

## PAUL' JOURNEY TO ROME (Acts 27:1 – 28:14)

Following his appearance before King Agrippa, Paul embarked on his perilous prison journey to Rome. He had already set his mind on this trip (Acts 19:21; Rom. 1:10,13), and the Lord had assured him it would happen (Acts 23:11).

By this time, Luke had rejoined him (“we”, v.1 ... the first since 21:18, when the imprisonment began), and also Aristarchus, a Macedonian who lived in Thessalonica (cf. 19:29). Together they set sail for Rome, such was their devotion and commitment to Paul. They were also accompanied by certain other prisoners (v.1), in the custody of the centurion Julius. He belonged to a special unit named after the emperor Augustus, whose original responsibility was to ensure grain was brought to soldiers throughout the empire. Gradually, their duties also included spying, and transporting important political prisoners and personalities back and forth to Rome.

They sailed out of Caesarea, and along the coast and to Sidon, seventy miles northwards (v.2,3). There, Julius treated Paul ‘courteously’ (v.3, φιλανθρώπως), granting him permission to meet with his *friends* and to allow them to *refresh* him. The word (τυγχάνω) indicates Paul was unwell and needed care. He has been a prisoner for over two years, and the Roman centurion allowed the Christians in Sidon to help ‘build him up’, in preparation for the long journey.

When they sailed out of Sidon, they kept close to the coast because of winds and choppy seas, sailing off the tip of north-western Cyprus and then northwards and along the southern coastline of Lycia, to huge harbour of Myra. There they transferred to a larger ship (v.6), from Alexandria, Egypt, which had grain as its main cargo, destined for Rome. Altogether, on board were 276 people (v. 37).

As they sailed into the westerly winds, they could only gather little speed (v.7). They continued along the southern coastline, sailing past Cnidus for it was too dangerous to enter the harbour. They went along the north of Rhodes, and then south-westerly to Crete. To avoid the more boisterous winds, they sailed towards Salmone on the eastern side of Crete, but they could not dock there either. They then hugged the southern coastline of the island arriving in the small ‘pokey’ harbour of Fair Havens, half-ways along (v.8). The problem was though, it was far too exposed to the winter winds (v.9) ... and also, they had missed the Day of Atonement festival, so Paul gives them very practical advice that if they proceed, shipwreck was inevitable (v.10).

However, Julius the centurion had a strict schedule to keep, and he chose to believe the captain and the owner of the ship (v.11). Also, the harbour of Fair Haven had

nothing to commend itself for a long winter stay and the majority decided to sail another forty miles to the more suitable and comfortable haven of Phenice, and winter there (v.12). So, they decided to leave Fair Haven. ... They sailed out of the harbour and into a southerly blowing wind, - it was warm and blowing softly ... quite pleasant (v.13). They were glad they listened to the captain and the master of the ship, rather than heeding Paul.

About twenty-three miles out from Fair Haven, the force of the wind changed, - known as Euroclydon, - blowing ferociously from the 'north east', and the ship was blown off course and out of control. They were at the mercy of the waves for they had to let the ship sail itself (v. 14,15)! They ran aground on a small island off the coast of Crete called Claudia where they managed to gain some control and repaired some of the ship's damage (v.16). They had to be extremely careful they would not crash into a reef or sail onto the beach. The wind was blowing mightily so they dropped the anchor to hopefully gain some measure of control (v.17). They were heading towards a disaster for the following day the ship continued to be violently battered by the storm. In fact, on the second day, the sailors began to throw some of their precious cargo overboard, and on the third day *we* were helping them (v.18,19)! ... To complicate the situation even more, the skies were so full of cloud during the days and nights the experienced captain and his sailors could not see the sun or stars (or moon), and they feared the ship would sink and they would all be drowned (v.20)!

They were frightened, tired, confused, and hungry (v.21, abstinence, fasting). They did not know where they were! Paul, though, had been assured in Jerusalem God would bring him to Rome (23:11) ... and no wind or storm would prevent the Divine will. And in the midst of the great panic, Paul stood up and addressed them, - they did not listen to him before (v.10), but they are listening to him now! He told them "I told you so! We should not have left Crete, and we should not be in this predicament!" (v.21) ... He has their attention and respect now. Instead of lambasting them, he encouraged them, <sup>22</sup> And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. ... How could he be so sure? ... Because an angel sent from God had appeared to him and told him so, <sup>24</sup> For there stood by me this night the angel of *God, whose I am, and whom I serve*, and the angel repeated God's promise how he would be spared to stand before Caesar, and, lo, *God hath given thee* all them that sail with thee. ... God said it and I believe it!

