



The Book of Acts - Chapter Twenty Seven

Summary of Chapter Twenty Seven

It was now probably the autumn of AD59. Having appealed to Cæsar, Paul was taken by the centurion Julius, a member of the emperor's cohort, on board a ship at Cæsarea; he travelled with Luke, Aristarchus, other soldiers, their prisoners and the rest of the ship's company. They initially sailed north to Sidon, where Julius graciously allowed Paul to stay with friends before rejoining the ship to continue the voyage. They followed the Turkish coastline until they came to Myra in Lycia, where they boarded a larger Alexandrian vessel bound for Rome. The ship then sailed as far as southern Crete, where Paul suggested they should spend the winter, but the ship's captain and owners decided to sail on.

Although the weather was set fair when they sailed, they soon found themselves battling to save the ship in a hurricane force wind and surging seas. They tried everything humanly possible but were at a loss to do more, and it seemed that, as the ship was driven relentlessly onward, the ship and all those aboard would be lost. After about two weeks of this, Paul had a vision from an angel of the Lord, who stated that Paul and all those aboard the ship would survive but the ship itself and its cargo would be lost.

Around midnight, the sailors, by taking depth soundings, realised they were approaching land and decided to take their chances in the sea, but Paul realised this and informed the centurion, who stopped them. Paul then advised them that they would need something to eat in order to have the strength and energy they would need for what lay ahead. As dawn broke, they saw land and tried to steer the ship to a sandy bay, but the ship's bow stuck on a sandbar. The relentless sea soon destroyed the stern of the ship. The Roman soldiers, as was their custom, were going to kill all the prisoners to prevent their escape but the centurion intervened, and so everyone had to jump into the sea. Those who could swim were told to make for the island, while the others were to cling to the ship's debris and allow the sea to wash them ashore.

XI Acts 27:1-28:31 - The Witness in Rome

The last two chapters of Acts are devoted mainly to Paul's journey to Rome. The first part of the story sees a dramatic shipwreck on the island of Malta, a place where the Gospel had not yet been preached. God would not leave himself without witness. Following their overwinter stay, they moved on to Rome, where Paul followed his usual pattern by beginning with the Jews, then turning to all who would come and listen to his message. The story of Paul, and indeed the 1st Century apostles work ends with Luke's final accounts, although the epilogue to Chapter 28 may indicate otherwise.

XI.a Acts 27:1-44 - Paul journeys to Rome by sea

The voyage to Rome, which almost certainly began in the autumn of AD59, is recorded in great detail by Luke, and with remarkable exactness, consistent with what is otherwise known about sea travel at that time and in that region. Clearly, this is an eyewitness account. The key theme of the story is God's providence, especially in preserving Paul for his Roman testimony. At a literary level, this dramatic story is told to indicate how far and difficult the journey to Rome was, as the Gospel headed toward the ends of the earth. There is also a lot in it about the human character that we can all learn from.



The map shows full route Paul took from Cæsarea to Puteoli and then on to Rome.

XI.a.i Acts 27:1-12 - Paul sails for Rome

Festus finally sent Paul to Rome, probably in the autumn of AD59 and under the guard of a centurion. Paul, accompanied by his companions Luke and Aristarchus, were taken aboard a ship at Cæsarea. They sailed to Sidon, where Paul stayed with friends, before continuing their epic voyage. They would follow the Syrian, Cilician and Lycian coastlines before crossing over to the island of Crete.

¹ When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.

Acts 27:1

Note the we, which indicates Luke's presence with Paul all the way to Rome. The last 'we' is found at Acts 28:16 <<**When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him**>>. Although we do know that Luke remained Paul's constant companion until the very end, as Paul indicates in his final epistle: <<**Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry**>> (2 Timothy 4:11).

Paul was shipped with other prisoners, reminiscent of the two thieves with Jesus. The innocent was again numbered with the transgressors.

The centurion belonged to the Imperial Regiment or Augustus' Cohort, see comments made on Acts 10:1 concerning relevant Roman military structure.

