

PART 33: ROME AT LAST!

Acts 27:1–28:16

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SUMMARY

Paul's trip to Rome was God's plan from the beginning. The voyage was entirely under his control and his direction was provided not through the sea-wise captain or the centurion, but through God's man, Paul.

I. PAUL SAILS FOR ROME (27:1-13)

A. Uneventful sailing to Fair Havens (27:1-8)

When the time came, we set sail for Italy. Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of a Roman officer named Julius, a captain of the Imperial Regiment. 2 Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was also with us. We left on a ship whose home port was Adramyttium on the northwest coast of the province of Asia; it was scheduled to make several stops at ports along the coast of the province. 3 The next day when we docked at Sidon, Julius was very kind to Paul and let him go ashore to visit with friends so they could provide for his needs. 4 Putting out to sea from there, we encountered strong headwinds that made it difficult to keep the ship on course, so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland. 5 Keeping to the open sea, we passed along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, landing at Myra, in the province of Lycia. 6 There the commanding officer found an Egyptian ship from Alexandria that was bound for Italy, and he put us on board. 7 We had several days of slow sailing, and after great difficulty we finally neared Cnidus. But the wind was against us, so we sailed across to Crete and along

the sheltered coast of the island, past the cape of Salmone. 8 We struggled along the coast with great difficulty and finally arrived at Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

- Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment: We don't know much about this specific Augustan Regiment (several held that title), but it was common for Roman soldiers to accompany the transport of criminals, those awaiting trial, and merchant ships filled with grain going from Egypt to Rome.
- Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us: Aristarchus and Luke (notice the "us" of verse 2 and beyond) accompanied Paul on this voyage. The favor Paul enjoyed from Julius (as in Acts 27:3) meant he was allowed to take these companions with him.
- Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care: The ship first sailed to Sidon, where Paul met with Christians and could receive care from them.
- The Roman commander gave Paul a lot of liberty because he wasn't a condemned man (yet) but waiting for trial before Caesar. Paul's godly character and display of Christian love were also helpful in gaining favor.
- Paul was different from the other prisoners on board. The other prisoners were probably all condemned criminals being sent to Rome to die in the arena.
- An Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy: This was a grain freighter, taking grain grown in Egypt to Italy. According to Hughes, the typical grain freighter of that period was 140 feet long and 36 feet wide. It had one mast with a big square sail, and instead of what we think of as a rudder, it steered with two paddles on the back part of the ship. They were sturdy, but because of their design, they couldn't sail into the wind.
- Along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra... off Cnidus... off Salmone... Fair Havens: The ship began to make its way west, eventually coming to the port called Fair Havens on the south side of the island of Crete.

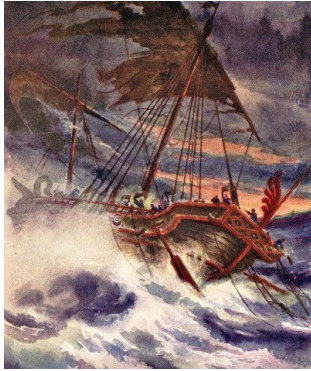
B. Split decision to make for Phoenix (27:9-13)

"We had lost a lot of time. The weather was becoming dangerous for sea travel because it was so late in the fall, and Paul spoke to the ship's officers about it.¹⁰ "Men," he said, "I believe there is trouble ahead if we go on-- shipwreck, loss of cargo, and danger to our lives as well." ¹¹ But the officer in charge of the prisoners listened more to the ship's captain and the owner than to Paul. ¹² And since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor-- a poor place to spend the winter-- most of the crew wanted to go on to Phoenix, farther up the coast of Crete, and spend the winter there. Phoenix was a good harbor with only a southwest and northwest exposure. ¹³ When a light wind began blowing from the south, the sailors thought they could make it. So they pulled up anchor and sailed close to the shore of Crete."

- Sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over: The Fast date in question here was probably October 5, which was the date of the Day of Atonement in A.D. 59.
- The idea is that as winter approached, the weather became more dangerous for sailing.

