Text: Acts 27:1-28:16
Title: Paul's Journey to Rome
Truth: God protected Paul on his journey to Rome.
Date/Location: Wednesdays 5/21 & 28/2014; 6/4 & 11/2014; 5/21 & 28/ and 6/4/2025

Introduction

"We" means Luke is back traveling with Paul, something that was not the case since around 21:18 in Jerusalem. Luke likely "tailed" Paul from Jerusalem to Caesarea to help Paul, but was not a prisoner with him.

I. Part 1: Caesarea to Fair Havens, 27:1-8

The straight-line length of the entire journey was nearly 1,400 miles. Verses 1-8 cover the first half of the distance, 675 miles from Caesarea to the southeast part of Crete.

A. Departing Caesarea for Sidon, 27:1-2

1. Festus delivered Paul to a centurion named Julius of the Augustan Regiment (palace guard). He apparently served as an escort for prisoners or VIPs.

2. They found a ship from Adramyttium, northwest modern Turkey near Troas. The centurion probably use a lot of different ships, but this one was convenient and available at the time.

3. Their intent was to sail along the Asian coastline. This was safer than going out in the open sea, particularly at this time of year. Additionally, it would permit them to stop frequently for supplies or various pick-ups and drop-offs.

4. Aristarchus also traveled with Paul and Luke. He was of Macedonian descent from Thessalonica. He appears with Paul a number of other places in Scripture (Acts 19:29, 20:4; Col. 4:10, Philemon 24). He had traveled with Paul quite a long time, suffered persecution with Paul, was a fellow-prisoner with Paul, and was counted as a valued co-worker in the ministry.

5. Given Paul's ministry pattern, it is certain that while on this boat trip Paul would share the message of the Messiah to the people on board. This may have been particularly fruitful when they later on thought they were going to die at any moment. He would tell them that they were in darkness and under the sway of Satan, but that they could turn to God and be brought into the light of life if they believed in

Jesus Christ who gave Himself for them and rose again from the dead (Acts 26:18, 23).

Figure 1 https://acts27blog.wordpress.com

B. From Sidon to Myra, 27:3-5

1. Sidon is mentioned in Acts 12:20, north along the coast from Caesarea in modern Lebanon. This was not very far, but it was only a portion of a day's travel.

2. The kind centurion let Paul have liberty. He was a white-collar criminal…rather, non-criminal.

3. They sailed "behind" Cyprus (under its shelter) to be protected from the winds that came off the open sea. This side of the island is called the "lee" of the island, where the land acts as a shelter from wind or other adverse weather.

4. Then they sailed westerly off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, and came to Myra in Lycia (a larger region including Myra).

C. From Myra to Cnidus, 27:6-7

1. The centurion then found a Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was on its way to Italy. It is interesting that the centurion did not have military boats at his disposal. It was more of an extemporaneous operation.

2. The sailing was difficult because of the lack of wind so it took days to cover a short distance to Cnidus. What a contrast to the later part of the journey!

D. Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea on the island of Crete, 27:8

1. Then further difficulty lined the way to Fair Havens as they sailed under the protection of Crete (the lee again), off the coast of Salmone.

2. We should comment here about the difficulty of the journey. Scripture indicates in several ways that this was not an easy trip. For example: contrary winds (4); slowly (v. 7); with difficulty…the wind not permitting us (v. 7); difficulty (v. 8); sailing was dangerous (v. 9).

3. Why does the Bible emphasize this? Is it because it was not God's will for Paul to go to Rome? That cannot be, for we know that God wanted Paul to go there (Acts 23:11). Perhaps it was a signal they should stop sailing for a little while and take stock of the situation. The challenges of sailing were a good providence from God indicating to stop for the season and pick up the journey when the weather was more favorable. In other words, perhaps it was a mercy from the Lord to prevent them from getting into the storm that they subsequently experienced.

4. Reading the story could give the impression that God sends the storm clouds over the journey to show His displeasure at the Roman authorities for doing this to His servant. But the text does not say this, nor much else as to why the journey was so hard. Maybe it just was that way as matter of course in that season.

