

Paul Begins the Voyage to Rome Acts 27

Introduction

Can you imagine how excited Paul must have felt as he boarded the ship to journey to Rome! For more than two years he had been unjustly imprisoned in Caesarea. He had patiently waited and remained faithful to God. Now, God's promise to him in Acts 23:11 was coming true.

Luke tells about the voyage to Rome as an eyewitness because he was with Paul on the journey. He gives a lot of details and Acts 27 is considered one of the best accounts of an ancient voyage on board a ship.

Outline of Acts 27

- I. Setting Sail - Acts 27:1-8
- II. Storm at Sea - Acts 27:9-38
- III. Shipwrecked but Safe - Acts 27:39-44

I. Setting Sail - Acts 27:1-8

After Paul gave his defense to King Agrippa, the decision was made to send him to Rome. Luke joined Paul. Aristarchus, one of Paul's converts from Thessalonica, was also with him. From the passage in Colossians 4:10, it appears that Aristarchus stayed with Paul because he is mentioned as a *fellow prisoner* (4:10).

A Roman centurion (commander of 100 soldiers) named Julius was in charge of Paul as well as some other prisoners for the journey. They boarded a "coasting vessel," a ship which traveled the coast of Asia Minor and stopped at ports along the way. This ship had made its way down to Caesarea and was returning up the coast. (It will be helpful to have a map of Paul's voyage to Rome in front of you as you read this section of the notes.)

The first stop was in Sidon on the Syrian coast, sixty miles north of Caesarea. Julius showed kindness to Paul by allowing him to visit the

Christians there. This must have been an encouragement to Paul.

Sailing from east to west was difficult in the Mediterranean Sea because the winds typically blew from the opposite direction. To give themselves added protection from the wind, the ship sailed between Cyprus and the mainland for shelter. The land would help block some of the wind's force. A straight voyage from the Syrian coast to Rome would have been the shortest route. However, that shortcut would be across the open sea would mean sailing directly into the wind. Luke notes that the *winds were contrary* even along the coast of Asia Minor.

The next stop was in Myra which was a busy port that served many of the grain ships from Egypt on their way to Rome. It was here that Julius found a ship from Alexandria, Egypt on its way to Rome. We can **infer** that it was a grain ship because later in this chapter Luke mentions that the wheat was thrown overboard to lighten the load (27:38). Paul and his traveling companions were put on board and the ship headed west toward Rome.

The ship headed into the wind toward Rome and the voyage was slow and difficult. After many days, they passed Cnidus. The ship headed south, around the island of Crete, for protection because the winds were so severe. They finally came to the port of Fair Havens. The ship docked there, and they waited for there for good sailing weather. Luke notes that the *Fest was already over*, referring to the Jewish Day of Atonement observed in late September or early October. By this time of the year, the weather was unpredictable and sailing could be dangerous. Paul had already been shipwrecked twice (2 Corinthians 11:25), so he knew the dangers of the sea first hand.

Fair Havens was not the best place for a ship to stay during the winter. The coastline of Crete turns sharply to the north and the bay at Fair Havens received harsh northwest winds. The helmsman (captain) and ship's owner wanted to try and reach the port of Phoenix (which had more protection for the ship) and spend the winter there. Paul, however, knew it was risky and warned the crew of the dangers which included loss of **cargo**, the ship, and their lives. But Julius chose to ignore Paul's warning and, instead, he listened to the experts. The decision was his to make because he was the highest ranking official on the ship.

When a gentle south wind came up, it seemed that there would be smooth sailing to Phoenix. Phoenix was only a one day sail from Fair Havens. To be safe, the sailors kept the ship as close as possible to the coastline of Crete. However, the wind changed again. A hurricane force northeast wind, known as Euroclydon or Euroquilo, came up without warning. They were almost to Phoenix, but the ship was not built to go into violent winds. It would break apart if they tried to sail on. The crew was forced to give up control and let the ship be driven by the wind.

The wind drove the ship out into the open sea and away from the protection of Crete. The storm was fierce. The crew worked to keep the ship from sinking. The lifeboat (*skiff*) was normally towed behind the ship. It was filled with water because of the storm. As the ship passed the island of Clauda, the winds were blocked enough to allow the crew and passengers to haul in the lifeboat, although it was very difficult. Strong ropes were used to hold the wood of the ship tightly together to prevent the ship from breaking apart in the heavy seas.

To make matters worse, the crew was afraid that the ship would drift to close to the coast of North Africa where there were dangerous quicksands known as the *Syrtis Sands*. So they took the precaution of pulling down part of the sail and leaving just enough to help keep

the ship steady. They may have also lowered a floating anchor to help keep the the stern of the ship steady in the heavy waves.

