

How to Read the Bible for All its Worth

Lesson 6k: Acts 27:1 – 28:31 – Voyage to Rome

Introduction

Our study of Acts will close with Paul's voyage to Rome and his early ministry in that city. While Paul has experienced many trials, he's also experienced great blessings from the hand of God. I am reminded of his words in 2 Corinthians 4:7, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding [and] eternal weight of glory;". This was Paul's perspective throughout all he endured. In these last chapters, Paul again faces trials and sees God's intervention; all of this working to promote the cause of Christ, whom Paul preached.

Acts 27:1-12 – To Fair Havens

For the voyage to Rome, Paul and some other prisoners were delivered to a centurion named Julius. He worked for Caesar as part of the Augustan cohort and probably received assignments that involved transporting special prisoners to Rome. The ship and crew were from the home port of Adramyttium, on the Northwest shore of Asia Minor. We notice that Luke¹ (the writer Acts), and Aristarchus of Thessalonica also accompanied Paul on this trip. Aristarchus was with Paul on some of his earlier journeys (Acts 19:29, 20:4) and remained with him for at least part of his imprisonment in Rome (Colossians 4:10).



Did Paul have a good relationship with Julius? How can we tell?

Yes, he was allowed unusual freedom in Seleucia in that he was able to stay with some friends and minister there while they waited to go to sea.

The Alexandrian ship to which the voyagers transferred in Myra was probably a grain cargo vessel. Myra was the chief port for the Imperial grain fleet that traveled between Egypt and Italy. Their routes were usually run between the months of March and November. In addition, all sailing between the months of September and November was very treacherous.

Why did they stay in Fair Havens so long?

The weather made further travel impractical at this time.

What was Paul's advice to the centurion and his crew?

They should stay through the winter in Fair Haven because further travel would put them in jeopardy. He mentioned that the fast (Passover) was already past, which put them into at least October. This was a dangerous time to travel.

What was Julius' decision and what was his reasoning behind the decision?

Julius decided to press on at the captain and the crew's advice. There was another city on the Western edge of Crete that was more suitable for wintering their vessel.

Acts 27:13-20 – Trouble at Sea

What was it that prompted them to leave Fair Haven?

The weather quieted down a bit and a moderate Southern wind arose that would be favorable to their travels.

¹ We know that Luke was with Paul because of the use of the pronoun "we" in Acts 27:1

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A Euraquilo is a Nor'easter (Northeasterly wind), a powerful windstorm that was dreaded by all who sailed on the Mediterranean. It eventually made the crew abandon the possibility of steering the ship. While catching a small break under the shelter of Clauda, they under girded the ship with ropes to prevent the hull from breaking apart from the relentless crash of the waves. They also lowered the sea anchor to prevent the ship from running aground, especially on the shallows of Syrtis, which were to the South of them. Syrtis was a graveyard of ships along the North African coast. The crew eventually began to throw the ship's cargo overboard to lighten the load and then threw out the tackle (equipment that was not necessary to sail the ship).

What was the mood of the crew, soldiers, and prisoners on board the ship? Why?

They gave up hope of surviving because they were unable to navigate or steer the ship.

Acts 27:21-44 – *Shipwrecked*

What was the prophecy given by Paul?

Paul stated that an angel told him that he and everyone else on the ship would survive the storm and that they would run aground on an island.

Why did God give Paul this prophecy?

The men were hopeless and greatly distressed. This prophecy at least gave them a little hope. Paul's faith in God's promise was surely a light to them in the midst of the stormy seas. It would also allow God to receive glory when He fulfilled the prophecy.

What practical lesson do we learn from this prophecy and Paul's circumstances?

God had a purpose for Paul that He desired to fulfill. Paul was caught in circumstances that were beyond his control. He was a prisoner and had no choice over whether they sailed on or wintered in Fair Haven. He made a good recommendation but Julius didn't take it. However, God intervened to accomplish his purpose and rescued Paul and the others from the storm. God's will isn't thwarted by the Satan or the sins of men.

The soundings taken by the crew were measurements of the depth of the ocean. As the measurements decreased, they were able to tell that they were getting closer to land. The anchors were cast so that the ship would stop before it landed in shallow waters.

What did the sailors attempt to do and why did Paul try to stop them?

The sailors attempted to abandon ship on the life boats. Paul told the centurion to stop them because their lives were in danger. Possibly they were still too far away to make it in by themselves and their help was needed to bring the boat farther in so that everyone could survive the trip.

What does the reaction of the soldiers tell you about the change in Paul's position of leadership?

He was highly esteemed by Julius. They dropped the boats so that no one could leave.

Why did Paul encourage everyone to eat?

They had not eaten for 14 days and needed their strength to make it into shore.

By lightening the load of the ship, it was able to ride higher in the water and thereby get them in closer to shore. However, the reef that the ship hit prevented further progress and the crashing of the waves against the bow began to tear the ship apart.

What was Satan's last attempt to stop Paul's progress towards Rome?

