

Storm & Shipwreck

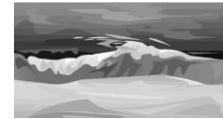
Acts 27:1-28:10

Setting Sail (Acts 27:1-8)

- ❑ Paul spent two years in prison at Caesarea and had hearings before Governor Felix, Governor Festus, and King Agrippa. He was now being transported to Rome, where he was being taken to face Caesar, Emperor of the Roman Empire. The Lord previously had revealed to Paul that he “must testify in Rome” (*Acts 23:11*).
- ❑ Paul was placed into the custody of a centurion named Julius (*27:1*); and he had as his traveling companions Luke (*v. 2* – “We boarded a ship...”), who was author of Acts; and Aristarchus (*v. 2*), who also had traveled with Paul for some time (*Acts 19:29*).
- ❑ Initially, Paul and his companions sailed along the Mediterranean coastline to Myra on the southern coast of modern-day Turkey. Out of kindness, Julius allowed Paul to visit his friends in Sidon “so that they might provide for his needs” (*v. 3*). Given the potential consequences of having a prisoner escape, how could Julius allow Paul such a luxury? Perhaps Paul had shown the same trustworthiness that he had shown the Ephesian jailer in Acts 16:28.
- ❑ At Myra, Paul was transferred to an Alexandrian ship that was headed on to Rome. It was on this ship, carrying 276 passengers (*v. 37*), that they encountered difficulties.¹

Stormy Seas

- ❑ Read Acts 27:9-38. Getting a late start in the sailing season², the ship encountered a hurricane-force “northeaster” storm that imperils them for fourteen days and nights, and they “gave up all hope of being saved” (*v. 20*).



Character in the storm – As a prisoner, Paul seems to play an unexpectedly important role in the events on and off the ship during and after this fierce storm.

1. Considering Paul’s words and actions during the storm (*vv. 10, 21-26, 31, 33-36*), what can we say about his attitude and character in the midst of these difficult circumstances?³

Confidence in the storm – When all hope seems to be lost (*v. 20*), Paul’s hope stands out.

2. In what or whom did Paul express his confidence or faith during the storm (*v. 23*)? How could Paul have such faith in the face of such a difficult circumstance?

¹ Vos, in *Bible Manners and Customs* (1999), indicates that this ship, perhaps carrying a cargo of grain from Egypt to Italy (*27:38*), may have been as long as 180 feet (over ½ a football field), been 45 feet wide, had a draft of 40 feet, and capable of carrying as much as 1,200 tons of cargo.

² Sailors in the Mediterranean generally could expect gentle winds from the south during the summer months, with the possibility of strong winds from the northeast occurring during winter months (IVP New Testament Commentary). The late departure of ship (“after the Fast”—*27:9*) meant that conditions could be uncertain.

³ Perhaps one of the most surprising of Paul’s attitudes in this situation is his thankfulness, as he “gave thanks to God in front of all of them all” (*v. 35*). He previously had encouraged the Thessalonian church to “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:18), and now he had the opportunity to live this out himself.

3. An angel of the Lord appeared beside Paul to remind him of God's promise that he would live to stand trial in Rome (v. 23, but see also Acts 23:11). What promise(s) of God can sustain us through stormy, fearful circumstances, and how can we gain such confidence in those promises?

Reflection

- Good News! Paul announced good news of God's gracious gift that was proclaimed to him "not one of you will be lost" even though the ship that they were relying upon would be destroyed (v. 22). Do we have similar good news to encourage others (and ourselves) with when they are in the midst of a "storm"? Do we reflect that good news through our character and confidence, as well as our words during stormy times?

Shipwreck and Snakebite

- ❑ Read Acts 27:39-28:10. The ship is run aground on an island that was known as Malta. The dangers at sea and on land did not end there. However, neither Paul's character nor God's faithful provision for Paul and his companions changed, and "everyone reached land in safety" (27:44).



Snake-bitten! – Paul was spared from the storm, but just when it looked like he was in the clear, he was bitten by a viper while gathering wood for the fire. The people thought that he must be guilty of some heinous crime. They expected him to swell up and die, but he did not.

4. What might the islanders' reactions to this event indicate about their beliefs, and how do those beliefs differ from those of Christianity?
- ❑ The unplanned stay on Malta resulted in opportunities to bless the family of the local official (28:8) and the island population (28:9), and that in turn led to unexpected blessing and provision for Paul and his companions.

Reflection/Application

- Undoubtedly, "storms" will come to all of us at some time(s) in our lives. Do you have reason for confidence in all circumstances, sunny or stormy? Do you need to find the same source of hope and confidence that Paul had that comes only through faith in Jesus – believing that he died for our sins, and that God raised him from the dead (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, Romans 10:9) – the hope that would take Paul all the way to Rome to proclaim God's salvation?
- Isaiah (32:2) speaks of the messianic age when "Each man (the Lord's redeemed) will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm..." This speaks of a time when Christians will be a protection and blessing to others, as their lives reflect the attitude and character of Christ (see also Philippians 2:5-11). This sounds like Paul in the storm. Does it sound like you and me?