² We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

Acts 27:2

We boarded a ship. To get to Rome they must travel by sea, just as the Romans did to invade Palestine in the first place, fulfilling the prophecy of Numbers 24:24 <<*Ships will come from the shores of Kittim; they will subdue Asshur and Eber, but they too will come to ruin*>>, where Kittim was Italy, Asshur was the forefather of Assyria (Genesis 10:22), and Eber the forefather of the Hebrews (Genesis 10:25).

The ship from Adramyttium was probably a small coasting vessel, not adequate for the open-sea voyage to Rome. Adramyttium was a large port city of Mysia in the province of Asia Minor, opposite the island of Lesbos.

Aristarchus, along with Gaius, was taken by the Ephesian mob into the theatre (Acts 19:29), and since then seems to have been Paul's frequent companion, travelling from Corinth to Jerusalem with him as part of the escort bringing the offerings of the churches in Greece and Asia, see Acts 20:4. He also is referred to in Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24, as well as here.

Some commentators think Trophimus was with Paul as well but then left the ship at Miletum due to illness (2 Timothy 4:20), but this is almost certainly a reference to his 4th missionary journey after Paul's release from Rome in the early 60's AD.

³ The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.

Acts 27:3

The friends of Paul were the Christians of Sidon: <<*And from thence he arose, and went away into the borders of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered into a house, and would have no man know it; and he could not be hid*>> (Mark 7:24 ASV).

Julius was very respectful of Paul and trusted him to be free in Sidon and to stay with his friends there, while the ship was unloaded and replenished. Paul, as it was important for his Christian witness, honoured his word and did not try to escape, but returned to the ship in time for its sailing. Paul's guard Julius showed him deference throughout the voyage.

Men like Paul and Joseph were recognised as special by the jailers and treated accordingly: <<*He caused them to be pitied by all who held them captive*>> (Psalm 106:46), although it was more respect than pity.

Provide for his needs. As well as his physical and material needs for the journey, Paul would be greatly encouraged by spending time in prayer and fellowship with the church.

⁴ From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us.

Acts 27:4

Under the lee refers to sailing under shelter; they were protected by the island from the contrary winds, which means they sailed round to the north of the island.

The winds prevented the ship from taking a direct route and had to tack around to the north of Cyprus. We too, in the winds of life, have to make the best forward progress as we keep getting blown off course, caught in the storms of life, or find ourselves in the Doldrums. Whatever the weather, the journey's end is the same place for those who persevere.

⁵ When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board.

Acts 27:5-6

Cilicia, Pamphylia, and Lycia were districts along the southern coast of what today is Turkey. Myra was directly north of Alexandria and would have been a good stopping place for the ship that was sailing for Italy, probably carrying Egyptian grain or luxury spices and gems from the Far East that would have been imported into the Red Sea ports of Egypt.

Alexandrian ships were frequent visitors to Rome as they brought corn from Egypt to Italy and also exported goods from the Far East that were imported into the Red Sea ports. They had special status in Roman ports and were the only ships of a foreign nation that were permitted to sail into port without striking their sails.

⁷ We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone.

Acts 27:7

The normal route from Myra to Rome would have taken them south of Rhodes and north of Crete to Sicily. They were already well off course when they reached Cnidus on the southwestern tip of Asia, i.e. Turkey, and even more so when they had to seek shelter on the southern side of Crete i.e. its lee from the north-easterly wind.

Some commentators say that Paul had proclaimed the Gospel in Crete and knew the area well: <<*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you*>> (Titus 1:5), but once again it seems more likely this occurred after his first imprisonment in Rome, as there is no mention in Acts of Paul visiting Crete with Titus, and such a major ministry would almost certainly have been of interest to Luke to include in his narrative.

⁸ We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

Acts 27:8

The precise location of Fair Havens is uncertain, though there is a town on the southern coast of Crete with that name today, probably close to the ancient site.

Paul's ship eventually made it to Fair Havens on the southern coast of Crete. As can be seen from the second image, it offered little shelter and would have been uncomfortable to spend the winter in the ship but it would have been preferable to what would occur!