The next day, the storm had not let up, so the crew lightened the ship by throwing some of the cargo overboard. On the third day, the crew was forced to throw over the "tackle" as well. The "tackle" may refer to the ship's ropes, riggings, etc., but probably refers to any unnecessary furniture and utensils.

The violent storm continued for *many* days, blocking all sight of the sun during the day and stars at night. Because the sailors depended upon the sun and stars for **navigation**, they had no idea where they were. All hope of reaching safety was gone.

No one had eaten for many days. It was probably impossible to cook with the storm raging all around. Also, many of the supplies may have been damaged or destroyed by the violent motion of the ship or the sea water. With people seasick and distressed, there was probably little appetite for food. In the midst of what seemed like a hopeless situation, Paul spoke up to give hope, encouragement, and a message from God.

Paul reminded everyone on board that he had warned against leaving Fair Havens. Perhaps this reminder came from Paul's fleshly desire to say, "I told you so." However, he could have reminded them of what he had said in order to establish his authority as God's representative. Just as Julius was the highest ranking official on the ship and represented the emperor, Paul was the highest ranking representative of the one true God. Whatever his reasons were for reminding them that he had given a warning before, he had their attention and used it to encourage them to *take heart*. Although the ship would be lost, all the lives would be spared.

How could Paul be so sure of what he said? He explained that he belonged to and served the mighty God. He told everyone that an angel of God had appeared to him. The angel had

told him not to be afraid because he would make it to Rome and appear before Caesar. Not only that, but the angel had told him *God has granted you all those who sail with you*. Paul boldly stated, *I believe God*.

Paul's prediction was that the ship would run aground on an island. After fourteen days of battling the storm and being tossed about in the Adrian Sea, a glimmer of hope arose.¹ Around midnight, the sailors sensed land nearby. They took soundings and found that the water was slowly becoming more shallow. This meant there was land nearby. They could not see the land they were approaching in the dark so they dropped the anchors to keep from crashing on a possibly rocky shoreline. Then they prayed for day to come. Some Bible versions use the word "wished" instead of "prayed," but the original Greek word is always used for prayer. The right thing to do is to pray and leave the results to God!

The sailors were ready to abandon ship to save themselves. Pretending that they were lowering anchors from the bow of the ship, they began to let down the lifeboat. Paul reported this to the centurion, telling him that the ship could not make it to shore without the full crew. The sailors had to stay on the ship. The soldiers responded by cutting the ropes. This left the ship without a lifeboat.

Just before dawn, Paul spoke to everyone and encouraged them to eat. They needed food for strength to make it safely to shore when the sun rose. Again, Paul encouraged them saying that all would survive: *Not a hair will fall from the head of any of you* (Acts 27:34). God is in control of even the smallest details of life. Paul set the example. He took some bread and thanked God, then broke off a piece and ate it. This encouraged everyone else to eat as well. After all had eaten and were feeling stronger, the crew lightened the ship more by

throwing the rest of the grain into the sea. A boat weighed down would take on more water and make it easier to sink. A lighter boat would beach itself well on the shore.

As the day dawned, a bay with a beach came into view. They headed toward shore, the ship ran aground on a sandbar created by the ocean currents. The forward part of the ship stuck in the muddy bottom and would not move. The back of the ship began to break apart from the pounding waves.

The Roman soldiers planned to kill the prisoners because they would face terrible discipline if any prisoners escaped. However, Julius, the centurion, kept them from doing so because he wanted Paul kept alive.

Julius ordered those who could swim to jump overboard and swim to land. The rest he told to paddle to shore on broken pieces of the ship. All two hundred and seventy-six people on board made it to shore safely. The angel's promise to Paul had been fulfilled. The ship and her cargo were lost, but every life had been saved! God is faithful. †

Prayer

When you are scared, who do you turn to? God has placed adults in your life to be His representatives. They may not even believe in Him, but God will use whom He chooses. Don't be afraid to ask adults to help you with your problems and fears. God will work through them to help you! Ask God to give you faith to believe His promises.

Memory Verse

Psalm 139:5 *You have hedged me behind and before. And laid your hand upon me.*

Vocabulary

infer - conclude from evidence

cargo - the load on a ship

navigation - steering a boat in sailing

¹ (NOTE: The reference in many Bible versions to the Adriatic Sea is incorrect. In Paul's day, the central Mediterranean Sea was referred to as the Adrian Sea. This is the area Luke referenced.)