II. THE STORM AT SEA (27:14-44)

A. General despair over the great storm (27:14-20)



But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (called a "northeaster") burst across the island and blew us out to sea. ¹⁵ The sailors couldn't turn the ship into the wind, so they gave up and let it run before the gale. ¹⁶ We sailed along the sheltered side of a small island named Cauda, where with great difficulty we hoisted aboard the lifeboat being towed behind us. ¹⁷ Then the sailors bound ropes around the hull of the ship to strengthen it. They were afraid of being driven across to the sandbars of Syrtis off the African coast, so they lowered the sea anchor to slow the ship and were driven before the wind. ¹⁸ The

next day, as gale-force winds continued to batter the ship, the crew began throwing the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ The following day they even took some of the ship's gear and threw it overboard. ²⁰ The terrible storm raged for many days, blotting out the sun and the stars, until at last all hope was gone.

- They used cables to undergird the ship: This was a normal emergency measure, helping to prevent the ship from breaking apart in a storm.
- They struck sail and so were driven: The fear of crashing on the Syrtis Sands (an infamous wrecking area of ships off the coast of North Africa) made them go with the wind and give up hope of navigating the ship in the storm.
- They lightened the ship... threw the ship's tackle overboard: These were the final two things done to help save the ship – first throwing over the cargo and then the ship's equipment. Even with this, the ship continued to drive in the wind for many days.

B. Paul's encouragement and promise of safety (27:21-26)

No one had eaten for a long time. Finally, Paul called the crew together and said, "Men, you should have listened to me in the first place and not left Crete. You would have avoided all this damage and loss. ²² But take courage! None of you will lose your lives, even though the ship will go down. ²³ For last night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me, ²⁴ and he said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul, for you will surely stand trial before Caesar! What's more, God in his goodness has granted safety to everyone sailing with you.' ²⁵ So take courage! For I believe God. It will be just as he said. ²⁶ But we will be shipwrecked on an island."

- There stood by me this night an angel: God sent an angelic messenger to Paul to bring good, encouraging news when all else seemed hopeless. This wasn't a direct appearance of Jesus (as in Jerusalem, Acts 23:11), but of an angel. God's word came to Paul in different ways at different times.

- An angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve: The angelic presence was an encouragement; this was also. Paul remembered that he belonged to God and that he served God. God never forgets those who belong to Him and serve Him.
- That doesn't mean everything goes easy for those who belong to God and serve Him. Paul's present calamity proved that. It does mean that God's watchful eye and active care are present even in that kind of calamity.

C. Paul's further instructions and encouragement (27:27-38)

About midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, as we were being driven across the Sea of Adria, the sailors sensed land was near. ²⁸ They dropped a weighted line and found that the water was 120 feet deep. But a little later they measured again and found it was only 90 feet deep. ²⁹ At this rate they were afraid we would soon be driven against the rocks along the shore, so they threw out four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight.³⁰ Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the front of the ship. ³¹ But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, "You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard." ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away. ³³ Just as day was dawning, Paul urged everyone to eat. "You have been so worried that you haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. ³⁴ "Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." ³⁵ Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. ³⁶ Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat--³⁷ all 276 of us who were on board. ³⁸ After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard.

- When the fourteenth night had come: They spent two entire weeks in the misery and terror of the storm.
- The sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land: Sensing land was near (probably by hearing the breakers in the distance) the sailors took proper precautions against being crashed against some unknown rocks (they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come).
- And prayed for day to come: The threat of shipwreck and death made them men of prayer.

D. Shipwreck and safe arrival on Malta (27:39-44)



When morning dawned, they didn't recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay with a beach and wondered if they could get to shore by running the ship aground. ⁴⁰ So they cut off the anchors and left them in the sea. Then they lowered the rudders, raised the foresail, and headed toward shore. ⁴¹ But they hit a shoal and ran the ship aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.⁴² The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. ⁴³ But the commanding officer wanted to spare Paul, so he didn't let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump

overboard first and make for land. ⁴⁴ The others held on to planks or debris from the broken ship. So everyone escaped safely to shore.

- They did not recognize the land: They did not know it at first, but they came to an island called Malta. The place where the ship came aground is now called St. Paul's Bay.
- "Only the rarest conjunction of favorable circumstances could have brought about such a fortunate ending to their apparently hopeless situation...all these circumstances are united in St. Paul's Bay."
- "If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long."
- The prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves: As the ship was stuck fast on shore, the still-stormy sea pounded the weakened vessel and started breaking it apart. All on board had to jump ship or be broken up with it.

