



THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

The Record of the Beginning of Jesus' Reign

Chapter Twenty-Seven

INTRODUCTION

PAUL is being held in custody under Festus, the new Roman governor of Judea. Paul is defending himself against charges that had been laid by the Jewish Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. The charges were false and had no basis in Roman law, so Paul asked Festus to let the matter be heard in a Roman court. The threat of Jewish backlash, however, worried Festus.

Paul had just testified before King Agrippa and Governor Festus. After listening to Paul, both agreed that Paul did not deserve to be imprisoned. But Paul had declined to go back to Jerusalem and stand before the maniacal Sanhedrin. Instead he appealed to Caesar, opting to take his chances with the Romans rather than with the bloodthirsty Jews. Paul considered the Roman court less menacing than the Jewish Sanhedrin.

Thus, recognizing Paul's status as a Roman citizen, Festus granted Paul his request by ordering that he be taken to Rome to be tried in Caesar's court. Festus admitted that Paul didn't deserve to be imprisoned, but due to pressure from the Sanhedrin he would not set him free. Therefore, Festus was happy to "pass the buck" by sending Paul to Rome, thus alleviating local trouble with the Judeans. It was the politically expedient thing to do.

Paul was headed to Rome.

NOTE: God's plan for Paul included his going to Rome. Paul didn't know what lay in store for him in Rome, or on his voyage there. One thing he did know was that he did not want to be turned over to the mob in Jerusalem. Paul did what he thought was right, and committed his life into the hands of God.

ACTS 27: 1-8 PAUL GOES TO ROME

Now when they determined that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius of Augustus' band.

And having boarded a ship from Adramyttium that was to go along the coasts of Asia, we set sail. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.

And the next day we landed at Sidon where Julius kindly permitted Paul to visit some friends to obtain care.

And when we had launched from there, we sailed under Cyprus because the winds were contrary.

And we sailed through the open sea along Cilicia and Pamphylia, and put into Myra, a city of Lycia.

And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing to Italy; and he put us on it.

Then, after a number of days of slow and difficult sailing, we came to Cnidus. With the wind against us, we sailed under Crete, by Salmone;

And working along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

THE voyage by ship started uneventfully, and the second day they put in at Sidon where Paul was allowed to visit with some friends that lived there.

The following day they set sail again, heading “under” (i.e., on the back side of) the island of Cyprus. They sailed on the back side of the island to get away from the “contrary” wind which apparently was blowing against them instead of with them.

They sailed over the open sea past Asia Minor, passing Cilicia and Pamphylia and finally put in at Myra, a city of Lycia. At this point they changed ships and boarded one that was sailing to Italy.

Now the weather was getting worse, and in verse 7 it says they sailed slowly for many days and made very little progress.

They sailed past Salmone, a town on the south coast of Crete, and then came into a port called “Fair Harbors” which was near the city of Lasea.

ACTS 27:9-26 PAUL WARNS OF THE PERIL BY SEA

Having tarried past the time of the (annual) fast when sailing becomes hazardous, Paul admonished them,

Saying to them, Men, I perceive that the future of this course will be with damage and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also of our souls.

But the centurion was persuaded more by the captain and the ship’s owner than by Paul’s words.

And since the haven was not suitable to winter in, most of them preferred to set sail from there if somehow they could make it to Phoenix to winter; which is a harbor of Crete that opens toward the northeast

and toward the southeast.

So when the south wind decreased, supposing that their purpose was in sight, they lifted anchor and sailed close by Crete.

But before long a hurricane wind, called Euroaquilo (i.e., northeast gale), thrust down on them.

And when the ship was caught, and was unable to keep its head against the wind, we gave way and were being blown along.

But having run under a small island which is called Clauda, we were able to get control of the boat with much difficulty:

And using helps, we undergirded the ship; and, fearing we might run aground in the Syrtis (i.e., shallows), we lowered the gear and drifted with the wind.

But being violently tossed in the tempest, the next day we began throwing things out;

And the third day we cast out the ship’s tackle with our own hands.

And when neither sun nor stars appeared in many days, and no small winter storm lay on us, we were losing all hope of being saved.

And after much fasting Paul stood up in the midst of them, and said, Men, you should

have obeyed me, and not sailed from Crete and received this damage and loss.

But now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for not one soul among you will be lost, except the ship.

For this night there came to me the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

Saying, Fear not, Paul; you must stand before Caesar: and behold, God has given to you all them that sail with you.

Therefore, men, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it will be just as it was told to me.

However, we must be cast upon some island.

THEY had stayed in the port of Fair Haven, on the island of Crete, too long. The winter season was upon them and the weather was growing worse. The “fast” (vs. 9) probably refers to the notable date of the annual fast kept by the Jews on their Day of Atonement. For non-Jews it marked the season when the weather usually became dangerous for sailing. Paul was not keeping this fast. It was merely referred to as a known seasonal marker date. Paul warned them that it was now the season when the sea would be stormy and that they were risking shipwreck. He advised against setting sail from Crete that time of year.

There was also a further dilemma: their port at Fair Harbors, despite the implication of its name, was not protected from the rough seas, and it was not a good place for a ship to spend the winter. Nonetheless, if they had stayed there the ship would have been better off, and the passengers would have been safe.