The likely location of Fair Havens



Fair Havens bay as it is today

A fair haven is a beautiful place to be; a place of peace and tranquillity, a place where we are in most danger: <<They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven>> (Psalm 107:30), but this life is not a desired haven and certainly not a safe haven; the journey must always continue.

Their journey then became tedious with little progress made.

⁹ Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. So Paul warned them, ¹⁰ “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.”

Acts 27:9-10

The Fast refers to the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, which occurs on 10 Tishrei in the Jewish calendar, i.e. mid-September to mid-October, when Mediterranean voyages became too dangerous for sailing vessels. Despite the poor harbour at Fair Havens, Paul’s advice was that they should stay put for the winter months.

The Day of Atonement, see Leviticus Chapter 16, was an annual ceremony where the high priest was to place all the sins of Israel onto the scapegoat and have it released into the desert. It was the only time when all Jewish men were required to fast, although the Pharisees would often fast more than once a week, as the Pharisee had boasted to God in the temple: <<I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get>> (Luke 18:12).

Paul recommended they proceed no further but little heed was made of him. The centurion went with the pilot and owner of the ship, who wanted to make further progress before winter set in. Their main consideration was economic, but Paul warned them against it. He was a seasoned traveller but his warning may have been prophetic and divine, although the loss of life warning was inaccurate if that were the case. The consequences for the ship and its owner would be dire and they would certainly have perished had not Paul been onboard, as Jesus still had work for him to do in Rome.

¹¹ But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship.

Acts 27:11

Instead of listening to Paul. Many people show great respect for Christ’s ministers but pay little heed to their words, this even applies to some members of their own churches. But this is nothing new: <<My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen

to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain>> (Ezekiel 33:31).

The pilot was the ship's captain.

¹² Since the harbour was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbour in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

Acts 27:12

The majority probably means the majority of the senior crew members, i.e. ships officers.

Phoenix, Greek phoinix, which means palm tree or date-palm, may be the modern Phineka Bay, which is on the south-western coast of Crete. The image shows how the mountains would afford shelter for the harboured ships below.



XI.a.ii Acts 27:13-26 - The storm

Against Paul's advice, they set sail again in fair weather, but this soon changed and they

found themselves trapped in the teeth of a hurricane. They did all that was humanly possible to save the ship but that was not enough and only divine intervention could save them now. That is just what happened. One night, after they had gone without food for many days, and had not seen the light of the sun, for the storm was so fierce, an angel of the Lord appeared to Paul and told him that not only he, but all those with him would be saved, but that the ship would be lost in a shipwreck on an island.

The wind Euroclydon was probably the same tempestuous storm from the northeast that struck Jonah's ship. But Jonah was running away from God and was thus in danger; Paul was on God's mission and therefore was protected: <<**He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses**>> (Psalm 135:7), <<**lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding**>> (Psalm 148:8), and: <<**They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away**>> (Psalm 107:26).

¹³ When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete.

¹⁴ Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster," swept down from the island.

Acts 27:13-14

They had obtained what they wanted. We do not know how close they came to reaching a safe haven before the storm struck them but God had warned them, through Paul, not to sail but they heeded him not.

The wind is described as hurricane force or tempestuous, Greek typhōnikos, and the storm is called in Greek the eurakylōn. The Greek is based on euros, east wind, and akylō, north wind, hence northeaster. Such northeasters are extremely dangerous in this region, appearing suddenly with violent, whirling winds caused by a meeting of opposite air currents.

¹⁵ The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶ As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure.

Acts 27:15-16

Cauda is today known as Gozzo.

The lifeboat was a smaller vessel used to transport people from the ship to land rather than designed to accommodate all the passengers if they had to abandon ship, which is a requirement of modern ships. It had probably filled with water, as it would normally be towed to save space, and was hard to lift on deck.

¹⁷ When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along.

Acts 27:17

Ancient ships were sometimes secured during storms with ropes or cables tied around the ends or across and under the centre of the ship.

They lowered the sea anchor to help slow the ship's progress and to add stability.

The Syrtis was a sandy shoal off the North African coast with a reputation as the graveyard of ships.

