troas in northwest Asia Minor. The ship was a "coasting vessel," one which traveled the coast of Asia Minor stopping at ports along the way. This ship had made its way down to Caesarea and was now returning home.

(It will be helpful to have a map of Paul's voyage to Rome in front of you as you read this section of the notes.)

1. At Sidon - 27:3

The first port of call was Sidon, on the Syrian coast, sixty miles north of Caesarea. Julius showed kindness to Paul by allowing him to visit the Christians there. Surely this was an added encouragement to Paul.

2. To Myra - 27:4-5

Sailing from east to west was difficult in the Mediterranean because the prevailing winds blew from the west or northwest. For this reason, the ship sailed between Cyprus and the mainland for shelter. The more direct route would have been out toward the open sea, but that would have taken the ship directly into the wind. Luke notes that the *winds were contrary* as they continued along the coast of Asia Minor.

The next stop was Myra, a port which accommodated large ships and served many of the grain ships from Egypt which were bound for Rome.

C. On an Alexandrian ship - Acts 27:6-8

During their stopover in Myra, Julius found a ship from Alexandria, Egypt which was sailing to Italy. This was obviously a grain ship, as 27:38 mentions the throwing of wheat into the sea to lighten the ship. Rome was dependent upon Egypt for large quantities of grain, and this was one of the large ships used for transporting the grain across the sea. Because of the prevailing and sometimes contrary northwest winds, ancient ships could not sail directly across the open seas. Egyptian ships sailed north to Myra in Asia Minor and then west across the Mediterranean using islands for protection.

Paul and his traveling companions were put on board and the ship headed west toward Rome.

1. Slowly and with difficulty - 27:6-7

Setting sail from Myra meant heading into the wind, making the voyage slow and difficult. After many days, they passed Cnidus, a promontory of Asia Minor just northwest of the island of Rhodes. Because of the strong winds, the ship headed south around the island of Crete to seek protection.

2. To Fair Havens - 27:8

It was with continued difficulty that they finally came to the port of Fair Havens. The ship docked there and they waited for the wind to change.

II. Storm at Sea - Acts 27:9-38

They remained at Fair Havens for a considerable period of time waiting for good sailing weather. Luke notes that *the Fast was already over*. The Fast refers to the Jewish Day of Atonement, observed in late September or early October. By this time of year, the weather was unsettled, unpredictable, and sailing could be dangerous. By early November, all sea traffic ceased on the open seas. Ancient sailing ships were not sturdy enough to weather winter storms. Paul had already been shipwrecked twice (2 Corinthians 11:25), so he knew the dangers of the sea first hand.

A. Paul's warning - Acts 27:9-10

Just past Fair Havens, the coastline of Crete turns abruptly to the north and leaves departing ships exposed to the northwest winds. Considering the time of year and the bad weather, Paul knew it was risky to set sail. He warned the crew of the impending dangers which included loss of cargo, the ship, and their lives.

B. The centurion's decision - Acts 27:11-12

Julius, the centurion, representing the Roman state, was the highest ranking official on the ship and in

command. He ignored Paul and decided to follow the advice of the experts, the *helmsman* who was the pilot or captain of the ship and the owner who had a vested interest in the safety of both the ship and cargo. Their advice was backed by the majority of those on board because *the harbor was not suitable to winter in*. Fair Havens was an open bay, exposed to the winds. Phoenix, only about 40 miles to the west, was a larger and more protected harbor. The decision was made to try to reach the port of Phoenix and spend the winter there.

The majority ruled. This was not the first time the majority has proven to be wrong, nor the last. Do you ever side with the majority instead of standing up for what you know is right? Paul was not afraid to speak up for what he knew to be the right decision, even though he was not the expert or the one in charge.

C. Encountering Euroquilo - Acts 27:13-20

When a gentle south wind came up, it seemed that there would be smooth sailing to Phoenix.

1. Sailing close to Crete - 27:13

Phoenix was only a one day sail from Fair Havens. As a precaution, the sailors kept the ship as close as possible to the coastline of Crete as they sailed on the gentle south wind.

2. Unexpected headwind - 27:14-15

Suddenly the wind changed again. A hurricane force northeast wind, known as Euroclydon or Euroquilo, arose without warning. They were almost to Phoenix, but the ship was not built to head into violent winds. The crew was forced to give up control and let the ship be driven by the wind.

