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Acts 27:1 - 28:10



Acts - Steve Gregg

In "Acts 27:1-28:10," Steve Gregg recounts the adventurous ship voyage of Paul from Caesarea to Rome, detailing a storm, shipwreck, and stay on the island of Malta. Despite initial reluctance towards the chapter's perceived dullness, Gregg finds it to be an engaging and perilous narrative underscored by the danger and difficulty of the sea journey. From Paul's warnings and angelic visions to his miraculous healings and flourishing relationships with locals, Acts 27-28 offers a compelling account of faith, perseverance, and divine intervention.

Transcript

Okay, we're coming to now the 27th chapter of Acts. There are only 28, and I will confess to you that for most of my life, I have felt that the book of Acts is really exciting up through about chapter 26. And then it was my impression that it kind of fizzles out after that, because most of what remains, chapters 27 and most of 28, simply describes Paul's travel.

Not so much activity, but just getting from one place to another place. The entirety of chapter 27 records his ship voyage from Caesarea, where he's been in prison for two years, to Rome, where he's going to be in prison for another two years. But the trip from Caesarea to Rome by sea is given in considerable detail in chapter 27.

But since I have to admit, since I am not extremely well acquainted with the geography of the region and the sites mentioned, nor my very knowledgeable nautical terms and seafaring experience, I've never really connected too much with chapter 27. It just has looked to me in many cases like a very long chapter, a tedious chapter, that just names a whole bunch of places I'm not familiar with and makes reference to several maritime experiences that I've never experienced and don't know much about. And for that reason, I've always thought this second to the last chapter of Acts kind of loses a lot of the momentum of the building story that has built up into chapter 26.

And then at the end of chapter 28, we get some dialogue of interest and importance so that we at least, you know, the book finally recovers its interesting features before it

ends just in the last several verses. That's how I always viewed it. Now, as I've been studying to teach it this time, and I've taught it before, but I've studied more this time than before, and become a little more acquainted with the details of chapter 27, I actually think it's a very exciting chapter.

I don't know why I thought it was so much of an anti-climax in the book. It is actually very adventurous. And it is necessary, of course, to read this chapter with a map handy.

Unless you're intimately familiar with the Mediterranean region and the cities and islands in the region that we read about. If you are familiar with that, you don't need a map. Just like, you know, some talk about a tour through Southern California.

If you've lived in Southern California all your life, all the places mentioned would be easy to picture in your mind with or without a map. But not so with the Mediterranean for most of us. And so, as I've handed out maps, and some of you may have colored maps, unlike the one I've handed out that are even better, I think it's pretty much necessary, going through chapter 27 of Acts, to have a map handy, and to consult it frequently.

But there is an interesting and adventurous story here. And that is that when Paul appealed to Caesar his case so that he could get away from the Jews who were trying to kill him. And therefore, it was the obligation of the Roman government to ship him to Rome to see Caesar.

He had to go by ship. Unfortunately, it was not the best time of year for travel. The Day of Atonement came and went around this time, which in that year was probably around October 5th.

And that is a time of year that most sailors knew was not a good time for travel. In fact, it was considered, and Roman writers from the period have actually left record of this in writing, that after September 15th, it was considered dangerous to be on the sea. And no one sailed between October 11th and March 10th.

That period of time was considered to be too treacherous to sail, and so they just ground the ships until spring and twiddle their thumbs until the weather got better. Because the ancient ships were not, of course, as sturdy and seaworthy as modern vessels are, and they had to travel by wind, and the winds had to be favorable. Well, you could travel if the winds were not favorable, but it wouldn't be very favorable.

It was difficult, and you might not make it at all. So it was just customary to stop traveling in mid-October. No one traveled from mid-October to mid-March.

Now, already at one point in this narrative, in verse 9, Luke tells us the fast was already over. The fast refers to the Day of Atonement. And as I said, that year it's been calculated this was probably on October 5th.

So they're well past the September 15th date. In fact, it looks like they may have left Caesarea right around that date, the date after which it's considered dangerous, not unheard of, but dangerous to sail after September 15th, but you just don't sail after October 10th in that region. Now, it would appear that it was either at or slightly before September 15th that they left Caesarea.

So they were sailing at a dangerous time. And because it was a dangerous time, they didn't take the most direct route across the Mediterranean to Italy, but they intended to skirt the coast, not get very far from land, just in case, you know, in case they had to quickly come into port because of storms or whatever. And so we see them skirting the Syrian and the Cilician and the Pamphilian coast up to a point.

But at a certain point, they have to go out to sea. And when they do, they find themselves, we might say, out of their depth. And there's tremendous danger.

And they almost die. They certainly, they lose the ship. They lose all the cargo of the ship.

And the people survive, but mostly by floating on debris and flotsam, which is the wreckage of the ship. And they do make it to Malta. And it's an adventure that, you know, in the telling of it, experts on, you know, sailing have said this was written by somebody very familiar with nautical procedures and so forth.