¹⁸ We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹ On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

Acts 27:18-19

The jettisoned cargo may have been grain, although they clearly kept some of it, see v.38.

The jettisoned tackle may have been the beam that supported the mainsail, spare ropes, sails and other items of rigging that would help lighten the ship's load.

The crew were doing all they could to save the ship. There is always a tension between our love of worldly goods and wealth, i.e. save the ship: <<I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner>> (Ecclesiastes 5:13), and building up our eternal treasure in heaven: <<You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions>> (Hebrews 10:34).

In his sermon on the mount, Jesus instructed us: <<Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also>> (Matthew 6:19-21).

We can shipwreck our goods but not our lives, although some would rather shipwreck their faith and conscience before they would abandon their earthly wealth!

²⁰ When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

Acts 27:20

Before the advent of the compass, sailors depended for their bearings and position on the sun and stars, which were not visible in the storm. Although today's sailors have GPS, which tells them precisely where they are, day or night and in any weather, they are still trained in the ancient art of navigating by the heavenly elements. God no doubt had this in mind when he created them, see Genesis 1:16-17.

Elsewhere we read: <<That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!">> (Mark 4:35-41), which leaves us with an unanswered question: 'could Paul have stilled the storm?' It is certain that he would have been given the power to calm it, had it been God's will and had the Holy Spirit instructed him to do so.

²¹ After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss.

Acts 27:21

You should have taken my advice was probably not a haughty, censorious statement or a reprimand, but rather was intended to establish Paul's credibility as he prepared to give the crew some divinely revealed instructions (vv.22-26).

²² But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.

Acts 27:22

At Fair Havens, Paul had warned of the danger of loss of life (v.10), but that may have simply been his opinion as an experienced traveller who had already been shipwrecked three times, reflecting the potential level of risk of sailing in winter: <<*Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea*>> (2 Corinthians 11:25).

Now, however, he says that not one of you will be lost. The difference here was a revelation from God through an angel (vv.23-24).

The ship will be destroyed could perhaps be seen as a punishment against the owner and captain who would suffer financial loss for not heeding Paul's words initially, see v.11.

²³ Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴ and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Cæsar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.'

Acts 27:23-24

Whose I am and whom I serve is incontestable proof that Paul has no doubt of how a relationship with Christ has to be. It is a good definition for the word disciple, and those that choose that path are owned by Christ, as he bought them with his blood of redemption. They are more his than their own and he should be served in reverential fear: <<*He answered, "I*

am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land>> (Jonah 1:9).

Paul was told do not be afraid. Jesus seems to be forever repeating commands to fear not and not to worry, as it seems so many of his disciples wish not to obey him on this; they choose instead not to trust him and his word, but worry about things that may or may not happen.

Disciples should follow instructions, such as: <<*Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it>> (Isaiah 8:12), and should be like:* <<*The sinners in Zion are terrified; trembling grips the godless: “Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?” He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil – this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him>> (Isaiah 33:14-16).*

Must stand trial before Cæsar. See comments made on Acts 25:9-11. The ultimate reason for Paul’s deliverance was his testimony in Rome: <<*After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I have been there,” he said, “I must visit Rome also”>> (Acts 19:21), and: <<The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome”>> (Acts 23:11). Therefore, whereas Jonah’s presence on the ship threatened to destroy everyone: <<“Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” he replied, “and it will become calm. I know that it is my fault that this great storm has come upon you”>> (Jonah 1:12), Paul’s presence assured everyone’s deliverance. This would not always be the case as Paul would one day be executed once he had completed his service to his generation. This is reminiscent of David: <<*For when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed>> (Acts 13:36). Even Paul’s death would be used to further the Gospel, not hinder it.**

The angel appeared to Paul: <<*Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man’s behalf!>> (Psalm 66:5), and: <<If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea>> (Psalm 139:9). Being lost at sea did not make him lost to God: <<God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble>> (Psalm 46:1). Paul clearly never doubted his own safety as the Lord had directed him in recent years to appear before the emperor in Rome: <<The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome”>> (Acts 23:11), but this vision was also to reassure him of the safety of all the others, including his friends, whom he would have more concern about than for himself. The miraculous escape of all 276 would be a powerful testimony that Paul no doubt used during their impending, if unscheduled stay on Malta. The fact that Paul had promised this outcome would only serve to enhance that witness.*