3. Fighting the storm - 27:16-19

The wind drove the ship out into the open sea and away from the protection of Crete. The storm was fierce and measures had to be taken to secure the ship.

a. Securing the lifeboat - 27:16

The lifeboat (*skiff*) was normally towed from the stern of the ship, but was now filled with water due to the severity of the storm. As the ship passed the island of Clauda, the winds were obstructed enough to allow the crew and passengers to haul in the lifeboat, although with much difficulty.

b. Undergirding the ship - 27:17a

Strong ropes were used to hold the planks of the ship tightly together to prevent the ship from breaking up in the heavy seas. The ropes may have been tied around

the hull and pulled taut, or they may have been tied from stem to stern, a procedure known as “frapping.”

c. Setting the storm sails - 27:17b

The crew was afraid that the ship would drift southward into the *Syrtis Sands*, dangerous quicksands off the coast of North Africa, so they took the precaution of pulling down part of the sail and leaving just enough to help steady the ship. They may also have lowered a floating anchor to steady the stern of the ship in the heavy waves.

d. Lightening the ship - 27:18-19

The storm had not let up by the next day, so the crew lightened the ship by throwing some of the cargo overboard. *Luke does not say that it was cargo that was jettisoned, but it cannot well have been anything else. Since the transport of grain was the purpose of the ship's voyage, on which the shipowner's livelihood depended, the sacrifice of even part of it stressed the desperateness of the situation* (The Book of Acts, F. F. Bruce).

On the third day, the crew was forced to take an even more desperate measure. They enlisted the help of the passengers (note the *we* in verse 19) to throw all the extra tackle overboard. The *tackle* may refer to the ship's ropes, riggings and spars, but more likely to the unneeded furniture and utensils.

3. Giving up hope - 27:20

The violent storm continued for *many* days, blocking all sight of the sun during the day and stars at night. Because the sailors depended upon the sun and stars for navigation, they now had no idea where they were. All hope of reaching safety was totally depleted.

D. Paul's encouraging words - Acts 27:21-26

No one had eaten for many days. It was probably difficult to cook with the storm raging all around. Also, many of the supplies may have been damaged or destroyed by the violent motion of the ship or the sea water. With people seasick and distressed, there was little appetite for food. In the midst of a seemingly hopeless situation, Paul spoke up to give hope, encouragement, and a message from God.

1. *Men, you should have listened to me* - 27:21

Here we see a glimpse of Paul's humanness. He could not resist an “I told you so.” He reminded those who had not followed his advice that if they had made the decision to winter in Fair Havens, they would not be in such a predicament.

2. *Take heart* - 27:22

Paul called everyone to *take heart*. Although the ship would be lost, all lives would be spared.

3. A message from God -27:23-25

How could Paul be so sure of what he said? Paul explained that he belonged to and served a mighty God. That very night an angel of God had appeared to him and told him not to be afraid because he would make it to Rome to appear before Caesar. Furthermore, the angel told him that *God has granted you all those who sail with you*. This statement implies that Paul had prayed for all those on the ship and that God had heard and was answering his prayer. Have you ever prayed for the impossible and seen God answer? God specializes in the impossible. Never hesitate to take any of your hopes and fears to Him!

Paul boldly stated, *I believe God*. Everyone on the ship could take heart because he was fully persuaded that God would do just what the angel had told him.

4. Looking ahead - 27:26

Paul's prediction was that the ship would be run aground on an island.

E. Drawing near land - Acts 27:27-38

After fourteen days of battling the storm and being tossed about in the Adrian Sea (see note below), a glimmer of hope arose.

(NOTE: The reference in many versions to the Adriatic Sea is incorrect. In Paul's day the central Mediterranean Sea was referred to as the Adrian Sea, and this is no doubt the area Luke had reference to.)