And Luke was present on the ship. Now, Luke wasn't always present in the Book of Acts in every story, but he was in this one. Because chapter 27, one begins the last of the we sections.

He says, and when it was decided that we should sail to Italy. So Luke is now with Paul again. They delivered Paul and some of the other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan regiment.

Now the Augustan cohort, as it's called, is known from secular history to have been in Syria about this, around this time. And this was a centurion from that cohort. Remember cohort has several centuries, several hundreds of soldiers.

But one centurion named Julius is mentioned as the one who was given charge to see to it that Paul was taken safely and securely to Rome, to where he'd be imprisoned and await trial from Nero. Now this Julius, it's interesting that his name is given by Luke. Because as you read the story, it's very clear that Julius, this centurion, was very friendly to Paul.

He respected Paul's opinions about things. He didn't always follow them, but he was desirous to save Paul. There was a time when the ship was going to break up and the soldiers were going to kill all the prisoners so that they wouldn't escape.

And Julius, wanting to save Paul, forbade them to do it. And we find even that when they come to shore, Julius lets Paul go ashore and visit his friends, possibly with a soldier in attendance. But I mean, Paul's a prisoner.

And yet the centurion is very friendly toward him. And making this long journey with him. Now, by the way, people on this cruise are probably going to think warmly of each other in the future as we got close to each other for about 12 days and have made new friends and so forth.

If by any chance we suffered shipwreck and all of us survived it through an ordeal, we would have been particularly closely bonded. And so, I mean, this centurion was friendly in the beginning, but he too almost lost his life, as did Paul and the others. Everyone almost did.

And so Luke may have felt particularly close to this. He might have become like a friend in a way. And Luke therefore mentions him by name.

He doesn't always mention Roman officers by name, but Julius, the centurion, was familiar. And he speaks of him as somebody who he's acquainted with, not just somebody who's a member of the story. Now, so entering the ship, excuse me, a ship of Andromedium, Adromedium, we put to sea.

Now, Andromedium was a seaport up close to Troas on the northwestern coast of Asia Minor. The ship was from there, but it was in Caesarea. So it's probably on its way back to its home port.

And they caught ship with it. We put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. That is, they didn't want to go out into the open sea.

They wanted to hug the shoreline as much as they could to avoid danger from storms. And Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. Now, we've seen his name before in chapter 20 in verse 4. In chapter 20, verse 4, Luke had given a list of names of people from Lystra and Derbe and Thessalonica and Asia who traveled with Paul when he carried the money gift from the Gentile churches to Jerusalem.

And Aristarchus was one of the representatives from Thessalonica. Apparently, although not all those men are still with Paul, Aristarchus had remained with him and Luke and now was traveling with them. Now, Luke was certainly not a prisoner.

Luke may have been going simply as a paid fare. He may have just decided to go on the same ship because Paul was going on it. He may have paid as a passenger to go, or he might have been allowed to go as Paul's attending physician.

We don't know exactly, you know, how it is that Luke was traveling, but he was there on the ship there. Now, Aristarchus, likewise, we don't know how he was attached, whether

he was a paying passenger or not, but we do know that in Colossians, which is generally believed to have been written by Paul from Rome, in Colossians 4.10, Paul mentions Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner. So whenever Paul was in prison, and it's usually believed it was the Roman imprisonment, and whenever he wrote Colossians, Aristarchus was with him and was a fellow prisoner.

And this, since they're on the way to Rome now, it may be that Aristarchus was a prisoner at this point, and that he was traveling under guard as Paul was. If so, we have no idea how it is that he became a prisoner of Rome. He obviously was a close associate with Paul, and we have read about Paul's arrest, and Paul's, you know, the controversies against Paul, but we haven't read anything about Aristarchus getting people mad at him, and certainly since Paul committed no crime, and it was only a prisoner because of his controversial person, Aristarchus likewise had committed no crime either, but was not such a controversial person.

So why he was even there is one of those unexplained things. One of those unexplained things we'll have to live with the ignorance about, but he was traveling with them. And it says in verse 3, and the next day we landed at Sidon, which is up in Phoenicia, modern Lebanon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and to receive care.

So as they probably, the ship took on supplies or whatever at Sidon, which is 69 nautical miles from Caesarea, about a day's journey, and it was the next day they got there. Paul was allowed to go ashore and see friends, see Christians, and in all likelihood a soldier attended him, but that was pretty magnanimous of Julius to let Paul even off the ship as he's a prisoner for crying out loud, not just a tourist. So we see how kindly treated Paul was by the centurion.

Now when we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. Now normally the journey they were making, they would go west of Cyprus, and you can see that on the map. In fact, when they had come the other direction, when they were going to, I guess they were coming to Tyre from Asia on their journey the other direction a couple years earlier, they had gone west of Cyprus, which would be the normal and shortest route, but it says they were going under the shelter of Cyprus.