God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you. Sometimes good men deliver many through their presence in the world, at other times only themselves: <<*as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved>> (Ezekiel 14:18). The knowledge of their safety would have been comforting to Paul to know he was such a blessing to the others. As God had promised it, so Paul had absolute belief and trust it would be so, for: <<God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfil?>> (Numbers 23:19), and God’s promises are: <<Yes and amen>> (see 2 Corinthians 1:20).*

God will often spare the wicked for the sake of the good, e.g. Zoar for Lot’s sake: <<*Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it – it is very small,*

isn't it? Then my life will be spared.” He said to him, “Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not overthrow the town you speak of. But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar)>> (Genesis 19:20-21), and Sodom might have been saved for the sake of 10 righteous men, or even less if Abraham had kept pressing God for further grace: <<Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten can be found there?” He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it”>> (Genesis 18:32).

²⁵ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶ Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”

XI.a.iii Acts 27:27-44 - The shipwreck

The nightmare was coming to an end. The sailors could tell they were heading for land. They were all for abandoning the ship rather than facing a shipwreck but Paul got the Romans to prevent this. As dawn approached, Paul instructed them to eat and gave thanks to God while doing so. The sailors tried to steer the ship to the island but the bow struck on a sandbar and the stern was soon smashed by the ferocious power of the sea. The Romans would have killed the prisoners but the centurion stopped them, and instructed everyone to make for the island, which they did safely, under the Lord's providence.

²⁷ On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸ They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep.

Acts 27:27-28

The Adriatic Sea was not just in the Gulf between Italy and the Balkans but included the Ionian Sea and all the way across the Mediterranean Sea to the coast of Libya.

About midnight the sailors, took soundings that showed the sea was becoming shallower beneath them, an indication that they were approaching nearby land.

²⁹ Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.

Acts 27:29

The rocks. The location was probably the rocky promontory on the north-eastern coast of Malta, known today as Point Koura.

Ancient ships had multiple anchors; the four anchors from the stern would keep the ship steady and facing toward land.

Prayed for daylight. It is not known if they prayed to Paul's God or one of their own. Anyway, the arrival of daylight would increase their chances of survival.

³⁰ In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.

Acts 27:30

The sailors were seeking to escape. They knew they were nearing land, so they decided to take the ship's only small boat and get themselves safely to shore. But such a selfish action would have left no one on the ship with the skill to handle it, normally leading to much loss of life. So Paul warned the centurion of the sailors' plan, and he stopped them (vv.31-32). Paul's

actions shows the compatibility of divine sovereignty with human responsibility (vv.22-24). God will fulfil his promises, but that doesn't negate the importance of human actions as the means God uses to carry out his promises, see comments made on Acts 18:9-11.

³¹ Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.

Acts 27:31-32

The crew had a responsibility for their passengers, yet they would wilfully abandon them and the ship to protect their own safety, just like the hired hand, who was not the true shepherd in John 10:12, would abandon the flock as soon as the wolf showed up. Paul thwarted their plans as he had probably also been instructed that everyone must remain on the ship, so Paul told the centurion what the crew planned. Paul gave a clear command **unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved**, yet it was not the skill of the seamen but the will of God that would save them. This leaves us with an enigma. Perhaps Paul was speaking out of prudence rather than prophetically.

God had promised him that all would survive providing all stayed with the ship. There might be a message in that for churches today for the need to stick together if they expect God to deliver.

³³ Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food – you haven't eaten anything.

Acts 27:33

Paul urged them all to eat. The rescue was to begin at daybreak, and everyone needed **food** for maximum strength.

³⁴ Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.”