The storm did not leave them immediately though, <sup>27</sup> we were driven up and down in *Adria [the central Mediterranean Sea]*. Altogether they were out on the sea fourteen long and harrowing days and nights.

And what a preaching opportunity he had for he told those godless sailors and everyone present, <sup>25</sup> Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for *I believe God*, that it shall be even as it was told me. <sup>26</sup> Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island. ... Even though the captain and his officers did not know where they were, God was keeping them on course for He was in control and would bring them through the storm. ... When the sailors did their calculations, they concluded they were approaching land (v.28). However, they were again frightened they might hit the rocks. Pandemonium ensued, with shades of mutiny and thoughts of abandoning the ship (v.29,30), but Paul told the centurion to order his men to remain on board for it was the only way they would survive ... and the centurion and his soldiers obeyed the command of their prisoner, Paul (v.31,32).

He is in control again as he instructs the whole ship's company to eat and build up their strength for they will soon be on dry land (v.33,34). Even this, he used as an occasion for God's glory, <sup>35</sup> And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and *gave thanks to God in presence of them all*. and when he had broken it, he began to eat. ... And joy broke out upon the ship's company, all 276 of them (v.36,37), and what they no longer needed, - and had been ruined by the sea water entering the cargo hold, - they cast overboard (v.38).

Early the next morning they saw land. They did not know where it was, but it was a truly welcome sight. They entered the bay ("St. Paul's Bay", Bugibba, Qawra, Malta ... 'Malta' means 'honey-sweet' or 'haven', 'port') and decided to run the ship up onto the beach, close to a creek (v.39). After running the ship aground *firmly* (v.40,41), it was not in any state to go further. Now though, the soldiers were frightened if they lost their prisoners they would be punished by death so, instead, they decided the best course of action was to kill them all, including Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus (v.42). However, the commander, - no doubt, realising his gratitude to Paul and Paul's God, - contradicted the soldiers and told them to jump overboard into the shallow waters and swim the few yards to the beach ... and so they did (v. 43,44). ... And all 276 who sailed out of Clauda over a fortnight earlier and 476 miles away, all arrived safe to land (v.44).

God was with them in the storm and now on the land for instead of meeting more opposition, they discovered the local Maltese people were excited and delighted to see them, <sup>28:2</sup> And the barbarous people *Inatives* shewed us no little *extraordinary* kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. ... They could not have been any more welcoming and hospitable! ... God was again showing His kindness as He kept His faithful servants, and also the rest of the 276 unexpected visitors. ... The wind has been

blowing, it has been continual torrential rain, and they are all soaked but the fire was lit, and they gathered round it to ‘dry off’.

While they were all warming themselves, Paul’s goes off and finds some more firewood. This time he did not order the soldiers or anyone else, but he did it himself (v.3), his humility. As he was laying the sticks on the fire, <sup>3</sup> there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. ... It was poisonous, and the local Maltese people reckoned Paul must have been a bad man, - a murderer, - for even though he had escaped the storms on the sea, he was now receiving his just deserts, as applied by this venomous and deadly viper (v.4). However, he shook it off and it fell into the fire ... He did not swell up with the poison or drop down dead ... and the people changed their minds about Paul being a murderer and concluded he was a god (v. 5-7). However, Paul acted swiftly to dispel any such notion. ... Once again, God had saved Paul to go to Rome!

Living in that region of the island was its pagan leader, who had a Roman name, Publius (‘popular’). For the following three days (v.7), he hosted Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus in his home. During that time Publius’ father took seriously ill with a gastric fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, and after prayer and the laying on of hands, he was healed. (Tradition claims Publius became a Christian, established a church, and became the first pastor on the island). Following this miracle, Paul was inundated with others who came seeking healing (v. 9), and when he left after remaining on the island for three months (v.11), - no doubt, having preached the Gospel faithfully, - they received many honours <sup>10</sup> and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.

They boarded another ship from Alexandria bound for Italy. This ship had the figures of Castor and Pollux, - the patron idols of navigation, - on their stern. They sailed the sixty miles from Malta to the southern tip of Sicily, entering the harbour at Syracuse, and remained there for three days (v. 12) ... during which Paul undoubtedly would have used the opportunity for the Gospel. From there they sailed out of Syracuse to Rhegium, on the southernmost tip of Italy, as another storm from the south was brewing (v.13). Over a day later they arrived in the city of Puteoli, in the Bay of Naples. This was where the transport ships brought their grain from Alexandria. Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus remained for a week in Puteoli and then travelled about 115 miles by foot to Rome. ... As God had promised Paul in the prison back in Jerusalem, <sup>23:11</sup> Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. ... *God always keeps His word!*