The winds were such that they, you know, they wanted to stay on the leeward side of the island, so they didn't get the direct winds, and so here we're seeing already that the storm is brewing. They're not out in the middle of the sea yet in danger, but weather's getting bad. It says the winds were contrary.

The winds were contrary is maybe the first indication we have that the weather's going to be bad on this trip, although we may have had a hint of it in verse 2, and it says they intended to sail up the coast of Asia. That would not be the most direct route, so there

may be a hint there that they were expecting bad weather and didn't want to get too far from shore any too early, but at this point, we see the winds are already whipping up, and we're going to see many indications of the building problems. I mean, if we just glance down through the chapter, we'll see in verse 7, it says we arrived with difficulty at Sinaitis.

It wasn't easy getting there. They obviously had weather issues, and it says right after that in the same verse, the wind not permitting us to proceed. Then in verse 8, passing with difficulty, and then verse 9, it says sailing was now dangerous, and then down in verse 14, a tempestuous headwind rose called Euryclidon, and it says in verse 15, the ship was caught in the wind, and they had to let her drive, just let her drift.

In verse 15, it says they got to where they went, or they didn't get there. They had to pull up the skiff on the board with difficulty, and it talks about them at the end of verse 17. They were driven by the wind again, and in verse 18, they were exceedingly tempest-tossed, so we can see the language indicating that they've got nothing but trouble.

The wind is contrary. There's an exceedingly tempestuous wind. They're tempest-tossed.

They get to where they get with difficulty only, and so while we can read through this chapter rather quickly, I have to say that when I used to read through this chapter without, I guess, sufficient attention, it seemed to me, but when you get halfway through the chapter, they're afraid they're going to die. I think, how to get from there, from Caesarea, to they think they're going to die in so few verses, but I wasn't paying attention to the clues. It's the references to the wind, the danger, the difficulty with which they got to each port.

This was not an easy trip. It was a nightmarish trip, so when they left side, and it says they went under the shelter, that is on the lee side of Cyprus, that'd be the eastern side, because the winds were contrary, verse 4. Verse 5, and when we had sailed over the sea, which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. Myra was about a 15-day trip from Caesarea, so they'd probably been on the trip for about two weeks at this point when they got to Myra, and you can see on a map where Myra is on the southern coast of Asia Minor.

Now there they changed ships, because the ship they were on was, as we saw, from Adramidium, and was apparently on the way back to its home port at Adramidium, which is not the direction they wanted to go, and so they found another ship, an Alexandrian ship this time, and it was on the way to Italy, which is their destination, so they thought they'd just take this ship straight to Italy and get there more directly than if they stayed on the ship they were on, and so they changed ships there, and it says in verse 7, and when we had sailed slowly many days, we arrived with difficulty off Sinaitis, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. Now Sinaitis

is a peninsula that forms the southwestern tip of Asia Minor. Once again, looking at a map will help you here.

The most southwestern tip of the landmass of Asia Minor is Sinaitis, and they didn't land there apparently, but they arrived with difficulty just offshore from there, and they weren't able to proceed as they had apparently, and so they sailed eventually to a place called Fair Havens, which is on the southern coast of Crete. Now it says in verse 7 that they sailed under the shelter of Crete. That'd be on the south side.

Normally they would sail on the northern side of Crete, but that's where the winds were strongest, and so they were again seeking the leeward side of the island to get the less severe winds. Even so, the winds were too much for them, but they would have been far worse on the other side of the island, so they were under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. Now Salmone is on the east side of the island of Crete, but they circled around to the south and came to a place called Fair Havens near the city of Laecia.

Now Fair Havens was an unprotected small harbor on the southern coast of Crete. By this time, they could tell it was not going to be safe to try to get to Italy until after winter. They were going to have to winter somewhere, and yet Fair Havens was not a very sheltered area, and with the storms as bad as they were, they didn't want to stay there in Fair Havens through the winter.

There was just around the bend a little ways another port, a sheltered one on the island of Crete, which was called Phoenix, and they thought, well maybe we'll try to get to that port because that'd be a better port to anchor in until the winter passed. So they already knew they're not going to get to Italy this time of year. It's been bad enough to, they can see that.

Now it says, now when much time had been spent, that is while they're at Fair Havens, and sailing was now dangerous because of the fast was already over. That's talking about how late in the fall it was now. Paul advised them saying, men I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.

Now this is just Paul's opinion. It was not actually correct. It did not end with the loss of their lives.

They did lose the ship, they did lose the cargo, and that they didn't lose their lives. So Paul's simply stating as a very experienced sailor, not that he ever sailed a ship himself, he traveled by sea a great deal. He knew enough from experience to say this is not a safe time to travel by ship.