Acts 27:34

Take some food. Solomon wrote: <<Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel>> (Proverbs 27:9), just as Paul was here to the ship's company. They had not eaten for 14 days: <<My heart is blighted and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food>> (Psalm 102:4). As with everything else, we are charged to be good stewards of our bodies: <<God gives a man wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil>> (Ecclesiastes 6:2), and: <<Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own>> (1 Corinthians 6:19). Elijah had to eat to enable him to make the journey God instructed him to undertake: <<The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, “Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you”>> (1 Kings 19:7), so too the ship's company would need strength to come to shore safely, even though God had promised: <<But not a hair of your head will perish>> (Luke 21:18). Through their fear they had had no appetite: <<so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal>> (Job 33:20).

You will not lose a single hair from his head: <<But the men said to Saul, “Should Jonathan die – he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the Lord lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God's

help.” So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death>> (1 Samuel 14:45), <<She said, “Then let the king invoke the Lord his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed.” “As surely as the Lord lives,” he said, “not one hair of your son’s head will fall to the ground”>> (2 Samuel 14:11), <<Solomon replied, “If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die”>> (1 Kings 1:52), <<And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered>> (Matthew 10:30), <<Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows>> (Luke 12:7), and: <<But not a hair of your head will perish>> (Luke 21:18).

³⁵ After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.

Acts 27:35

Paul’s giving thanks and breaking bread was not a celebration of the Lord’s Supper but a testimony to his faith in the God who was about to deliver them. It was right that Paul gave thanks to God so publically, and to do so before they were safe, as it would strengthen his subsequent proclamation of the Gospel, and also show his own genuine faith and trust in God for all things: <<They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer>> (1 Timothy 4:3-5), not that we ever need any specific reason to praise God and to give thanks. It may have been long-lasting sea biscuits rather than bread they ate, but we should still remember: <<He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD>> (Deuteronomy 8:3).

³⁶ They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷ Altogether there were 276 of us on board.

Acts 27:36-37

The number of 276 passengers was not too great for large grain ships, which were up to 100 feet or 31 m long.

³⁸ When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

Acts 27:38

Throwing the grain into the sea indicates they clearly did not dump all their cargo earlier, unless this just refers to sufficient grain kept for their food during the voyage, which seems less likely. See comments on vv.18-19.

³⁹ When daylight came, they did not recognise the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.

Acts 27:39

Although other locales on Malta have been suggested, the traditional site of Paul’s shipwreck is known as St. Paul’s Bay; it has a sandy beach on the western side. See the image.



⁴⁰ Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach.

Acts 27:40

The ship's rudders would have been pulled out of the water and tied down during the storm but were now placed back in the water to steer the ship.

The foresail, Greek artemōn, was a small sail in the bow to guide a ship.

The sailors did everything they could to bring the ship to safety: freeing the rudder to steer the ship, losing the sea anchors to aid mobility, and hoisting the foresail to provide power, but still the ship's bow stuck fast and the stern was soon crushed by the mighty power of the sea smashing into it. God through Paul had said the ship would be lost and no human endeavour could overcome that: <<*This is what the Lord says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God*>> (Isaiah 44:6).

⁴¹ But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

Acts 27:41

The bow stuck fast on a sandbar, a known hazard around islands like Malta, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding surf. This was due to the enormous forces of the sea relentlessly battering the ship from its rear. This was invariably the most dangerous part of any shipwreck as the seas around the ship would be seething and the forces far stronger than even the strongest of swimmers.

⁴² The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.

Acts 27:42

Once again Paul's presence assured the deliverance of the others, this time the other prisoners. The soldiers feared the escape of the prisoners because they were accountable for them with their own lives, something we saw when Peter was led out of prison in Jerusalem by the angel of the Lord: <<*After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed*>> (Acts 12:19a).

⁴³ But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴ The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

Acts 27:43-44

Roman soldiers learned to swim as part of their military training and Julius Cæsar was a famous swimmer in his time. Julius the centurion would have some of his men swim ashore first and then let all the ship's company go ashore: those who could swim should do so; the rest should

look for ship's debris to cling to and allow the tidal flow to wash them ashore. The soldiers would already be on the beach to ensure prisoners were immediately held in custody. Any that were then lost would be assumed drowned and there would be no retribution against the soldiers for their loss.

They had reached their desired haven: <<*They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men*>> (Psalm 107:30-31).

So they all came to safety, just as God had promised Paul.