

ACTS 27: SHIPWRECKS IN LIFE

Most of us get excited when we are about to embark on a trip, especially if it is one, we have been anticipating and planning for some time. We know from the book of Acts that Paul has been wanting to go to Rome for years now but hasn't been able to get there. It seems something always comes up and he is re-directed by God to some other task, in some other place. But now the time has come, and God has told Paul that he will get to Rome. But once again, just as we have seen throughout the Bible, though Paul will get there, he has no idea, at this time, what will happen between points A and B. And I believe this is something we should focus on in this part of the story. God's will, will be done. Paul is moving within God's will and plan, but the circumstances that occur between points A and B – between the launch of another chapter in his life and ministry, are things to which Paul is not privy. Once again, we will see an intertwining of God's will, intervention and providence, along with Paul's volition, as the journey continues. And once again, we will see how God places people into our lives at just the right time in order to move the pieces on the chessboard so that His will is done. Keep this in mind as we go through the chapter.

There are some who believe this story didn't really happen but is placed here in order to just make the story more interesting and bolster Paul's story. I don't believe this to be true. When you look at the story, you see what we have consistently seen throughout the book of Acts, particularly when it comes to Luke recording the "travel-log" parts of the book. He always gives a great deal of details about ports and cities as they reach them. And as we make our way through this pericope, he continues true to form. You can actually learn a great deal about sailing, as it was done in the first century from this story. Indeed, the details serve to show that Luke was a first-hand witness, who accompanied Paul on his journey and didn't write this down from a second-hand account.

We pick up today with Paul as he begins his long-awaited journey to Rome.

1 And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. 2 So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. 3 And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul

kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care. 4 When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.

7 When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

- Luke and Aristarchus accompany Paul, and others on the trip.
- Aristarchus – has been around since Ephesus and is mentioned a few times, even as a fellow-laborer of Paul's. Some believe that he would have had to declare himself as Paul's slave in order to accompany him on the voyage. (Not sure about that.)
- Julius – A Roman centurion of a select unit. Probably was a liaison officer. He is in authority throughout the voyage. He treats Paul well – most likely because he realizes he doesn't have any ordinary prisoner here. He allows Paul some freedom as they travel.

- They make their way north to Sidon where Paul meets with fellow believers. (Geographical messaging)
- They board a grain ship in Myra. This ship would have been a large one. Upwards of 135 feet long with as much as a 33-foot draft. Steered with two rear oars, no rudder.
- They already begin to have issues with the weather at this point.

9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." 11 Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul. 12 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.

- Verse 9 gives us some info regarding when this voyage took place. The fast – most likely the Day of Atonement, which, if this is 59 AD would have taken

place on October 5, on our calendar. Sailing began to get dangerous in September and by November, would normally grind to a halt because of storms in the Mediterranean.

- Paul warns that they should stay put and winter in port until shipping is safe once again.
- Julius, the Centurion confers with the captain and owner of the ship. They decide to continue on. Paul is overridden. That would be par for the course. Paul, though he was well-traveled, wasn't a sailor. But the captain is thinking of getting his cargo to Italy in order to get paid.
- The harbor wasn't one suitable to a group of sailors to stay in all winter. Not much to do there. So they set sail once again, heading for Phoenix, (Phoenice) in order to winter there.

13 When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. 14 But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon. 15 So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive. 16 And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty. 17 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. 18 And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. 19 On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. 20 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.

- Try to imagine this. Think of the movie, *The Perfect Storm*, or “*The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald!*”
- They have a couple days of good weather, so they think they can make their destination. But soon, the “Euroclydon” hits them. These are the winds coming from the NW. These are the winds that make sailing nearly impossible this time of year.
- When they can’t steer to ship into the wind, they let her drive.
- Secure the skiff – normally towed behind the ship.
- Undergird the ship with ropes. Syrtis Sands – Shipping graveyard off the coast of Carthage, (North Africa).
- Start throwing cargo overboard in order to lighten the ship.

- On the third day of the storm they throw the ship's tackle overboard to further lighten the ship. Tackle – oars, extra sails, etc.
- Couldn't see the Sun for days on end. No compass or sextant. Navigated by Sun and sight.
- The men were giving up.

21 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. 22 And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. 26 However, we must run aground on a certain island."

- No one had eaten for days.
- Paul, "I told you so!" Glad he didn't list tact as a manifestation of the Spirit. This is a good way to get thrown overboard.

- Take heart! An Angel! Only the ship will be lost. But we must run aground on a certain island.
- The God whom I serve! This sets him apart from the Gentiles on board. The patron god of most sailors would have be Poseidon/ Neptune.
- My God has declared this. I must get to Rome.
- **Even if you're an unbeliever, the safest place you can be is with a believer who is on a mission from God.**

At this point, Paul assumes some amount of control of the situation.