Questions for Acts Lesson 22

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

DAY ONE: Review last weeks lesson and notes.

1. What do you remember about the soldier who was put in charge of Paul?

2. What impressed you most about the voyage from Caesarea to St. Paul's Bay, Malta?

DAY TWO: Read Acts 28:1-11.

3. How did the natives of Malta treat the survivors of the shipwreck? Underline the correct answers and give the verses where you found them.

showed unusual kindness

honored them in many ways

built a fire

provided necessities when they left Malta

4. a. What happened when Paul gathered sticks for the fire?

- b. What did the natives think when this happened?

- c. Compare this to what happened to Paul in Acts 14:8-19 by giving some...

similarities

differences

5. a. Who showed special hospitality to Paul and his companions?

- b. What did Paul do for him? What happened as a result?

- c. How long did Paul stay on Malta? Why did they stay so long?

DAY THREE: Read Acts 28:11-16.

6. a. On a map, trace the journey from Malta to Rome.
- b. List the towns where they stopped along the way and give one fact about each place.

DAY FOUR: Read Acts 28:17-25.

7. a. In Rome, who did Paul call to meet with him? How long was this after his arrival?

- b. What was Paul's reason for speaking with these people? See verse 20.

- c. From the following Scripture passages, what is the "hope of Israel?"

Acts 5:30-31

Acts 23:6

Acts 24:14-15

8. Mark each statement below T (true) or F (false). Write the verse number beside each true statement.

- a. (T or F) vs._____ The Jews in Rome had heard many negative things about Paul.
- b. (T or F) vs._____ The Jews wanted to know what Paul thought about Christianity.
- c. (T or F) vs._____ A special day was set for Paul to speak.
- d. (T or F) vs._____ Many people went to hear what Paul had to say.
- e. (T or F) vs._____ Paul testified, from the Law and prophets, about the kingdom of God and Jesus.
- f. (T or F) vs._____ The Jews could not agree about the truth of Paul's testimony.

9. ★(Memory Questions) a. How was the reaction of the Jews in Rome similar to that of Jews in other cities where Paul had preached?

b. Name one city, mentioned earlier in Acts, which was an exception. Tell why those Jews had responded differently.

DAY FIVE: Read Acts 28:25-31.

10. a. What Old Testament passage did Paul apply to the Jews? See reference in the margin of your Bible.

- b. What did the passage say about each of the following.

The Jews' hearing _____

The Jews' seeing _____

The hearts of the Jewish people _____

Their ears _____

Their eyes _____

- c. From Luke 8:9-10, and John 12:37-40, who else had applied this same passage to unbelieving Jews?

11. ? (Thought Question) From Acts 28:28 and Romans 11:11, what was God's purpose for the unbelief of the Jews?

12. Give several important facts concerning the next two years of Paul's life?

13. ♥(Heart Question) Are you glad you studied the Book of Acts? Why or why not?

VOCABULARY FOR ACTS LESSON 22

***"The more words you know, the more clearly and powerfully you will think...
and the more ideas you will invite into your mind."***

— Wilfred Funk

DAY ONE: Write the definition of the vocabulary word.

infer - _____

cargo - _____

navigation - _____

DAY TWO: Write three sentences using three different vocabulary words from THIS lesson.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

DAY THREE: Circle the word's synonym(s). (Synonym is a word/phrase that means the same thing.)

infer -misunderstandbelieveassume

cargo -contentsbaggageshipment

navigateoperateget loststeer

DAY FOUR: Match the word to its meaning.

- infer

the load on a ship
- cargo

steering a boat in sailing
- navigation

conclude from evidence

DAY FIVE: Review previous vocabulary word(s).
Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the Word Bank.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

- Across
1. to give special importance to something shown

3. criticized or corrected sharply, reprimanded

4. not concerned with the rules of right conduct or the difference between right and wrong

6. special honor or respect

7. corruption of the pureness or excellence of something
- Down
2. causing to turn away from what is right and good; corrupting

5. new believer or follower

WORD-BANK		
rebuked	defilement	pervverting
convert	homage	emphasized
immoral	authentic	distinct

ANSWER KEY

Across

1. **emphasized** to give special importance to something shown
3. **rebuked** criticized or corrected sharply, reprimanded
4. **immoral** not concerned with the rules of right conduct or the difference between right and wrong
6. **homage** special honor or respect
7. **defilement** corruption of the pureness or excellence of something

Down

2. **pervverting** causing to turn away from what is right and good; corrupting
5. **convert** new believer or follower