1. Sensing, sounding, and praying - 27:27-29

It was about midnight on the fourteenth night at sea when the sailors sensed land nearby. They probably noticed the running swell of the sea and the unmistakable sound of surf. They took soundings and found the ocean depth to be twenty fathoms. After going a little further, they repeated the soundings and found the depth to be fifteen fathoms. This confirmed their hope of land nearby. Since it was the middle of the night and they could not see the coast they were approaching, they dropped anchors to keep from running aground on a possibly rocky shoreline. Then they prayed for day to come. Some Bible versions use the word *wished* instead of *prayed*, but the Greek word that is used always implies prayer. Paul's words of encouragement concerning the promises from God seem to have struck a chord in the hearts of the crew. It certainly wouldn't

hurt to pray. The right thing to do is to pray and leave the results to God!

2. Sailors' attempt to escape - 27:30-32

The sailors were ready to abandon ship to save themselves. Under pretense of putting out anchors from the bow of the ship, they began to let down the lifeboat. Paul reported this to the centurion, telling him that the ship could not make it to shore without the full crew. The sailors must stay on the ship. The soldiers responded by cutting the ropes, leaving the ship without a lifeboat.

3. Need for nourishment - 27:33-37

Just before dawn, Paul spoke to all those on board and encouraged them to eat. Having eaten little or nothing for fourteen days, they needed food to strengthen them for the job of making it safely to shore when the sun came up. Again, Paul encouraged them that all would survive their ordeal. *Not a hair will fall from the head of any of you (27: 34).* God is in control of even the smallest details of life.

Paul set the example. He took some bread and thanked God, then broke off a piece and ate it. This encouraged everyone else to eat as well.

4. Preparing for landing - 27:38

After all had eaten and were feeling stronger, the crew further lightened the ship by throwing the remainder of the grain into the sea. This was important to insure that the ship take on as little water as possible and beach itself well up on the shore.

III. Shipwrecked but Safe - Acts 27:39-44

A. Sighting a beach - Acts 27:39-40

As the day dawned, a bay with a beach came into view. The sailors did not recognize the land, which has come to be known as St. Paul's Bay. The plan was to beach the ship, so the crew cut the anchors loose, released the rudder ropes, and hoisted the mainsail to the wind. The rudders were two large steering oars on each side of the ship. They had been brought up out of the water and tied securely to the ship during the storm but were now released to help steer the ship to shore.

B. Running the ship onto a sandbar - Acts 27:41

As they headed toward shore, the ship ran aground on a sandbar created by the ocean currents. It was a narrow strip of land projecting out from the mainland with deep water on either side - *a place where two seas met.* The forward part of the ship stuck in the muddy

bottom and would not move. The stern began to break apart due to the force of the pounding waves.

C. Planning to kill the prisoners - Acts 27:42-43a

The Roman soldiers were responsible for their prisoners and would be subject to strict discipline if any of them escaped. Rather than risk losing any of them, the soldiers planned to kill them all. However, Julius, the centurion, kept them from doing so because he wanted to spare Paul's life. He had shown that he was a kind and humane man earlier by allowing Paul to visit his friends in Sidon. Now that he had witnessed Paul's actions under pressure and the wisdom of his advice in a perilous situation, he must have been duly impressed. Surely he felt grateful to Paul, and may have even believed Paul to be under divine protection.

D. Escaping to land - Acts 27:43b-44

Julius ordered all those who could swim to jump overboard and get to land. The rest were to make their way to the shore on boards and broken pieces of the ship. All two hundred and seventy-six persons on board made it ashore safely. The angel's promise to Paul had been fulfilled. The ship and her cargo were lost, but every life had been saved! God is faithful.

Applications

1. By God's providence, Paul had made it through the first leg of his journey to Rome. Although the storm had raged for fourteen days, all the while Paul was safe in the hands of God. Although the Roman soldiers had wanted to kill all the prisoners, Paul was kept safe by the overruling hand of God. When you experience "storms" and dangers in your life, remember that your heavenly Father is sovereign over all. He will protect you and see you through. He will fulfill His perfect plan for your life as he did for Paul.

2. As the storm buffeted the ship in the midst of the sea, Paul remembered to pray. He prayed not only for himself but for all on board the ship. When you are going through trials, do you still remember to pray for others?

3. Paul's encouragement helped to save everyone on the ship. He was not afraid to speak up and confess his faith in God before two hundred and seventy three sailors, prisoners, and Roman soldiers. These were tough men who relied upon their own strength and fortitude to see them through difficult situations. Yet they took Paul's words to heart and did not belittle him and his faith. Who needs your godly words of faith, hope, and encouragement?