E. **Spiritual lesson**: Often, the normal course of events in life is difficult or is attended by many difficulties. Do not be surprised. It does not necessarily mean that God does not want you on this course. The timing may be a little bit off, or it may just be that these difficulties are part of the way God has planned for you to help you trust Him.

II. Part 2: The Storm, 27:9-44

A. But they pressed forward. The shows man's stubbornness to continue despite clear natural indications to the contrary. Perhaps they were impatient; perhaps there were other notable prisoners that had to make it to Rome. If it were just Paul, there would be no reason to rush it as he was not guilty anyway!

B. Paul's warning not heeded, 27:9-12.

1. “Much time had been spent” sums up the prior 8 verses of slow sailing. The “fast” is the Day of Atonement in late September or early October. Sailing was dangerous from September to November, so it was already well into the dangerous sailing time. After that, it was apparently impossible until February. Paul’s knowledge of this led him to advise them to wait for better weather. He “perceived” that the voyage would end badly. I tend to think that an apostle’s “perception” is close to a prophecy, not a “bad feeling” or “premonition” although I will grant that it did not take much foresight to figure out that the outcome could be bad. A side benefit of this delay was that he would have four to five months in Crete to minister the gospel.

2. The hard-headed ship owner and the captain convinced the centurion that they should move the ship to a better harbor in Crete called Phoenix. That would be more suitable “to winter in” meaning to stay put for the winter while sailing was not feasible. Perhaps there was an issue of availability of supplies or maybe of better shelter from the weather. In their favor, at least they were willing to winter over on Crete somewhere instead of trying to finish the entire journey to Rome immediately.

C. The text now records their long journey through the terrible storm, 13-44. The apostles experienced a stormy boat ride as well (Matthew 8:23-27) but Jesus calmed the waves. In the case of Paul, the Lord did not provide a miraculous deliverance.

D. They were tricked by a nice soft wind so they put out to sail and stayed close by the island of Crete. But that was just the calm before the storm. The Euroclydon or Euraquilon was an “east-northeast-wind” that was a devastating type of storm and was the fear of sailors on the Mediterranean Sea. Think of it as a tropical storm, cyclone, or even hurricane. It went on for a couple of weeks, although it may not have been a cyclone in the technical sense of the term. I provide some documentation below that agrees with the Biblical account.

1. Mediterranean tropical cyclones are well-documented. Mediterranean hurricanes are sometimes abbreviated to “medicanes.” See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_tropical_cyclone. These generally last from 12 hours to 5 days and have windspeeds up to 90 miles per hour. Hurricanes have been known to last for up to 31 days, generally for 2 to 4 weeks from end to end of their life cycle. Medicane Ianos in September 17-18, 2020 reached Category 2 hurricane strength!

2. From https://www.britannica.com/science/gregale, gregale, also called **euroclydon**, or **euraquilo**, a "strong and cold wind that blows from the northeast in the western and central Mediterranean region, mainly in winter. Most pronounced on the island of Malta, the gregale sometimes approaches hurricane force and endangers shipping there; in 1555 it is reported to have caused waves that drowned 600 persons in the city of Valletta. A gregale that lasts four or five days is usually the result of a flow of air from central or southern Europe toward Libya. One that lasts only one or two days is caused by the passage of a low-pressure centre over the southern Mediterranean."

E. The crew and passengers had to take extreme measures to survive, such as throwing many things overboard.

1. The text spares us the details of the fear and crying and lack of sleep, and undoubtedly of violent seasickness that plagued at least some passengers (even people normally OK on a ship can become seasick in such extreme conditions). People were not eating perhaps because of sickness, but probably more likely because the journey was expected to be quite short, but ended up being many days.

2. We are not told until verse 37, but this was a very large ship, with 276 people on it. There were a lot of lives at stake.

3. By verse 20, Luke reports that just about everyone had lost hope that they would survive the ordeal.

F. Paul's first encouraging speech to the crew and passengers, 27:21-26. Paul gave them a big "I told you so" but then revealed an angelic message that they would live and only suffer the accident of running aground on an island, which did happen. What a relief!