I just think we'll lose everything, including our lives, if we go now. Now the fact that he wasn't correct means that he wasn't prophesying. He didn't get some kind of revelation

from God.

He was just using common sense, and his common sense proved pretty close to true because they did lose the ship, they did lose the cargo, but of course since he wasn't speaking by inspiration, he couldn't know whether or not they'd lose their lives, but the likelihood would be that they would. What this shows us is that when Paul is not speaking under inspiration, he's as fallible as anyone else, but he's well advised, he's experienced, he knows a lot about what he's talking about, and this is like when Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7, when it comes to virgins, I don't have any commandment from the Lord, but I'll give my judgment as one who has obtained grace to be faithful. Now Paul's not claiming to be inspired in what he says, but he's saying I'm giving my judgment, and I'm, you know, my judgment is it's not chopped liver, it's worth something, you know.

I'm a spiritual man who's got some experience and insight, had a few revelations from God, you know. If someone says, well, if Paul wasn't inspired, then I don't care what he had to say. Really? How many times were you caught into the third heaven and heard things unable to be repeated? I mean, Paul's personal experience with God, with Christ and his insights and the revelations he had make his mere opinion more valuable than any opinion I would have on similar subjects of religion or spiritual things.

I mean, whether Paul's speaking by inspiration on a given occasion or not, his opinion is worth a great deal, and here his opinion should have been heeded. Later on, when they don't follow his opinion, he comes back at him and says in verse 21, you guys should have listened to me and not sailed from Crete, you know. So he's, he kind of does the I told you so thing later on, because although he was not speaking under inspiration and was not 100% correct in what he said, he was right in general that this was a disaster in the making.

If they would sail at this time, they'd better stay where they are. Now, maybe where they are just means Crete, because I don't know that Paul was opposed to going to Phoenix, which was another port in Crete that was a safer one, but he might have been opposed even to that. As it turns out, their attempt to get to Phoenix failed, because although they got just a little offshore Crete, hoping not to get very far, the wind caught them and blew them out to sea, and that's when things got totally deadly for them.

So anyway, Paul's giving his advice here. Now, remember, he's a prisoner advising the people who are his captors. Nevertheless, the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman, that is the captain of the ship, and the owner of the ship, who apparently was traveling with the ship on this occasion, than by the things spoken by Paul.

And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, that is Fair Havens was not, 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. This

town of Phoenix in Crete is now called Phoenica, which obviously is etymologically related to its older name, Phoenix, Phoenica, P-H-I-N-E-K-A. It's a west-facing port on the western shore of Crete, and a better place to winter than where they were, so they thought we could probably make it there.

I mean, the wind was howling, and you've got a sailboat, you don't have motors, you're going to go where the wind tells you to go. And so, if we could just stay close to the shore, we might be able to hug the shore, make it around the bend to the west, and get into this safer port. Let's give it a try.

Now, Paul seemed to be advising against that. I think he was saying, you know, this isn't a great port, but it's better than the middle of the sea at wintertime, so I think he's saying we should stay right here at Fair Havens. But they, it does say, I mean, even Luke says this harbor was not suitable to winter in, in verse 12, which means that even staying at Fair Havens was more risky than most people would wish to do.

So they made the decision to try to get over to Phoenix and winter there. Now, so they set out when the south wind blew softly. Now, the south wind blowing means it's blowing toward Crete, and it's a soft wind.

The storm was, you know, at a low point, a lull, and the wind was blowing the direction that would seemingly keep them close to the coast. They're on the south coast of Crete. The wind is blowing in a southerly direction.

There doesn't seem to be a danger of it blowing them out further to sea, so they say, we're going to try to make it, let's see if we can make it. So, when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete. But not long after, apparently shortly after they got to sea, a tempestuous headwind arose called Euryclidon.

Now, this Euryclidon was the name of a, of a northeaster wind, a strong northeaster wind. Technically, the sailors knew it by that name. There's actually a Latin inscription known to use that term of this wind.

The word Euryclidon actually comes from two words. One means east wind, the other means north wind, so it's the northeast wind. Now, notice they set out with the south wind.

South wind was favorable because they're on the south, they want to stay near the shore, the wind's blowing them toward the shore. That looks favorable. They could probably make it.

But suddenly, down from the hills rushed this infamous northeasterly squall, pushing the ship out away from Crete, out into the ocean in a southeast, out into the open sea. And their ship was not able to resist it, as we shall see. So, when the ship was caught and

could not head into the wind, we let her drive.

Had nothing, nothing for it but to just drift, see where the wind takes you. Now, experts on this kind of situation have said that if you just let the ship drift in this kind of a storm, you probably drift about 36 miles in 24 hours. They actually drifted for 14 days, so they got hundreds of miles off course.

