

Paul's Trip to Rome (Acts 27:1-44)
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Introduction

1. Luke writes this 27th chapter in the form of a classic Greek odyssey.
2. Luke had an expert knowledge of sailing. He uses no less than 14 technical sailing terms in this section and describes 3 different kinds of ships.
3. The primary lesson of this chapter is how the providence of God is illustrated in Paul's life.
 - a. Early in his ministry, Paul revisited new churches, *"strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22).
 - b. Indeed, it was "many tribulations" that characterized Paul's life and ministry. These were not the idle words of an ivory-tower preacher.
4. Jesus informed Paul that he must appear in Rome to testify of Jesus (Acts 23:11).
 - a. Jesus did not tell Paul that he would be detained by Felix, the Roman proconsul in Caesarea, for two whole years for no apparent reason.
 - b. Jesus did not tell him he would go to Rome as a prisoner.
 - c. Neither did He warn him that the trip would be extremely difficult and dangerous.
5. This passage resembles a trial, a trial of nature in which a criminal escapes human prosecutors but is caught and punished by the gods.

That Paul survived his test by sea with the help of his God would impress Gentile observers. It would have great significance in preparing them for the gospel of Christ.

I. Sailing: from Caesarea to Fair Havens (vv. 1-12)

1. Embarking on the trip (vv. 1-4)
 - a. Paul and some other prisoners were placed in the custody of a centurion of the Augustan cohort, Julius.
 - b. They boarded an Adramyttium vessel from Mysia, a coastal ship, port-hopping back to Asia Minor.
 - c. Another passenger was Aristarchus from Thessalonica (Acts 19:29; 20:4; Col. 4:10).
 - d. They put to sea, and the next day they stopped in Sidon. Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to visit the brethren and be cared for by them (v. 4).
2. Encountering the first difficulties (vv. 5-8).
 - a. Contrary winds made sailing difficult, forcing the ship leeward (under the shelter or north) of Cyprus. (1)
 - b. Arriving at Myra, the centurion located another much larger grain ship bound for Italy.
 - c. This leg was difficult sailing and after many days they arrived off Cnidus.
 - d. Unable to bring the ship into the wind, they coasted off-course coming to Fair Havens.

3. Difficult decisions (vv. 9-12)

- a. Many weeks passed, and it was already past the “Fast” (Day of Atonement, the first of October).
- b. Paul sought to advise them to winter at Fair Havens because to continue would place both cargo and passengers in jeopardy.
- c. Against Paul’s advice, Julius listened to the ship’s pilot and its owner.
- d. Because Fair Havens was neither fair nor a proper haven, the “majority” chose to try to make harbor at Phoenix on the west end of Crete.

II. *Eurakylōn*, a Dreaded Storm at Sea (vv. 13-38)

1. In the providence of God, Paul’s advice was rejected.

- a. The majority choice, at first, seemed to be working out. Gentle winds encouraged their decision to try for Phoenix harbor.
- b. Too soon, they encountered a fierce storm—a *Eurakylōn*, a northeaster dreaded by Greek sailors because of its supernatural portent.

While Christians and Jews would not notice any supernatural importance to this storm, the pagan Gentiles will definitely take notice. Paul was exonerated of any crime or wrong-doing in several human courts. Now the Lord desires that Paul also be exonerated in the court of nature—the court of the gods, opening the way for Paul to preach the gospel of grace to those who might otherwise turn a deaf and disinterested ear.

- c. No longer was the ship under control. It was at the mercy of the wind, pushing them south past the small island of C[*l*]auda.

2. The crew began to act with drastic measures to survive the storm (vv. 16-19).

- a. They secured the ship’s boat (v. 16).
- b. They sought to undergird the bow with special ropes (v. 17).
- c. They lowered the sea anchor to slow the ship, fearing they might hit the Syrtis sandbars (v. 17).
- d. They began to lighten the ship by casting its cargo overboard (v. 18).
- e. Finally, they jettisoned the ship’s tackle (v. 19).

3. When the hope of surviving the storm was gone, Paul sought to bring some hope to the sailors (vv. 20-26).

- a. He reminded them of his unheeded caution.
- b. He informed them that there would be no loss of life but only the ship because God granted the lives of all to Paul’s care.
- c. He challenged all to take heart because Paul trusted God that it would happen as he was told it would.
- d. He told them that they would run aground.

4. When half a month passed, at midnight, the crew sensed that land was near (vv. 27-38).

- a. They began to take soundings to confirm their suspicions.

- b. Fearing that they might strike submerged rocks, they let down the four anchors.
- c. Some sailors plotted to escape in the ship's boat, but Paul warned the centurion. They were stopped.
- d. At dawn, Paul urged them to take food and courage.

III. Shipwreck at Malta (vv. 39-44)

1. The crew hoped to run the ship onto the sandy beach on the island of Malta. (6)
 - a. They cast the anchors and raised a small sail to carry them onto the sand.
 - b. However, an unseen reef stopped the ship and the wind and surge began to break it apart.
2. Realizing that the prisoners might escape, the soldiers were ready to put them to death, but the centurion, to save Paul, prevented them.
3. All were ordered to abandon ship and make for shore however they could.

Application

1. Why should we believe that "much tribulation" is no longer God's means to entering the kingdom?
2. No matter how difficult or hopeless our situation may seem, God's sovereign providence keeps everything under His complete control.
3. Trials test our faith and perseverance.
4. Tribulation reveals God's greatness and faithfulness for His glory and our good.