1. **Spiritual lesson:** Do not ignore God's revelation. In other words, do not ignore the Bible. Do not ignore what the pastor tells you from the Bible. If you get Christian advice or teaching from someone, and then you live counter to that teaching or advice, what should you expect? Even if it is just wise advice in the mundane nor natural realm, why should you ignore it?

2. Despite the fact that the owner of the ship and the soldier did not listen, God was still gracious to them on account of Paul and the other "innocent" lives on board.

3. **Spiritual lesson**: *Sometimes* when we make dumb choices, God rescues us from the consequences, although there is often a loss associated with it—like cargo and the ship. At least no lives were lost.

This is not quite a miracle, but it is close. This is no recommendation for ignoring what an apostle or pastor (for example) says.

4. God gave special revelation to Paul that he would indeed make it to Rome (23:11, again here in 27:24). This was an important journey, and God graciously decided to save everyone's lives along with Paul's. It is not promised that every time a believer is in a group with unbelievers that those unbelievers will be rescued or fare better just because of the presence of the believer—but they might.

G. About to run aground, 27:27-32.

1. They were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, what we today might call the Ionian Sea.[1] Two weeks into a trip that should have been a couple of days, they began to take measurements and found that they were coming into shallower water. When they perceived they were close to land and might run aground, they dropped anchors. The sailors began to abandon ship, but Paul's word prevailed and the skiff was dumped to avoid that temptation.

2. Someone had learned the lesson that Paul knew what he was talking about, that with the authority of special revelation he was able to tell them what was going to happen in the future. At least the centurion "got it." In Paul's message from God, he revealed that all of the people were going to be "saved" = rescued.

3. Note that the soldiers were not faithful, for they planned to kill all the prisoners to prevent their escape.

4. **Spiritual lesson**: A leader can have enormous influence over those underneath his authority, even if he is not formally in charge. Paul was a prisoner, but had a huge influence. We should use that for good if we have it. A spiritual authority like Paul did not have "authority" like the centurion, but he had a voice and an influence and used it for good.

H. Paul's second encouragement to the crew and passengers, 27:33-38.

1. Luke mentions fasting in v. 21. They may not have had the provisions to outlast the storm, particularly after throwing a lot of stuff overboard. And perhaps they were fasting and praying to their various

[1] The Adriatic is between Italy and the Balkan peninsula; the Ionian Sea is south of it, with Greece on the east side of it. The Aegean Sea is between Greece and Turkey.

pagan gods for help. But they would need some energy to swim to shore, so Paul reiterates that they should take food for strength.

2. Paul led by words, telling them to take food and take courage that they would survive—because they would. Then he led by example and gave thanks in prayer to God and ate some bread. The idea was that they should follow his example. Paul counted on God's promise so much that he prayed in thanks for it before it came to pass! He counted on it so much that he could eat amid a seemingly hopeless situation. Paul was a human being just like the rest of the people on the boat, but he had a relationship with God that gave him peace amid a bad situation.

3. **Spiritual lesson**: Can you give thanks "in all things" like Paul does here?

4. This greatly encouraged the people. In English the words sounds like adding courage to someone who is fearful, but in Greek it means being in good spirits or cheerful. They had been depressed to the max in recent days, but now they were generally in better spirits because they knew they would survive.

5. After they had eaten, and knowing they were close to land, they got rid of the rest of the food stuff on the ship, primarily the wheat. I take it that they believed this would increase their chances of survival because it would make the ship more buoyant and be able to get closer to land before running aground.

6. **Spiritual lesson**: Sometimes God does ordain rescue from disaster, and sometimes he does not ordain safe passage or rescue from the midst of a disastrous situation. We are called to trust in Him in any outcome—good or bad—and also to trust Him in the uncertainty leading up to the outcome.