And says, and running under the shelter of an island called Klauta. Now, Klauta is a modern island today called Gevaho. It's spelled G-A-V-A-H-O.

Gevaho is the name of the island today. It's about 23 miles from Crete, so once they've been blown 23 miles out there near a little island where they are able to take, you know, be, try to be on the leeward side of that to try to diminish the problems they're having with the wind, but it was certainly not enough to get control of their course again. Running under the shelter of an island called Klauta, we secured the skiff with difficulty.

Now, the skiff, of course, is the lifeboat, and with it hanging down being dragged in the water, the storm being turbulent, it would probably smash the boat against the larger boat. The lifeboat, if it's just dangling from a rope in the water, is in danger of being either swamped or splintered against the ship, or maybe doing damage to the ship as the waves crash it against the boat. So they, with difficulty, hauled the lifeboat up onto the deck.

The lifeboat will have a role to play later in the story, too. They'll have to cut it and let it go into the water, but right now, with difficulty, they're getting that drag off the ship and that danger, and then when they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship. So they're running cables.

Commentators are not sure whether this is referring to the practice of running cables laterally under the ship to hold the boards tightly together, just kind of cinch them so that the gaps between the boards are held tight by a cable, or whether another practice was used which had to do with running a cable from the front to the back of the ship and holding it from breaking up that way. So they did use cables to try to keep the ship's integrity from being lost in the storm, and they did that. They used cables to undergird the ship, and fearing lest they should run aground on the cirrus sands, they struck sail and so were driven.

Struck sail apparently means that they lowered the sail and they didn't want the wind to blow them too quickly, the direction they were going. Now, they were not very near the cirrus sands. They were still about 380 miles at this point from the cirrus sands.

Now, what are the cirrus sands? The cirrus sands were a shoal of quicksand off the coast of Libya in North Africa, and it was legendary for a danger for ships. It was actually sort of like the Bermuda Triangle of the times of the region, just like the Bermuda Triangle is

sort of a legendary for being a dangerous place for ships to disappear. The cirrus sands had that reputation too, and although they were not close to it, they didn't want to take any chances.

They are not much in control of where their boat's going, so they're doing what they can to prevent it from going too quickly in the southerly direction and getting caught in the cirrus sands. And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship, and on the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands. Now, lightening the ship would be probably just throwing overboard anything that isn't absolutely necessary, but the ship's tackle would normally be considered necessary.

You need the ship's tackle to, you know, in order to maintain control of the sails and things like that. You don't throw the tackle over unless you're just giving up the ship, you know, and you're just hoping against hope that you're going to find land somewhere before you die, but you're not in control. And when Luke says we threw the ship's tackle over with our own hands, it makes it sound like, you know, we did this to ourselves.

We did this on purpose. This is how bad it was. Our survival was so much in question that we were willing to, on the off chance that it would give us a slight advantage of not sinking, and to get rid of the extra weight, we got rid of necessary, you know, nautical equipment.

And Luke himself, as a passenger of the ship, is helping them throw it over. I mean, if you were, if this was a movie, it would be a very turbulent movie. These, you know, people shouting and running around and, you know, the passengers and prisoners and everything cooperating together, the soldiers trying to throw stuff overboard and try to save the ship from sinking.

And it says in verse 20, now, when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days. Now, of course, that doesn't just mean it's a gloomy situation, means they can't navigate. They don't know where they are.

They need those stars, especially, to know where they are to navigate. They have no clue where they are, because for many days they can't see the sky. They're drifting.

They don't know where. And no small tempest beat on us. All hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

So by verse 20, they have finally given up hope of survival. I mean, once you throw the tackle overboard, you know, the ship's going to, you're not going to be able to control the ship. Only God or fate or good luck is going to get you anywhere in your land before you're dead.

And that didn't seem very likely. They just kind of gave up hope on that. So they're just

kind of resigned to their death.

Now, remember, Jesus had appeared to Paul in Caesarea and told him, you will bear witness for me in Rome as you have borne witness for me in Jerusalem. So Paul knew that he was going to get to Rome. I mean, most people on the ship didn't have any hope of survival, but he knew that he was going to get there because Jesus had that promise.

But after a long abstinence from food, actually this whole, they were now 14 days away from Fair Havens and Crete, and they hadn't eaten in that whole time. You can imagine how weak they were, and yet they were probably so seasick. They couldn't even feel hungry.

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. And now I urge you, take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night, an angel of the God whom I serve, to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, do not be afraid, Paul, you must be brought before Caesar.

And indeed, God has granted you all those who sail with you. Therefore, take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as he told me, or as it was told to me. However, we must run aground on a certain island.

So now, unlike the first time when Paul said, you know, I see we'll suffer loss of life and ship and cargo if we leave, that was not uttered under inspiration. That was just his, you know, experienced opinion when he first made that prediction when they were still on the island of Crete. This time though, he's got a word from the Lord.