III. PAUL ON THE ISLAND OF MALTA (28:1-10)

A. Survival of a viper bite (28:1-6)

Once we were safe on shore, we learned that we were on the island of Malta. ² The people of the island were very kind to us. It was cold and rainy, so they built a fire on the shore to welcome us. ³ As Paul gathered an armful of sticks and was laying them on the fire, a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, bit him on the hand.⁴ The people of the island saw it hanging from his hand and said to each other, "A murderer, no doubt! Though he escaped the sea, justice will not permit him to live." ⁵ But Paul shook off the snake into the fire and was unharmed.⁶ The people waited for him to swell up or suddenly drop dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw that he wasn't harmed, they changed their minds and decided he was a god.



- They then found out that the island was called Malta: These experienced sailors would certainly have known the island of Malta, but not this side of the island. Almost all the traffic to Malta came to the main port, on the other side; they didn't recognize this side of the island.
- Made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold: Luke wrote as someone who experienced this, both the kindness of the Malta natives and the cold and wet of the storm. Malta could mean refuge, a fitting name.

B. Healing ministry (28:7-10)

Near the shore where we landed was an estate belonging to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and treated us kindly for three days. ⁸ As it happened, Publius's father was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him. ⁹ Then all the other sick people on the island came and were healed.¹⁰ As a result we were showered with honors, and when the time came to sail, people supplied us with everything we would need for the trip.

- Leading citizen of the island: This "is the exact technical term for the person who represented Rome in that place; it is another example of Luke's extraordinary accuracy."
- The father of Publius lay sick of fever and dysentery: Some think this was a malady known as Malta fever, which comes from a microorganism found in the milk of Maltese goats. Its symptoms usually last about four months.
- Paul went and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him: God healed this man, yet it happened through the willingness and activity of Paul. God did the work, but Paul made himself ready and available for the work.
- The rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed: Soon, the work Paul did went to many others. This word for healed is not the customary word for miraculous healing. The word more literally means, "to receive medical attention." It may be that Luke (who was a physician according to Colossians 4:14) served as a medical missionary in Malta.

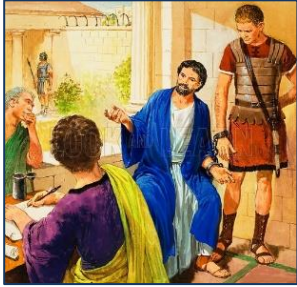
IV. PAUL ARRIVES IN ROME (28:11-16)

A. The itinerary (28:11-13)

It was three months after the shipwreck that we set sail on another ship that had wintered at the island-- an Alexandrian ship with the twin gods as its figurehead.¹² Our first stop was Syracuse, where we stayed three days. ¹³ From there we sailed across to Rhegium. A day later a south wind began blowing, so the following day we sailed up the coast to Puteoli.

- After three months: They spent three months in Malta, gathering strength and waiting for the winter to end.
- Landing at Syracuse: This was the first stop from Malta. Syracuse was a famous city in the ancient world, being the capital city of the island of Sicily.
- Rhegium... Puteoli... and so we went toward Rome: As Paul and the others made their way northward up the Italian peninsula, they spent time with fellow followers of Jesus they met along the way (we found brethren and were invited to stay with them seven days).

B. The reception (28:14-16)



There we found some believers, who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. ¹⁵The brothers and sisters in Rome had heard we were coming, and they came to meet us at the Forum on the Appian Way. Others joined us at The Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was encouraged and thanked God. ¹⁶ When we arrived in Rome, Paul was permitted to have his own private lodging, though he was guarded by a soldier.

- When the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii Forum and Three Inns: Eventually they were greeted outside Rome by Christians from the city who came to meet them. They honored Paul by greeting him as the emperors were greeted when they arrived in Rome:
- They had received Paul's famous letter to the Romans a few years before, so they probably felt like they knew him already – and they certainly wanted to honor him. In light of the love and honor behind this greeting, no wonder that Paul thanked God and took courage.

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