

Paul's Journey to Rome, Part 1

Scripture: Acts 27:1-26

Code: 1799

INTRODUCTION

A. The Practice of Seamanship

Acts 27 describes one of the three shipwrecks that the apostle Paul endured (2 Cor. 11:25). It is one of the most detailed portions in all Scripture. Historians and archaeologists have studied this passage for its valuable description of ancient seamanship. There's much to learn about how people conducted their work on the seas, particularly in times of crisis.

B. The Providence of God

Throughout this passage it's clear to see who was really in control of the events and elements. As easily as Jesus Christ could calm the winds and waves (Matt. 8:23-27), so God could stir them up for His own ends. And when it pleased Him to calm the seas to make Himself known, that He did.

C. The Personality of Paul

Paul, the dominant personality of this particular drama in Acts 27, experienced many trials in his life and this journey was no different. The true metal of a person shines forth in the fires of testing. Crises reveal character.

1. His labor

This particular journey was perhaps the most prolonged, intense, and unrelenting crisis Paul ever endured. He started off with the fatigue of his imprisonment and then faced storms, winds and waves, sword-bearing soldiers, and finally, poisonous snakes. He was imperiled in his journey from beginning to end.

2. His leadership

Nevertheless throughout the entire journey Paul was calm, courageous, and confident. He was ever and always a true leader. He started this trip as a prisoner, and yet ended up commanding everyone, including the captain, sailing master, and the Roman centurion. The characteristics of true spiritual

leadership are all exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul.

LESSON

I. THE PASSAGE

A. The Start (vv. 1-8)

Ever since the Holy Spirit planted the idea of going to Rome into Paul's mind, he never lost confidence in the fulfillment of that plan. He had been to Jerusalem to deliver contributions to the poor saints there (Acts 21:15; 1 Cor. 16:3), and now earnestly desired to go to Rome. However, he was imprisoned with the angry Jewish population keeping him under their thumbs for two years. At the end of that time he appealed to Caesar and his case was transferred to Rome.

1. The participants (v. 1a, 2b)

"When it was determined that we should sail ... Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us."

"We" in verse 1 and "us" in verse 2 is a return to the "we" of Acts 21:18, an indication that Luke--the writer of the book of Acts--had since rejoined Paul. Luke had most likely been living in Caesarea, where Paul was imprisoned, and had joined him along with Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.

a) Paul's traveling companions

Paul's trip to Rome was in the company of two of his dearest friends, which is remarkable considering it was unheard of for a prisoner to be allowed to have companions. There were two ways this allowance could have taken place: they would either have to take the position as slaves of Paul or get special permission from Festus, the governor before whom Paul appealed to Rome.

b) Festus' allowance

Festus, knowing the innocence of Paul, might have wanted to secure his good reputation with Rome by showing kindness to a man who would surely be set free. Either reason is a possible answer to why Paul's friends were allowed to accompany him to Rome.

A Mark of Brotherly Love

That Luke and Aristarchus were with Paul is an indication of their love for him. Luke and Aristarchus were not taking a cruise with some buddies to Honolulu. They were headed to Rome knowing that they awaited the same fate as Paul. The threat of losing life and limb didn't bother them because of their love for God and their affection for the apostle Paul.

A godly leader has people who not only follow him but also love him. The difference between spiritual leadership and all other kinds of leadership is the element of love. Luke and Aristarchus loved Paul to the point where they were willing to sacrifice their own lives for the sake of their ministry to him.

2. The prisoners (v. 1c)

"They delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band."

A group of prisoners--including the apostle Paul--had been quartered at Caesarea for some time and now were to be taken to Rome. Some were to be tried, others sentenced, and others executed.

a) The duties of centurions

All the prisoners were placed under the charge of Julius, "a centurion of Augustus' band." A centurion was the commander of a hundred men. "Augustus" was a title for the emperor of Rome. Augustus' band was a special cohort of men assigned to protect the emperor and carry out any special request he might have.

When the Roman government began to send its garrison of troops throughout the empire, they had men assigned to accompany the food rations. They were responsible for the safe transportation of the food to and from its destination. As time went on, those special couriers became sophisticated imperial agents responsible for spying and transporting political prisoners. Julius commanded one hundred of those men, although it is uncertain exactly how many of them accompanied Paul on the ship. It is known that when the men later changed ships there was a total of two-hundred and seventy-six people (v. 37).

b) The integrity of centurions

The Romans were not adept at picking governors because of all the political maneuvering but were usually very good at picking leaders for their armies. Several passages in Scripture show that centurions tended to be men of integrity (e.g., Luke 7:1-10; Acts 10:1-2; 22:25-26).