27 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. 28 And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms. 29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come. 30 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, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in

the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

- 14 days! (fortnight)
- Probably heard water crashing against breakers. Still couldn't see well.
- Taking soundings. 20 – 15 fathoms.
- Fear running aground. Drop 4 anchors. (In succession to slow down the ship. Cut the ropes when they threaten to break up the ship.
- Sailors plot to escape the ship on the skiff, but Paul spots this and tells Julius.
- They all must be on the ship. ????
- They throw away the skiff. There is only one way out of this. And that is to do it the way God said to do it. Paul has to believe this or he wouldn't have taken away some of the men's chance to save their lives. Paul's faith, in this instance has to save all of them. But the men have also come to have some measure of faith in Paul and his God. Julius asserts his authority, based on what Paul said. (credibility)
- Our behavior speaks volumes, especially in a catastrophe. Paul isn't freaking out or acting a fool. He is calm. Think of Jesus sleeping in the boat when the storm hits the disciples while they're fishing. Paul is imaging.

33 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. 34 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." 35 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. 36 Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. 37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. 38 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

- Paul feeds and encourages the men. May have been too sick to eat.
- "Not a hair will fall from your heads.
- He prayed over the meal with them all. It is safe to say that at this point, the men were eager to go along with anything Paul said. He was now seen as credible.
- 276; gematria? The sum for -----.
- They now throw out what cargo was is left on the ship.

39 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. 40 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. 41 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.

42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. 43 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, 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

- They see a beach and attempt to run aground there, but can't make it happen. They hit some rocks, catching the bow of the ship, which allows the stern to begin breaking up.
- The other Roman soldiers want to kill the prisoners, fearing they might escape. (penalty for allowing prisoners under your control to escape was you had to do their time or death.) Julius wants to save Paul so he overrules the other soldiers.

- Those that can swim, swim. Those that can't, grab a plank and float.
- The million dollar question: **“Can Paul swim or did he have to grab a plank?”**
- Everyone makes it to shore. No one dies.

Questions:

1. What if Paul hadn't been on the ship? He gave good advice even though he wasn't a sailor. He wasn't blinded by getting paid for the cargo. He was focused on getting to his destination in order to complete his mission. Pursuing God's will, takes you further and gets you there much safer than ordinary human motivations.
2. What if Julius hadn't been there for Paul? This man saved Paul's life as well as others. We all need others in order to safely reach our destination on earth. God moves through others, even unbelievers, in order to further His plans for us.
3. Why did all this have to happen in the first place? Can't we say, at the very least it was bad timing? It was bad timing, as far as shipping went. Everyone, with the exception of Paul was blinded by worldly pursuits. Paul saw past that and was willing to wait in order to get to Rome safely. Paul knew that God

doesn't get in a hurry. Paul prayed and trusted God, but he also made rational decisions, knowing God was in the mix. The blend of God's will getting done and personal decisions is one that we all think about, but in the end, we have to know God is there. The ups and downs that come in our lives are sometimes our own doing, sometimes they are brought about by decisions others make. Sometimes God intervenes directly and sometimes it seems He doesn't. But for the person of faith, we have to know He is there assuring His will is done. We don't always know what all that entails. And that is where faith has to come into the picture.

4. How did the timing of all this fit into God's plan and what came of it? Had Paul, a man of faith, moving in God's will not been on board the ship, I think it is safe to say that the ship would have sailed anyway. And the result of that would have been that people would have died, both from the shipwreck and the fact that the Roman soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to insure no one would escape. The sailors most likely would have escaped on the skiff leaving the others to die.

5. What came of all this? When they finally reached land, people were ministered to; people were healed, and evangelized. The name of YHWH was spread throughout the island. Julius got to see God at work through an unassuming man, as did everyone else.
6. What does all this mean to us? Everyone has shipwrecks in life. If we are walking with God, moving in faith, in His program for us, then there is no limit to who and how many we can affect positively. We literally have no idea how all that can and will work out for God's glory. But the important point is that we move in faith, keeping focused on the end-goal. That was Paul's modus operandi in all things. Even when he didn't know what was about to happen, he saw the end of the journey and pressed forward in faith. This is our example.

We are told how things will end, but we aren't given all the details, if any, about how things will work out between points A and B. The same that went for Abraham, (GO!) and Paul, are the same that goes for us. Walk in the faith that God has a plan for each of us. Seek that plan and continue forward in faith, even if you don't

know what that plan is. God will step in, in His timing. We walk by faith and not by sight.