



**ACTS 27-28 SHIPWRECKED AND FINALLY ARRIVING IN ROME**

In this Bible study, we will finish the account in Acts about Paul's harrowing voyage to Rome.

As they headed to Rome, their ship arrived at a small port on the island of Crete, Fair Havens, where Paul warned them to remain there because the storm season had begun -- generally after the Day of Atonement, which falls in late September or early October. Regrettably, the captain and the centurion failed to heed Paul's advice--with disastrous consequences.

Luke mentions, "Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. 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. 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. 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 Claudia, 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" (Acts 27:11-17).

By the way, why did they consult Paul?

*The Bible Knowledge Commentary* mentions, "Paul was perhaps included in the ship's council because of his experiences in travel (cf. 2 Cor.11:25, 'three times I was shipwrecked') and his natural leadership. Contrary to Paul's advice, the majority decided it best to sail on to a more commodious harbor and to winter there. The authority rested ultimately in the hands of the centurion because grain ships were considered to be in government service. So they sailed along the southern coast of Crete. They hoped to reach the harbor of Phoenix" (note on Acts 27:11).

Yet, as they rounded the southern coast of Crete, they ran into a famous violent storm called Euroclydon (the great northeastern gale). They were helpless in it, but managed to reach Cauda, a

small island 25 miles south of Crete, which provided a momentary rest from the ravaging waves and they hauled up the lifeboat that had become a drag. Then they threw ropes around the ship to secure it. Their great fear was being driven further south into the dreaded Syrtis Sands--shifting sandbars off Libya, where ships got stuck and were demolished by the pounding waves.

Luke continues his eyewitness account, "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. 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. 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 was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island" (Acts 27:18-26).

So things got so bad, most on board thought they would all perish. Yet, they had three very special men on board -- Paul, Luke and Aristarchus. As had occurred before, when Paul's life was in danger, Jesus appeared and encouraged him (Acts 18:9-10; 23:11). He had told him he would arrive safely in Rome and stand before Caesar. So Paul encouraged the crew and told them they would all be saved although they would lose the ship.

Luke continues, "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. And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms (120 ft.); and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms (90 ft.). Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors

from the stern, and prayed for day to come. 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.' Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off" (Acts 27:27-32).

For two weeks they were engulfed in this gale, taken 600 miles off course. It is hard to imagine how horrifying this would be--just the seasickness alone would prevent keeping anything down! As they came closer to land they dropped the anchors to avoid being wrecked on a reef or a sandbar.

Luke proceeds, "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.' 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. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. 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. 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" (Acts 27:33-44).

Even if Paul was a prisoner, he was a Roman citizen and with his calm, spiritual strength, the

captain and the centurion now heeded his advice.

At dawn, they saw a bay with a sandy beach and decided to run the ship aground. So they cut the anchors, threw off the rudders, hoisted the foresail and aimed for the beach. Unfortunately, they ran right into a sandbar, causing the back of the ship to be violently rocked to and fro until it began breaking up. Since there was a danger some of the prisoners would jump ship and escape, which meant the soldiers in charge of them would receive the same sentence they had, the soldiers prepared to kill them. But the centurion stopped them not wanting to kill Paul and instead ordered all to swim as they could to the beach.

Barclay brings out, "Once again the fine character of this Roman centurion stands out. The soldiers wished to kill the prisoners to prevent possible escape. It is difficult to blame them, because it was Roman law that if a man escaped, his guard must undergo the penalty intended for the escaped prisoner. But the centurion stepped in and saved Paul's life and the other prisoners with him. So this tremendous story comes to an end with a sentence which is like a sigh of relief. The ship's company was saved; and they owed their lives to Paul" (note on Acts 27:44).

We now come to the last chapter in Acts – Acts 28. Luke says, "Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, 'No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.' But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god" (Acts 28:1-6).

Malta is a large island sixty miles south of Sicily and was under Roman rule. So the natives made a bonfire and Paul helped out, tossing some sticks

into the fire, but in them was a poisonous snake, which, fleeing the fire, bit him. The superstitious natives thought this was a fit punishment from the gods for a guilty man. But when they saw Paul didn't die, they typically went to the opposite extreme, thinking now he was sent from the gods.

Luke continues, "In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary" (Acts 28:8-10).

We can well imagine how highly regarded Paul became by all the miraculous things they saw.

Luke continues, "After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island. And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome. And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him. And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: 'Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called

for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.' Then they said to him, 'We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.' So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:11-23).

All of these descriptions of the trip have been verified by archaeology and historians. Also notice Paul's central message is mentioned here (and in the section below) as having to do with "the kingdom of God" and concerning "Jesus Christ"--the same two-fold focus of our mission statement.

Luke continues, "And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: 'The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull, their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.' 'Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!' And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves. Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him" (Acts 28:11-31).

Acts ends abruptly, without the usual Amen, nor does Luke let us know what happened afterward to Paul. Perhaps it is because the "acts" of God's servant leaders have not ended yet and one day, the rest of the "Acts of the Apostles" will be added on. On this point, we will have to wait and see.