But the centurion ignored Paul’s advice. At the insistence of the captain, the ship owner, and others there at the harbor, he decided to set

sail and try to reach a harbor at Phoenix which had more protection from the storms and the seas.

The wind let up somewhat so they decided to set sail. They launched and sailed close to the island, going along the coastline. But the break in the weather was short-lived. Soon a gale force wind came up and the ship began taking a beating. Verse 14 calls the wind a “Euroquilo,” which is a Greek word meaning a northeast gale. With the storm threatening to sink them, unable to sail across the wind, they lowered the sail and just let the wind drive the ship along.

The situation did not improve. In fact it worsened, and the ship was starting to break apart. When the wind let up briefly under the shelter of a small island, they all worked together to “undergird” (gird up) the ship with ropes or straps to hold it together in the storm. Wrapping ropes around the hull would give it added strength.

They were worried also that they might be blown into the shallows, called “Syrtis” (called “quicksand” in the KJV) and get stuck on the sandy bottom.

The storm grew so fierce they were forced to throw out cargo, even to the point of throwing out some of the tackle, which they wouldn’t have done unless the ship was in imminent danger of sinking.

At this juncture Paul speaks up and reiterates that they should have heeded him back at Crete and stayed in harbor. He says, “You refused to listen when I warned you not to sail from Crete.”

Then he explains to them that an angel of God appeared to him and told him that none on board would die, but that the ship would be lost and they would be cast upon an island.

PONDER THIS: In the midst of hardship, Paul is seen as a witness for Christ, and people begin to listen to his counsel and accept the fact that he is guided by God.

ACTS 27:27-44 THE CREW HEEDS THE COUNSEL OF PAUL

But as the fourteenth night came, and we were being driven along in the Adria (Adriatic Sea), about midnight the sailors suspected that

they were drawing near to some country;

And having taken soundings, and found it twenty fathoms:

and having proceeded a little further, they took soundings again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

Then fearing lest we might crash upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern,

and waited for day.

And as the sailors prepared to flee out of the ship, and had lowered the skiff into the sea, under the pretense of casting out anchors from the bow,

Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Unless these remain in the ship, you cannot be saved.

Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the skiff, and let it fall.

And when the day was nearly dawning, Paul began to encourage all to take nourishment, saying, This day is the fourteenth day you have been on alert having taken no food for yourselves.

Therefore, I encourage you to take nourishment for this is for your salvation: for not a hair from one of your heads will perish.

And having spoken, and having taken food, he gave thanks to God in sight of them all: and having broken it, he began to eat.

And having cheered up, they also took nourishment for themselves.

And all the souls in the ship, we were about seventy-six.

And when they had satisfied their hunger, they lightened the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

And when day had come, they did not recognize the land: but

they perceived a bay with a beach, into which they determined, if they could, to drive the ship.

And having cut away the anchors they let them fall into the sea, and having loosed the lashings on the rudder, and having hoisted the foresail to the wind, they made toward the beach.

But falling upon a shoal washed on two sides by the sea, they ran the ship aground; and the bow stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the stern was breaking up by the violence.

And the soldiers thought to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

But the centurion, wishing to bring Paul safely through, prevented them from their plan. He commanded those who could swim to 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 all were saved upon the land.

NEAR midnight the crew detected some sign indicating they might be near land. They immediately “sounded” (i.e., measured the depth of the water) to see if they were nearing land.

Their first sounding measured twenty fathoms. The second measured fifteen fathoms. They were headed toward shore and the water

was getting more shallow.

Fearing that they would run into rocks in the dark, they threw out anchors from the stern to stop the ship from drifting closer to shore.

Some of the crewmen didn’t want to wait for daylight so they began to lower a skiff over the side intending to make for shore in the dark.

Paul warned the soldiers and the centurion that God’s promise of safety required that no one leave the ship yet. So the soldiers stopped them by cutting the ropes, letting the skiff fall into the ocean. Obviously, they were now heeding Paul’s warnings.

Paul admonished the sailors to eat so they would not be weak. They needed strength for the coming day.

In verse 37, the King James Version numbers the people on board at 276. But the best manuscripts say there were about 76 men (souls).

After everyone had eaten, they tossed the rest of the food and cargo overboard. The ship was doomed anyway, and they needed the ship to stay intact until morning.

As the sun came up, they saw a beach that would serve their purpose. They cut loose the ropes that had been holding the ship at anchor, and the ship was blown toward the beach.

They ran upon a shoal, jamming the bow solidly in place while the violent waves battered and began breaking up the stern.

Verse 42 shows the mentality of the soldiers. They knew they couldn’t keep track of all the prisoners, so they thought to kill them rather than allow them to escape.

But the centurion stopped them. Evidently, he was the more level-headed of the lot and he also wanted to follow Paul’s advice for the safety of all. So the centurion gave the order it was every man for himself, including the prisoners. Anyone who could swim headed for land.

As the ship broke apart in the waves all 76 people jumped into the water. They washed ashore on boards or pieces of the ship that had dislodged from the hull. What Paul had promised was coming true: the ship was lost but everybody on board were “saved.”