3. The port (v. 2a)

"Entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia.

Adramyttium was the port where their ship was registered. Since it was a coastal vessel, the ship hugged the coastline and rarely ventured out into the open sea. The ship was on its way back to Adramyttium.

There were several kinds of ships in those days. There were those that ventured into the open sea and others that sailed from coast to coast and from one port to the next. Their intention was to go from port to port, hoping to connect with a ship that was headed for Rome. Since there were no passenger ships, they had to rely on transport ships headed back to Rome.

4. The permission (v. 3)

"The next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously treated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself."

Since Paul was a prisoner it's not likely that he and Julius were friends. The Romans had very strict rules concerning their prisoners. If a Roman soldier lost a prisoner, he served the prisoner's sentence himself--regardless of the circumstances. Commander Julius must have had a very good reason to allow Paul the liberty to go ashore and meet with his friends. It is likely that Governor Festus informed Julius of Paul's innocence and assured him that Paul would in no way jeopardize his command.

a) The church at Sidon

Apparently there was a group of believers in Sidon. That they were called "friends" is not unusual. Jesus said, "I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends" (John 15:15). It was a common term used by the early church to designate other Christians.

The church at Sidon apparently came about from the repercussions of the persecution of Stephen. When Stephen was martyred, the church was scattered throughout the area of Judea and Samaria, including the areas of Sidon and Tyre (Acts 8:1; 11:19). Paul had visited that church on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4-14) and now was visiting it again on the way from Jerusalem.

b) The refreshment of Paul

What did Paul do when he arrived at Sidon? No doubt he enjoyed the fellowship of the church and did some teaching and ministering to them simply because that was his nature. However the predominant reason Paul went was to "to refresh himself." The Greek word translated "refresh"

(epimel[ma]eias) is a medical term, which indicates that Paul was sick. It isn't any wonder with all that he endured, having been a prisoner for two years. He was probably not able to get the diet, rest, and care he needed on the ship, so Julius allowed him to be ministered by the believers in Sidon.

5. The problems (v. 4)

"When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary."

a) The winds

The normal route would not have been to go around Cyprus but because the wind was such a problem they had to sail very close to the coast. Since this was a coasting vessel, it wouldn't dare venture into the open sea with any hint of wind problems. By traveling close by the coast, they could take advantage of the land and winds breaking at the shore.

b) The weather

This journey probably took place in the late summer months. Since the winds were westerly in the summer, the ship could easily tack against the winds and make good progress toward Rome. But mid August was getting near the treacherous season, which ran from September 14 through November 11 according to Bible scholar F.F. Bruce (Commentary on the Book of Acts [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], p. 506). No one dared cross the Mediterranean then. The winds were strong and the sea was very rough at that time, so virtually all shipping ceased during that period.

6. The pilgrimage (vv. 5-6)

a) The ship's origin (v. 5)

"When we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia."

Paul knew that area very well because he had taken three missionary journeys to those areas and was born and raised in the area surrounding Cilicia. The city of Myra was actually two miles inland from the harbor but was known as the harbor town itself. It was the southernmost region of Asia Minor and was a chief port for Egyptian vessels that were passing through the area.

Egypt was the granary of the Roman Empire. The imperial government had a fleet of grain ships that carried grain to the various places it was needed. When the ships came from Alexandria--the main port of Egypt--one of the stops they made was to dispense grain needed in the area of Asia Minor at the city port of Myra. They often stopped there to harbor in difficult weather until they could proceed further west to Italy.

b) The centurion's opportunity (v. 6)

"There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us on board."

As they arrived in Myra, there happened to be a grain ship headed back to Rome. The transfer was made and the ship now had a total of 276 people, a good percentage consisting of Paul and the other prisoners. Historians have indicated that it would have taken approximately nine days to travel from Sidon to Myra. In tacking back and forth against the coast for nine days, Myra would have been a welcomed site. It was a popular harbor and Paul would have been glad to get there. They were inching ever so closely in their journey to Rome.