The soldiers suggested that all the prisoners (included Paul) be killed so that they could not escape. God used Paul's position with Julius to save his and everyone else's life.

What were some of the things the Lord accomplished in this situation?

The men grew to respect Paul and his position with God. It also opened their heart to the message he preached about Christ.

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Acts 28:1-16 – *Wintering in Malta*

The island that Paul and the others landed upon was Malta. It is a small island about 17 miles long and 9 miles wide, south of Sicily. The bay in which they came ashore is now called St. Paul's bay. They were immediately shown hospitality by the people of the island. They are described in the KJV as "barbarous". This word does not mean that they were uncivilized, but rather that they did not speak the Greek language.

What does the hospitality of the natives teach us? (See Romans 2:14-16)

Even though these people did not have the revelation of God as a standard of truth, they had an internal moral compass that guided them. All men have this, regardless of whether they are versed in Scripture or not. It is a testimony to the existence of God.

How did the natives react to Paul's encounter with the snake? What else do we learn from this?

Their first reaction was to believe that he must be a very evil man to have escaped shipwreck and then die by a snake bite. However, when he didn't swell up or die, they thought he must be a god. This demonstrated their religious nature and inherent sense of justice and the divine. They were ripe for the gospel.

What does the healing of Publius' father and others on the island indicate about what the Lord was trying to accomplish on Malta?

The purpose of the gift of healing was to reveal the power of God to unbelievers and to attest to the validity of the message Paul was preaching. Obviously, the Lord was trying to reach the people of Malta with the gospel and had shipwrecked Paul there to preach Christ to them.

Church tradition tells us that a church was established on Malta during Paul's three months there and Publius was its first pastor. We cannot verify the accuracy of this tradition, but it would be consistent with the evidence we see in Scripture. What other evidence do we see in verse 10 that indicates that a church may have been established at this time?

They were extraordinarily gracious to Paul and the rest of the voyagers as they left Malta. While it may be tied to his healing of those of the island, their outpouring suggests a Christian spirit of giving.

They sailed from Malta upon an Alexandrian ship, probably another imperial grain vessel, that had the Twin Brothers, Castor and Pollux as its figurehead. They were revered in Greek mythology as the gods who protected sailors. They stopped in Syracuse for three days and then moved on to Rhegium and then to Puteoli. From Puteoli, they traveled the rest of the way on foot upon the Appian Way. As the local Christians heard about Paul's arrival, they traveled in from miles around to meet him.

How did the Lord bless Paul upon his arrival in Rome?

He was able to stay by himself with only one guard watching over him. This gave him great personal freedom and the opportunity to preach and teach in his house.

Acts 28:17-31 – *Paul's stay in Rome*

What does Paul do after three days in Rome? Why?

He called the leaders of the Jews together to tell why he was a prisoner and make sure they heard his side of the story before making a judgment.

Why did Paul say he was a prisoner? What does this mean? (See 2 Timothy 1:8)

He said he was a prisoner because of "the hope of Israel". The "hope of Israel" was Jesus Christ, who was the promised Messiah. Paul was saying that he was a prisoner because of his faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah.

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What was the response of the Jewish leaders to Paul?

They had not heard of the charges against Paul or received any letters from their Jewish brethren in Judea. However, they wanted to hear more about this “sect” of Judaism.

Why did the Jewish leaders call Christianity a “sect”? Were there other Jewish sects that existed? What were their differences? What does their hatred of Christianity reveal?

They viewed Christianity as a denomination of Judaism. There were other Jewish sects, like the Pharisees and Sadducees that had marked differences. For example, the Sadducees didn't believe in a literal resurrection and rejected much of the moral standard taught in the Old Testament. However, these two sects co-existed and would even work together on some instances. Their animosity towards Christianity, another sect of Judaism, reveals their evil and rebellious hearts. The Pharisees and Sadducees could co-exist with each other, but they could not co-exist with the truth because it is a light that reveals their darkness.

What opportunity was given to Paul by the Jewish leaders?

He was allowed to address a large contingency of the Jews at his house and preach the gospel to them.

What was their response?

Some believed his message, while others were not convinced and hardened their hearts against the truth.

What is the meaning of Paul's quotation from the Book of Isaiah? (See Isaiah 6:9-10)

It is a statement that the Lord made about their Jewish ancestors at the time of Isaiah. It means that the truth was being preached but they were unreceptive to it. Paul was comparing those who were rejecting his message to their ancestors.

How did Paul finish his discourse to them?

He told them that if they wouldn't hear, God would open the door to the Gentiles. This bruised their Jewish pride. They always felt that they were somehow better than the rest of the world because of their special position with God. Paul told them that their rejection of the truth would cause them to lose that special position and it would be granted to others.

How did Paul spend the next two years in Rome?

He stayed in his own rented quarters for two years under constant guard. He had complete freedom to preach the gospel and teach all who came to his house.

Next Time: *The Rest of the Story & The Lesson Summary*