I. Shipwreck on the island, 27:39-44.

1. Unfortunately, disaster strikes again when the plan to sail directly into the bay is foiled by a sandbar, a hidden outcropping of land just under the surface of the water. They had committed themselves by leaving the anchors behind in the sea. "Where two seas met" could refer to where two typical sea currents deposited their sand around the island and caused a sandbar.

2. It is quite notable that there were still lots of waves, enough to break the ship into pieces. This was still not a time to take out your sailboat because it was very late in the season and thus dangerous.

3. The good centurion helps Paul again by keeping the soldiers from their plan to kill the prisoners (v. 42-43). If any escaped, that could be fatal for the soldiers. Wisely, the centurion thinks something like this: after this disastrous journey, there is no call for anyone's life to be snuffed out, certainly not Paul who helped us.

4. 276 people helped each other to make it, with the good swimmers leading the way. Others had to use boards of wood as flotation devices. No one had life jackets. Can you imagine if you are unable to swim and are on that ship for many days, thinking the ship will sink, and you cannot swim, so you might die by drowning? Even if you can swim, that would ultimately be your demise on the open sea if you were there long enough. But everyone made it safely to land, thanks to the Lord.

J. This trip so far has been a mixture of normal means (lightening the ship), revelation through a vision to the apostle, and a smiling providence.

Spiritual lesson: Our lives are like that—a lot of "normal" stuff combined with divine guidance from the Bible and hopefully a smiling providence most of the way. Let us ask God for wisdom to put all the pieces together so we can live a life that is honoring to God even amid adversity.

III. Part 3: Malta to Rome, 28:1-10

A. On Malta, 28:1-10.

1. We learn that the weather was great for a duck, perhaps…rainy and cold. Those who lived on the island showed kindness to the shipwrecked people by helping them with a fire to warm them and probably for cooking food as well. This was no small act of hospitality. Gentlemen, imagine the response after telling your wife, "Honey, I just invited over 276 people for dinner!!!"

2. But another tragedy strikes as Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake (v. 3-6). This seems to the natives to be fate or justice of the gods. They figured that Paul should have died already, thus why the snake got him since the sea did not. We know better from the account here given by Luke. I take it that Paul was miraculously protected from the snake's venom. We need not weary ourselves searching for a naturalistic explanation; whatever the case, God protected Paul miraculously or providentially because Paul *had* to get to Rome.

   Instead of dying, Paul's survival served to elevate Paul's status among his observers. After he did not keel over or die, unfortunately the

people drew the wrong conclusion, thinking that he was a god of some sort. These folks were evidently very superstitious and pagan. They had no natural explanation for what happened, so we can be a little generous toward their unbelief at this point in time. They did not know the true God yet.

3. A Roman official on the island was named Publius (v. 7-8). His father was sick with fever and dysentery, so Paul prayed, laid hands on him, and healed him. This is definitely miraculous. God permitted Paul to use his apostolic gift of healing to authenticate and extend the ministry of the gospel in that place as well. He gave similar aid to many people on the island (v. 9). Paul now has strong credibility among the people.

4. The Maltese people honored the shipwreck survivors in several different ways and gave them provisions for the journey. That kind of generosity is remarkable. Maybe some were now Christians, but mabe many were not. Still, they were generous. The way God has created people makes them this way in some cases.

B. Syracuse and Rhegium, 28:11-12. It was three months of waiting before traveling was safe again and before arrangements could be made. The trip had started late September or early October and was over two weeks in duration, perhaps three to four weeks. This would put them at the end of October or early November. Three months later would be early February which is when sailing began to be feasible again.

The group departed on a ship with the Alexandrian flag which had wintered on Malta (their previous Alexandrian ship was now wrecked, 27:6). The ship was marked with Castor and Pollux, supposedly the twin sons of the Roman god Zeus. These mythological figures are demigods and are associated with the two brightest stars in the constellation Gemini. They were thought to be the patrons of sailors, athletes, and travelers, so people would invoke them for safe travel. We only pray to God for safe travel.