7. The slow progress (vv. 7-8)

a) The danger (v. 7)

"When we had sailed slowly many days, and scarcely were come off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us, we sailed under the lee of Crete, off Salmone."

They left Myra and very slowly sailed west, between Rhodes and the mainland of Asia Minor, proceeding to Cnidus. When they had passed Cnidus, they immediately left the shelter of land. The gentle land winds ceased which provided protection, and the open sea winds became very strong as they ventured immediately into it. As a result, they were unable to harbor at Cnidus. They ran directly into the prevailing wind and head waters, so the only thing they could do was try to get the ship under Crete to hide from the wind.

Roman transportation ships were very heavy and would have displaced a tremendous amount of water. And since they were grain ships, they would be loaded down. They had a single mast with a large, square sail and the seamen usually preferred to sail with the one sail behind the wind. But when the wind was gusting heavily, the grain ships were hard to handle. During this journey, the wind prevented them from going to either of Cnidus's two harbors. Instead, they had to sail around the treacherous cape at Salmone to reach the shelter of the back side of Crete. Once they got around the cape, they would be secured from the treacherous northwesterly wind.

b) The difficulty (v. 8)

"And passing it with difficulty, came unto a place which is called Fair Havens, near to which was the city of Lasea."

They did not have an easy time going around Cape Salmone, which was on the eastern tip of Crete, because Crete is a 140-mile-long island. They finally arrived at a place called Fair Havens (Gk. kalos

lime[ma]jonas), near the city of Lasea.

B. The Stay (vv. 9-12)

1. Paul's concern about the voyage (vv. 9-10)

The men aboard ship were taking on supplies and anxious to go to Rome before winter came. If they didn't get to Rome before winter set in, the ship owner would have to take care of the entire crew for the three to four months of winter. To be stuck in Fair Havens would have been very undesirable because it was exposed to the winds of the open sea (v. 12).

The captain knew that to make money on the cargo he was carrying, it had to reach its destination as soon as possible. He didn't want to spend the entire winter paying his crew for their idleness. Therefore he was willing to gamble to see if they could make it to Rome.

a) The weather (v. 9a)

"When much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous."

It is not known how much time was spent in Fair Havens, but it must have been at least a month. If they arrived sometime in mid-August it would now be about mid-September. That period of time would have been right at the beginning of the treacherous season running from September 14 through November 11.

b) The timing (v. 9b)

"Because, the fast was already passed."

"The fast" is a reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement, which is commonly called "Yom Kippur." It occurs on the tenth day of Tishri, which is the seventh month in the Jewish calendar. That would put their journey at the end of September or the beginning of October. In [sc] A.D. 59, one of the dates proposed for Festus' short term of office, Yom Kippur occurred on October 5th, and if the journey was occurring after then, that would be well into the dangerous season for sailing. Any attempt would have been a gamble.

c) The warning (vv. 9c-10)

"Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with injury and much damage, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our lives."

Paul was not a sailor but had apparently been in other shipwrecks before (cf. 2 Cor. 11:25) and didn't want to go through another. He was attempting to give them some practical advice so a shipwreck wouldn't occur. He didn't say they were all going to die, but he did say it would be disastrous. One of the qualities of a true spiritual leader is that he is a very practical man.

2. The centurion's choice to go on (vv. 11-12)

a) The men in charge (v. 11)

"Nevertheless, the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul."

The words "master" and "owner" are very difficult words to translate from the Greek text because they do not occur often in the New Testament. The best translation of "master" seems to be "sailing master" or "pilot." He was responsible for navigating the ship. "Owner" should be translated "captain." In some cases the captain was also the owner if it was a private vessel, but since this was an imperial vessel, he would simply be the captain.

b) The majority who chose (v. 12)

"Because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the greater part advised to depart from there also, if by any means they might attain to Phoenicia [Phoenix], and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the southwest and northwest."

The centurion agreed with the pilot and captain as did the majority of those on the ship. It is difficult to blame them because the pilot and captain were experts when it came to weather and navigation. Their main reason for wanting to continue on to Rome was that Fair Havens was not a desirable place to stay. Historians record that the only place in the winter season that was comfortable was the port of Phoenix, which was about forty miles from Fair Havens. It was located between the southwest and northwest side of the island.

C. The Storm (vv. 13-26)

1. The deceptive breezes (v. 13)

"When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing from there, they sailed close by Crete."

