

### “LESSONS IN THE STORM” (Acts 27:1-44)

This chapter reveals a wealth of historic information on the workings of ancient mariners. It primarily describes one of the three shipwrecks that the apostle Paul experienced. He not only suffered when he was preaching but also in his travels. That has led some to describe the journey in Acts 27-28 as Paul’s “Fourth Missionary Journey.” The providence of God is seen prominently in control of the people, events and elements. The writer shows Paul standing out as a true leader, a wise man in practical matters, and a man of God in this crisis. As MacArthur says,

“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.”



*And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. (v1-2)*

Paul was entrusted into the care of a centurion called Julius. These centurions received double the salary of ordinary soldiers and were trusted for their courage, loyalty and wisdom. We can see the workings of providence in the kindness of this man Julius, who did not regard Paul as a common criminal. Centurions were not known for being kind people but God touched this soldier's heart. One wonders if we will meet him in Heaven.

Aristarchus, a Macedonian was mentioned previously with Paul in his travels (Acts 19:29, 20:4). He was captured during a riot at Ephesus and now also seems to have volunteered as a traveling companion to Paul. We know that he was later mentioned as a fellow-labourer (Philm. 1:24) and went with Paul to Rome as a fellow-prisoner (Col. 4:10). The personal pronoun “*us*”

here indicates Luke is also on this journey. It must have been a great encouragement for Paul to have these Christian travelling companions.

*And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. (v3-5)*

Paul had friends here also. That reunion must have been a sweet one. Often, we have a picture of Paul as a harsh theologian but he was also a man who was winsome. To be a strong leader does not inevitably eliminate people's love for you (cf. Titus 3:15; 1 Tim. 4:12). Paul must have made a tremendous impact to establish this degree of trust with Julius within a short period of that 70-mile journey – may be no more than one day. It is amazing considering the fact that if a Roman soldier lost a prisoner due to negligence, he would pay with his life. His deep respect for Paul, led to granting considerable liberties, taking seriously his advice, and using every effort to protect him.



*And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. (v6-8)*

Sailing in the Mediterranean from mid-September to November is very dangerous because of strong North Eastern winds. Sudden storms can rise without warning and last sometimes for days. As they were not going to get to Rome until after winter, they had little to gain and much to lose. They changed ship here. Kent Hughes notes that in,

“Asia Minor, the centurion transferred Paul and the other prisoners onto a large Egyptian grain ship. The typical grain freighter was 140 feet long and thirty-six feet wide and bore a thirty-three-foot draught. It was a sturdy ship, but in high seas it had definite disadvantages. It had no rudder like a modern ship but was steered by two great paddles extending from the stern. It had only one mast on which was a great square sail. Chief among its drawbacks was that it could not sail into the wind.”

*Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. (v9-10)*

Paul was an experienced sea traveller and had already survived one shipwreck. The word “*admonished*” is in the imperfect tense indicating he kept on doing it. Even though Paul of all of those sailing believed absolutely in the Sovereignty of God, it is interesting that he did not play recklessly with this. God’s sovereign control should never be an excuse for carelessness or recklessness. Paul knows that he must work toward the revealed purpose for his life.

*Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. (v11-13)*

The centurion rather trusted in the “expert” judgment of the captain and the owner. Jack Arnold explains,

“The reason the owner, captain and crew did not want to stay in Fair Haven was that they did not want to stay in that dingy little town. They would have been bored there so they wanted to go to a more exciting city to winter. These sailors wanted action and not a winter of humdrum. It is obvious that they were thinking of their own comfort and convenience and not the safety of the ship or its passengers.”

As soon as the weather appeared to be suitable with a soft south wind, they rushed on. It didn’t take long before these “experienced” men discovered that the inexperienced Jewish preacher knew better than them.

*But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. And running under a certain island which is called Claudia, we had much work to come by the boat: Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. (v14-19)*

This Euroclydon was a powerful North Eastern wind. We can only but imagine the horror of being caught in such a storm for days. They had no ability to control the ship. They were at the mercy of the elements. At the end of the third day they threw out the cargo. Desperation and panic had set in.

*And 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. (v20)*

This was a terrible handicap because these ancient navigators were guided by the sun and stars. It must have added to their sense of panic and hopelessness.



*But after long abstinence 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. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the 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. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island. (v21-26)*

The Lord appeared to him at this crucial hour again. God did not remove Paul from the trial but strengthened him with a word of encouragement. The apostle went through the same storm as the rest on board but he had a different perspective. Paul may not have been frightened so much for himself as the Lord had promised to bring him to Rome, but for the others. When all hope is lost, Paul addresses the people in the ship.

Paul respectfully reminds them that they ought to have listened to his counsel before. He was not being arrogant in his address simply establishing his credibility for the next claim. Paul had even more important words to speak now based on inspired special revelation from God. He spoke with the authority; not from himself but from the Word of God.

It is truly amazing that Paul could go through trials, murder plots, imprisonments, hungerings, and shipwrecks and yet not give up. The Christian lives by a different principle from the world. He testified, “*whose I am and whom I serve.*” This man was unashamed to testify of His God in every situation. These pagan sailors must have been impressed with this man Paul, for they saw he was clearly different.

*But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country: And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone*

*a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. (v27-29)*

After such a buffeting for many days they had no idea where they were. This measurement of 20 fathoms was around 120 feet. It was pitch dark and in the middle of the night which only added to their anxiety. Trull notes,

“A wreck of any kind is a terrifying experience, whether it is a train derailment, an automobile collision, or a crash of an airplane. But probably the most terrifying of all is a shipwreck, because of the prolonged agony that the passengers and crew endure.”

*And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. (v30-32)*

We see the balance here between human responsibility and Divine Sovereignty. Arnold explains,

“This is a perfect illustration of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. Both are taught in Scripture. We call this a mystery or antinomy. God’s sovereignty includes man’s responsibility. Man’s actions are the means whereby God works out His plans. God’s announced purpose never cancels out man’s responsibility and activity.”

*And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. (v33-38)*

Paul was now in total command of the ship. He showed he was not just a spiritual man but a practical man. There was a lot of people with authority on the ship but the prisoner Paul stands head and shoulder above them all. He began the journey as a prisoner and ended it effectively as the captain! The man of faith in God’s promise sets the example and this transforms the attitude of two hundred seventy-five other people.

*And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land. (v39-44)*

God has a way of using everything to accomplish His purpose (Ps. 34:19). Trials don’t make a man – they simply reveal what is in a man. God’s promise was fulfilled to the very last sailor. Two hundred seventy-six saved lives demonstrates God is faithful. He allowed each man through Paul’s revelation to see that He was in complete, sovereign control.



This ordeal no doubt was a mighty testimony to the gospel. Arnold notes,

“Notice carefully that God’s plan for the ship, crew and passengers was carried out in every detail. God had said that everyone on the ship would make it to shore. Yet, they were told to swim and hang onto boards and other things so they could stay afloat. Suppose they had said, “Well, God has said we are to make it safely, so I’m not going to swim or hang onto a board. It is God’s responsibility to get me to shore!” Suppose they had done nothing. They would have died. This teaches means as well as ends. God committed Himself that all on board the ship should get to land safely but they were to use the means God provided - swimming or hanging onto boards - in order to make it safely to shore.”

Paul also would have grown in faith as he learned how faithful God could be. This renewed faith would be critical as he faced the prospect of pagan Rome. Everything that seemed could go wrong on this journey went wrong, but God turned the whole circumstances round for His glory. There would be good days and bad days. Storms come and go. But God would remain faithful. The anchor holds in the storm. No matter the present hardship – you will arrive safely through.