But sometimes, we are in situations where there are idolatrous connections. This does not put Paul into a sinful state. The decorations on that boat are just that. They are not real gods, or demigods. Paul is not worshipping those things. And in our lives, there will be times when we have to be “close” to idolatrous things. We might have to work somewhere where there are signs or statues or other things that we would not have in our home. We can shine as bright lights there just as well as anywhere else. In fact, if all we do is shine inside the four walls of

our home, that accomplishes only very limited results with our family, but not even that is guaranteed! To shine brightly out in the idolatrous world, we need to know what we believe and why we believe it.

The travelers stayed three days at Syracuse on the island of Sicily. Paul may have started a church there, according to tradition. This is not the Bible; we can imagine that tradition might exaggerate his accomplishments.

Note that Luke is with them because this is one of the "we" sections of his writing.

Rhegium is at the bottom of the boot of Italy.

Figure 2 https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/apostle-paul-all-cities-visited-large-map.html

C. Puteoli, 28:13b-14. Wind from the south blew them north up the coast of Italy toward their final destination. They stayed with Christians there for seven days. Luke was with them.

D. The next stop were places called Appii Forum and Three Inns, 28:15. The presence of other Christian brothers in the midst of a journey of this sort was an encouragement and leads to more giving of thanks. Notice before how Paul's words encouraged the people on the ship. Now, the presence of other believers is encouraging him! How we need mutual encouragement. I do not believe that it is weak to believe that. In fact,

you may have found, like I have, that it is plainly true that when you are down-hearted, spending time with other believers is a real boost. Paul was reminded that he was serving people like this, helping them throughout the entire Roman empire.

E. **Spiritual lesson**: Your very presence is of incalculable value. Go sit with someone in the hospital or shut-in at home and see what I mean. Come to church—and you do not even know who you encourage when they see you, or you talk to them, or you minister in the church somehow for them. It is regrettably true that many people are so self-absorbed that they do not realize the encouragement that is available for them and from them. Others do notice, especially spiritually sensitive people and those who are going through some kind of trial (like being a prisoner!).

F. Rome, 28:16. Finally, after months of travel, the party arrives at Rome. It is bad enough having to travel by air across the planet and take 24 or 36 hours to get to your destination. Imagine if it took four or five months!

While there, Paul was able to live in a place by himself along with a soldier who guarded him 24x7. This provided some flexibility that he would not have to be in a jailhouse with many other prisoners. Still, having to be with the solder was restrictive.

IV. Why This Journey Detailed in the Bible?

A. Why is it that God put in all these details about a bad journey and a storm and all the different cities?

B. For one, it gives exciting color to the real history that Luke records in Acts. I suppose someone could say it is good fiction, but it does not have the ring of fiction to it. The level of detail is excellent. I wonder if the storm in chapter 27 can be correlated to other mentions in history. Ancient churches in those stop-over points were due in part to Paul's visit there either at that time or possibly just because of the historical impact that Paul left everywhere he went.

C. More importantly, it shows Paul's slow but persistent movement toward Rome where an important extension of his mission was to take place. His case was critical for Christianity moving forward, something like a precedent-setting case before our own Supreme Court would be. It shows God's sovereignty over Roman government and God's control over nature in getting Paul to his destination. In Philippians we learn that Paul's circumstance actually turned out for the advancement of the gospel, so prison was not entirely a bad thing (Phil. 1:12).

D. We are encouraged by the passage, and by Paul's example in it, to trust God in the midst of whatever path our journey takes us. God worked in a mostly indirect way to preserve Paul. There was special divine intervention in the vision, for instance, but there were many normal means employed, like lightening the ship and tying the cables under the ship, and sounding for land, and using the anchors, and so forth. We have to pray and we have to do what we can. We trust God to watch over the outcome and work as wisdom indicates.

E. Like Paul's encouragement of the others on the boat, and how he received encouragement from others along the journey, the interaction of believers along life's journey is important to keep each other buoyed in the faith in our walk with the Lord. Life is tough, but made better with solid Christian friends!

F. Next we will read how Paul begins his ministry in Rome to the Jewish people there and the extensive freedom he had to evangelize the people that came to him.

MAP