It must have been a very deceptive thing for the crew when the wind began to blow softly. They assumed that the winds would simply carry them right on course, and if not, they would at least be able to winter at Phoenix.

2. The destructive tempest (v. 14)

"But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon."

Euroclydon, or Euraquilo as it is known in the textual margin, was a sailor's term for a strong northeasterly wind. It came from two words--one Greek and one Latin. The Greek word euros refers to an east wind, and the Latin word aquilo literally refers to a north wind. This northeast wind would come down from Asia Minor and was so fierce that it was of hurricane or typhoon proportions. They were bobbing up and down, being tumbled and beaten by the wind. The gentle south wind that was carrying them along was replaced by a treacherous, deadly northeastern wind. The Euroclydon was a great fear among all who sailed the Mediterranean because it tended to send ships to an ocean graveyard off the coast of North Africa. Archaeologists have discovered the remains of many sunken ships there.

3. The driven ship (v. 15-17)

a) Looking for protection (vv. 15-16a)

"When the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under the lee of a certain island which is called Cauda."

The Euroclydon didn't capsize the ship but began to drive it south because the wind was blowing from the Northeast. They started at Fair Havens and twenty-three miles later were near a small island called Cauda. They tried with great effort to get behind the island to gain some protection from the tempestuous winds.

b) Preparing the ship (vv. 16b-17)

(1) They secured the lifeboat (v. 16b)

"We had much work to secure the boat."

Every sailing vessel had a dinghy. It was small enough that when the vessel was harbored, it could be used as transportation to go ashore. It could also be used as a lifeboat in case the ship was destroyed. Normally the dinghy was attached to the stern of the ship by a rope and simply pulled along. But if any stormy weather occurred, the crew would have to secure the lifeboat or it would fill with water, drag, and eventually snap the rope. With great difficulty everyone worked to secure the lifeboat.

(2) They undergirded the ship (v. 17a)

"When they had hoisted it [the lifeboat], they used helps, undergirding the ship."

In those days they couldn't bolt the planks to the girders because they didn't have bolts. The only way they could secure the ship was to tie or glue it. In a single-masted vessel there was no distribution of stress, as opposed to a multi-sail vessel, where the stress is distributed over the entire hull. The ship would simply begin to split in half. They would attempt to wrap cables tightly around the ship to keep it secured during the storm, a procedure called "frapping" in a mariner's dictionary (Albert Barnes, Notes on the New Testament: Acts [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1975], p. 364).

(3) They struck the sail (v. 17b)

"Fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, struck sail, and so were driven."

The Greek word translated "quicksand" is *surtes* and refers to the reef or sandbar that was so treacherous to ships in that area. Albert Barnes tells us "there were two celebrated *syrtes*, or quicksands, on the coast of Africa, called the greater and lesser. They were vast beds of sand driven up by the sea, and constantly shifting their position, so that it could not be known certainly where the danger was" (p. 354).

It wouldn't have done any good for the crew to keep up the main sail because the ship would have torn apart and brought about their demise. Therefore they dropped the sail and allowed themselves to be driven by the waves and the wind. With the sail down, the storm swirling around them from all sides, and their inability to navigate, God caused them to sail on a direct course to the harbor of Malta.

4. The desperate measures (vv. 18-20)

a) Lightening the load (v. 18)

"We being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship."

The next day they jettisoned part of the cargo (cf. Jonah 1:5). They kept some for ballast, some for their own food and, hopefully, some for their eventual arrival in Rome.

b) Casting the tackle (v. 19)

"The third day we cast out with our own hands the tackle of the ship."

Verse 18 says "they" lightened the ship whereas verse 19 says, "we cast out with our own hands the tackle of the ship." The situation became so desperate that the entire group--crew and prisoners--began throwing overboard the excess tackle of the ship, such as unnecessary sails, cables, furniture, and baggage. They had been only three days off the coast of Fair Havens and already they had to jettison their cargo and tackle.

c) Abandoning hope (v. 20)

"When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away."

The men on the ship had lost all hope. They had nothing and no one to turn to. But that is exactly what God wanted.

5. The divine comfort (vv. 21-26)

a) The lack of food (v. 21)

"But after being long without food."

Because of seasickness and contamination of the food by the salt water, no one had eaten in a long time. Since they had jettisoned the cargo, they had a limited supply of food. And they were much too busy to eat since their lives were in constant danger.

b) The failure to listen (v. 21b)

"Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss."