An angel came to him that night and said, don't worry, you're going to get to, you're going to stand before Caesar. It means you're going to get to Rome, okay? And the angel said, and God's going to let all the people on the ship survive too, as a gift to you. He's going to grant you the lives of those people traveling with you.

They're your friends now after all, so I'm going to do you a favor and save your friends too. And so Paul was greatly encouraged, as you can imagine. But when the 14th night had come, as we were driven up and down, I'm not sure what that means.

I don't know if that means the sea was, they're high, high waves and low troughs or what. I mean, going up and down, bobbing like a bobber on the water. I don't know how driven up and down or if it means north and south or back and forth.

In any case, they weren't sailing, they were drifting. They were being driven by the elements, not by their own devices at all. In the Adriatic Sea, about midnight, the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.

They must have heard what sounded like distant waves crashing on the shore. It was

dark and they couldn't see land, but the first indication they were near some kind of land was audible. And it says, so they took soundings and found it to be 20 fathoms, which is, a fathom is about six feet, so it's about 120 feet deep.

And when they'd gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be 15 fathoms, that'd be 90 feet. So apparently in not very much time, the sea bottom was rising toward them. They were coming to shore.

They didn't know where, and it was rather rapidly happening. The distance from ship to the sea bottom was diminishing by a quarter in a short time. At that rate, they'd be hitting ground, but they didn't know where.

You don't want a ship to hit the ground, usually. It's not, generally speaking, desirable to have your ship grounded and hit the ground. For one thing, if it hits rocks, it's going to destroy the ship.

Even if it hits a sandbar and gets stuck, the waves beating on it from the back is going to beat the thing to toothpicks. It's going to be shredded. So they were kind of scared, obviously.

I mean, it's perhaps a little bit heartening to know there's land nearby, and yet it's coming so close so fast, and they don't have any control over the situation. That concerns them. Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped the four anchors from the stern and prayed for the day to come.

So they just determined from taking soundings they were moving too rapidly for safety toward shore somewhere. So they dropped four anchors to keep from moving any further for the rest of the night and prayed for the daylight. And then it says, and as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they let down the skiff into the sea under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.

Now, I'm not sure how Paul knew that, that if these guys had left the ship, everyone else would die too. After all, the skiff was not going to be necessary for the survival of anybody. But I guess Paul, probably part of what God revealed to him, perhaps, was that everyone had to stay on the ship if they're all going to survive.

Now, the sailors, they figured if we get into the lifeboat, it's a much better chance, especially if the water is getting shallow. The ship will hit the bottom and get wrecked. But if we're in a lifeboat, it's not going to hit the bottom.

We can maybe drift ashore. So that was their plan. But they were pretending because everybody would want to be in the lifeboat.

I mean, these guys were pretending to drop anchors, but indeed, they're secretly trying

to drop the lifeboat. Paul's spot somewhere knows about it, tells it. And so the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.

So the skiff that they had to pull ashore earlier, they now just let it drop into the sea. And as the day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, today is the 14th day you have waited and continued without food and eaten nothing. Therefore, I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from your head of any of you, which is not literal.

Probably some of them lost a few hairs here and there in the ordeal. But it's the same thing Jesus said to the disciples when he sent them out two by two in Matthew 25. He said, you know, you'll be persecuted and so forth, but not a hair of your head will perish.

Just a matter, a way of saying that you'll be protected thoroughly. And when he had said these things, he took bread, probably fairly moldy bread at this point in time, having been four weeks on the ship, a very wet ship, probably no dry bread, but he gave thanks to God in the presence of them all. And when he had broken it, he began to eat.

Then they were all encouraged and also took food themselves. And in all there were about 276 persons on the ship. Now the number 276 would include the crew and also any passengers that were paid passengers, of which Luke was probably one, and there may have been other paid passengers.

There were also soldiers on the ship and there were prisoners. So there's a mixed group there and all together. We don't know how many prisoners or how many soldiers.

It's possible there were a hundred soldiers since there's a centurion guarding Paul. They may have had a hundred soldiers with them, but the ship had almost 300 people on it, all told. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

Now the wheat was the cargo. This was a wheat ship. It was an Alexandrian ship and Alexandria shipped wheat up to Rome.

Rome depended on Alexandrian wheat. And so this was apparently one of the Alexandrian ships that carried wheat to Rome. But even the cargo got thrown overboard, the merchandise.

They ate what they needed and they tossed the rest over into the sea. Anything they could do to lighten the ship a little bit and keep it above the water a little longer. Now 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.

And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea. Meanwhile, losing the rudder ropes and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore. So they just cut

loose the anchors, left them in the sea behind them, and let the waves carry them toward the shore.

And striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground. Now it's not clear what is meant by a place where two seas met. It is thought that this is probably a channel between the side of the bay and a small island that was there called Salmoneta.