Paul could not resist an "I told you so" response toward the captain and crew. It reminded them that what he said came to pass, thus establishing his credibility as God's representative.

c) The preservation of life (v. 22)

"Now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but only of the ship."

"Be of good cheer" must have seemed like a ridiculous statement considering the circumstances. The ship was teetering back and forth, the waves were smashing the top of the mast, and visibility was almost impossible. But Paul gave a reason for his statement: "There shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but only of the ship." The crew was probably saying, "Terrific! And when that happens,

we'll just walk on the water, right?" Why would they believe Paul? Maybe because of their present situation. God set up Paul's credibility and now the foundation was established for the crew to believe him in the future.

d) The trustworthiness of God (vv. 23-26)

"There stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar; and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. However, we must be cast upon a certain island."

Paul made sure that God was the focus of the situation. God introduced Himself to these men by getting them into a desperate position. And because they sensed imminent death, they were looking for God. They knew only God could help them in this situation.

By communicating the vision he had of the angel, Paul was putting himself out on a limb: if what he said didn't come true, his vision wasn't from God. Do you realize the likelihood of landing on the only island around, losing the ship and cargo, and yet everyone's life being saved? The mathematical probability of that occurring would be staggering. It would not be surprising, however, if God was engineering every detail to fit His plan. And He was!

How God's People Protect Society

Acts 27:24 reminds us that God's people--in the midst of an ungodly society--actually act as a protection to the community. That principle is very clear in Scripture.

1. Genesis 18:32--Abraham said, "Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Suppose ten shall be found there [Sodom]. And he [God] said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake." God was prepared to spare the entire city based on the righteous people who lived in it. Unfortunately there weren't ten righteous people living in the city. The principle, however, still holds true. Even the unrighteous are protected based on the grace of God but only for the benefit of the righteous.

2. Genesis 30:27--Laban told Jacob, "I pray thee, if I have found favor in thine eyes, tarry; for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake." Laban recognized the blessing of God when Jacob was present.

3. Genesis 39:5--"From the time that he [Potiphar] had made him [Joseph] overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field."

The world doesn't know how fortunate it is to have godly people in their midst. The men on board the ship carrying the apostle Paul didn't know how fortunate they were to have him present.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Why have archaeologists and historians been interested in Acts 27?
2. What does Acts 27 tell us about God's providence?
3. The true metal of a person shines forth in the _____ of _____ .
4. To whom does the "we" in Acts 27:1 refer?
5. Describe two theories that would have allowed Paul to have companions on his journey to Rome.
6. Describe the centurion's duty and the origin of Augustus' band.
7. Why was Paul's liberty to leave the ship such an usual occurrence?
8. What was the origin of the church at Sidon? Why did Paul go there?
9. When was the treacherous season on the open seas?
10. What link did Egypt have with the Roman Empire?
11. Why was Fair Havens not a good place to stay for the winter (Acts 27:12)?
12. What was the captain's motive for wanting to leave Fair Havens?
13. What fast does Acts 27:9 refer to?
14. One of the qualities of a true spiritual leader is that he is a very _____ man.
15. Who were the men in charge of the ship carrying Paul (Acts 27:11)?
16. What was the Euroclydon?
17. What did the crew and passengers struggle to do during the storm (Acts 27:18-19)?

18. Why did men on the ship give up hope (v. 20)?
19. Why did Paul tell told the crew they should have listened to him?
20. What principle can be seen in the phrase, "God hath given thee all them that sail with thee" (Acts 27:24)? Support your answer with Scripture.

Pondering the Principles

1. One of the things we see is that God was in complete control of all that happened to the apostle Paul. Nothing happened with the events or elements that was outside the sovereign control of God. Do you believe that every event in your life is under His control? Study the following verses and thank God for His sovereignty: Psalm 103:19; Daniel 4:24-25, 34-35; Acts 17:24-28.
2. Luke and Aristarchus were committed to the apostle Paul because he was committed to God. They were headed for Rome knowing that they awaited the same fate as Paul. Because of their love for God and their affection for Paul, the threat of losing their lives was inconsequential. Are you willing to love God regardless of the circumstances? How would you have responded if you were Joseph in Genesis 37? After reading the following chapters about Joseph's life in slavery, read Genesis 45:5-8 and ask God to give you the same kind of attitude in your present circumstances.

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