That location today, there is a shoal there, a shallow shoal under the water that has a bottom of clay, where if the ship's hull would get caught in the clay, it would be, it would stick fast. And that's what happened here. They ran the ship aground, not on shore, but on this shoal out, still out at sea from the shore.

And the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves. So a ship is, can only take so many poundings of waves as it's sitting still, and they're pounding it from the rear before it begins to disassemble itself. Now the soldier's plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.

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, and the rest, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to the land. And so they did, as Paul said, all their lives were spared, but they did lose the ship and everything that was in it.

That was a very expensive journey. I don't know if they had insurance back then, but the owner of that ship should have listened to Paul. Remember, it was the owner of the ship that the centurion listened to when Paul was saying, we better stay here in Crete for the winter.

It's not safe to go. It was the helmsman and the owner of the ship that disagreed, and so the owner of the ship's choice caused him the loss of his ship and a great deal of merchandise, which he probably had to pay back to its owners and so forth. So this was a huge disaster, but at least no loss of life, and you know, life is worth more than any amount of money.

Quite coincidentally, the place where they landed is called St. Paul's Bay in Malta. Isn't that a coincidence that St. Paul would land at a place called St. Paul's Bay? Obviously, that's the modern name for it, named after this incident, but this bay is on the northeastern part of Malta, and Malta is due south of Sicily, and so we find in chapter 28, verse 1, that they are on the island of Malta, and they winter there, but first they have to get ashore and survive the first night. It would not be very cold there due to the time of the year and the location in the Mediterranean.

It was probably only about 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the weather, but the ocean would be

colder, and they were wet, so they were no doubt very cold. It says, now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta, and the natives showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold. Now, it says the natives here in the New King James.

The word that Luke uses is actually the barbarians. He referred to the Maltans as barbarians. Now, we think of the word barbarian as kind of insulting.

You know, we're talking about somebody being almost like the Huns or someone who's very warlike, very vicious, very, maybe, uncivilized, but the word barbarian is used in scripture to simply mean someone who doesn't speak Greek. They might be very well civilized, but they're not Greek speakers, and when Paul said, I am a debtor to the Jews and the Greeks and the barbarians, he's speaking of three different demographics. The Jews, of course, an obvious category.

The Greeks would be those who speak Greek, which was almost everybody in the Roman Empire, but then there were those regions where Greek had not really become the official language, and the people didn't speak Greek. They were called barbarians. So, the word barbarians doesn't have quite the negative connotations in the Bible that it does in our modern speech.

They're just not Greek speakers. It was cold, so the locals helped them build a fire. Imagine being a local and seeing the ship break offshore that morning, and all these people floating ashore, 270 people coming to your shore, and they're all wet and cold, so you help build a fire, of course.

Can't bring them all indoors, though. They're going to be outdoors, mostly, but when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, so he's helping with the fire, and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. It sounds like the gathering of a bundle of sticks, the viper was inside the bundle, and when he laid it on the fire, the fire made the snake want to escape, and it leaped out and grabbed his hand before he could get very far from the released pile that he just put on the fire.

Now, it says it fastened to his hand. I think the assumption is it fastened with its fangs to his hand. It's not impossible that it could have fastened by coiling around his arm or something like that, but because of the way the story goes, it sounds like it fastened to his hand with its fangs.

It bit him, and it was a deadly snake, and the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, and they said to one another, no doubt this man is a murderer, whom though he has escaped from the sea, yet justice does not allow him to live. Now, justice here probably should be capitalized, because the Greek goddess Justice is probably who they're referring to. You know, he is a murderer, and the gods are out to get him.

You know, the sea tried to get him, but he somehow managed to get away from that, but the goddess Justice is not letting him escape, and so she's brought a snake out. Interestingly, there's an old poem, an old Latin poem, about a legend, about a man who did, he was shipwrecked on the coast of Libya, and he died from a snake bite that he got there. So, I mean, it was the moral of the poem was, crime doesn't pay.

The man was a murderer, and he escaped the sea, and then a snake bit him, and he died. So, these guys might have even been familiar with that poem, but they figured out this must be the case with this guy. He certainly escaped the sea, but he hasn't escaped the serpent.

It turns out he did escape the serpent, but Paul shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. However, they were expecting that he would swell up and suddenly fall down dead, but after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Here's the fickleness of the heathen again.

We saw in Lystra, Luke, I think, tells it deliberately to make the heathen seem kind of unstable and fickle, because when he's talking about Lystra and Paul there, it says at one point, with these words, Paul and Barnabas scarcely restrained them from offering sacrifices to them. Then the next verse says, Jews came in and stood up to people, and they stoned him to death, you know, or stoned him and dragged him out of the city. It's like one verse, Paul can hardly convince these people he isn't a god and that they shouldn't worship him.

He manages to convince them, and then the next verse, they're stoning him and dragging him out of the city. Here also, one verse, they say, oh, he must be a particularly wicked man, that the sea has not been able to conquer him, but the snake gets him. He must be very evil.

And then immediately afterwards, because he doesn't, oh, he must be a god. Just the contrast in the opinions of the heathen that Luke brings out in some of these stories is, I think, deliberately trying to point out how maybe unstable the pagans were in terms of having any kind of beliefs that could, that would withstand scrutiny or change. Now in the region, there was an estate of the leading citizen.

This expression, the leading citizen in Greek, is the first man of the island. It's interesting that I've mentioned that Luke, throughout his treatment, gives the proper titles to government officials in different places. Sometimes they're called Asiarchs.

Paul had friends in Ephesus that were called Asiarchs, and Luke uses that term, and that is the correct term for the provincial officials in that region at that time. In Thessalonica, he talks about the Politarchs, and of course, they've now found inscriptions, over six of them, that talk about the Politarchs of Thessalonica, though for many years, critics said

there was no such term, and that Luke was wrong, but it turns out now the inscriptions they found make several references to Politarchs in Thessalonica, and so forth. You have Herod is called a king.

Festus is called a proconsul. You know, these titles, they weren't all the same in different towns, in different areas, and or even at different times, but Luke, in every case, gives the correct one. It is now known, from an inscription that was found, that the leading political official on the island of Malta at this time was called the first man of the island.

That's the title, that's his title, the first man, and that's the term that Luke uses here. This was the primary political ruler of this island, so there was, in that region, an estate of the first man of the island. It may not have been his only home.

He may have had a coastal retreat, and his estate here on the coast is where he happened to be at the time the shipwreck took place, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days, and it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went into him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

They were, they also honored us in many ways, and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary. Now, it says that Paul healed this man, who happened to be the father of the main political figure on the island, so that's a good way to incur privilege in a foreign country, and it says that when this man's father was healed, then all the sick people of the island came and were healed by Paul. So Paul healed every sick person on the island.

Now, not likely on that same night. After all, not everyone on the island would even hear about this immediately, but Paul and Luke and his captors and so on stayed on that island for three months. They waited for better weather.

I'm sure they wanted to be much more careful in the remainder of their journey. So it does say in verse 11, after three months we sailed, and in verses 9 and 10, I think we're supposed to understand this happened during that three months. During that three months, people heard about Paul's ability to pray for the sick, and people from all over the island came and were healed through Paul's ministry.

So that's how Paul spent his time, and no doubt preaching too, and I would assume that in his preaching, when it's backed up with healings, he probably had an effect. He probably had quite a few converts. In any case, the people honored him in the three months he stayed there, and then when those three months ended and he left there, they gave provisions and so forth.

Remember, the people on the ship had lost everything. They couldn't pay for room and

board in Malta. They couldn't pay for passage from Malta to continue.

You know, everything they had was in the sea somewhere. They had no money. They had no food.

They had no extra clothes. They just came. They escaped with their lives, and now they are kept three months in a place where they probably are not able to work, and therefore the people are generously providing for them, and probably because Paul healed the sick.

I mean, the implication is Paul's healing people caused him and those with him to be honored and provided for, even provided for apparently for the ship passage to the next destination. So Paul may have, through his ability to heal, kept all 270 people alive, although it's possible if he hadn't healed, they would have received some hospitality too, but it'd be expensive for the people of the island to take on all the expenses of such a large group that are traveling on, but they provided for them, and we're going to next time talk about that. Now, just the thing about Paul and the snake.

No doubt many people, when they read this story, think about Mark chapter 16, where it says at the end of Mark, in a passage which is not found in all manuscripts, but in some. In verses 16 and 17, Jesus said, he who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned, and verse 17, and these signs will follow those who believe. In my name they will cast out demons.

They will speak with new tongues. Verse 18, they will take up serpents, and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them. They will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.

These kinds of signs are said to accompany the preaching of the gospel and the believing communities. Now, taking up serpents is in the list, and of course, the only case we know of this, where a Christian actually was invulnerable to snake bite, was this one case when Paul was bit. Now, Jesus had said to his disciples in Luke chapter 10, I think it's verse 19, I give you power over serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, but he's probably referring to demonic powers, which is serpents and scorpions.

In any case, this passage in Mark is thought by most to not be authentic. That is, in most of the older manuscripts, all the older manuscripts of Mark, it ends at verse 8. Chapter 16 ends at verse 8, and there are 12 more verses that are found in some manuscripts, and that includes the reference to taking up serpents and so forth. So, some would say that the statement that is recorded there in Mark was not really an authentic statement of Jesus anyway.

It may have even been influenced by the story of Paul being bitten and not harmed. It's

not impossible to see it that way. Now, we're going to stop there, and we'll take the rest of chapter 28 after our break.