

The Acts of the Holy Spirit

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

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Shipwreck!

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From Caesarea to Fair Havens ([27:1-8](#))

Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment: We don't know much about this specific "Augustan Regiment", but it was common for Roman soldiers to accompany the transport of criminals, those awaiting trial, and merchant ships sailing from Egypt to Rome.

Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us: Paul was accompanied by Aristarchus and Luke (notice the use of "us") on this voyage. While some have thought that they went "undercover" with Paul, posing as his servants, it is just as likely that Aristarchus paid his fare as a passenger and that Luke was on board as the ship's doctor.

Julius treated Paul kindly: The kindness Paul received reflected both his status as an innocent man awaiting an appeal before Caesar, and no doubt his character, and his desire to "...live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18). Any of these would have differentiated Paul from other prisoners on board. The other prisoners were likely condemned criminals being sent to Rome to die in the arena, and not terribly concerned with living peaceably with all!

The Decision to Leave Fair Havens ([27:9-12](#))

Sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over: "The Fast" in question here was probably Day of Atonement, which would be in early October (per once source, in A.D. 59, Yom Kippur was October 5th.) As winter approached, the weather would become more dangerous for sailing.

“Fair Havens”, despite its name, was vulnerable to winter winds and storms, and not an ideal place to wait out the coming season.

F. F. Bruce notes:

"The dangerous season for sailing began about September 14 and lasted until November 11; after the latter date all navigation on the open sea came to an end until winter was over."

Paul advised them: So Paul probably isn't speaking to the centurion as an oracle of God here, but rather as an experienced traveler when it came to the waters and weather systems of the eastern Mediterranean. Plus, Paul had already been in three shipwrecks (2 Corinthians 11:25); he knew what stormy seas could do to a boat!

...The centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship: Paul's opinion might have been based in experience, but it's hard to fault the centurion for having more respect for the opinion of the chief sailor and the owner of the ship. After all, they both had much to lose if the ship didn't make it to Rome! Also, Phoenix was a larger city than Lasea, and may have been more appealing to captain and crew as a location to wait out the stormy season.

A Stormy Journey from Fair Havens to Malta ([27:13-20](#))

Euroclydon: This wind was feared among ancient Mediterranean sailors for its destructive force. The sailors knew they were in for a rough time.

The skiff was normally towed behind the boat, but would be taken aboard in bad weather, so they brought it in. “We secured the skiff with difficulty” may be quite literal, from Luke's perspective. The good doctor was probably pressed into service pulling ropes!

Using cables to undergird the ship was a customary practice sometimes called "frapping." It helped prevent the ship from breaking apart in a storm.

Fearing they should run aground on the Sytris Sands: The Syrtis Sands were an infamous "graveyard" of ships off the coast of North Africa, feared almost superstitiously, much like the Bermuda Triangle today. Seasoned sailors wanted to avoid the area at all costs.

That they “saw neither sun nor stars” shows just how bad their situation was, because these were the only tools of navigation they had. No wonder they gave up all hope that they would be saved.

Paul Talks of God’s Promise ([27:21-26](#))

Paul’s long abstinence from food might’ve had nothing to do with fasting per se, but instead with the poor condition of the food during such a storm, and the prevalence of seasickness among them!

There will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship: The promise that there would be no loss of life, only the destruction of the ship, probably sounded like a bad deal to the captain and owner, but would likely have sounded great to the crew! Either way, Paul had their attention.

...An angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve: The angel that appeared to Paul did more than assure Paul of his own survival. Of course, Paul already *knew* that he would survive, because God had promised he would appear before Caesar (19:21, 23:11). The angel also promised something worth telling the passengers and the crew: God will save all who sail with Paul.

The angel told Paul “do not be afraid.” There was a reason Paul needed to hear those words, both for his own reassurance, but also as an assurance to those he would be talking to, as “be afraid” was the order of the day!

Note that Paul says: “I believe God”, not “I believe in God.” The difference is critical, and with this statement Paul declares his complete confidence in God’s promise. This terrible situation was very real, but God’s promise was more real to Paul than their dreadful circumstances.

I wonder if Paul was reminded of Job’s words, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (Job 13:15)? What is evident is that Paul was utterly unashamed to say that he believed God.

Therefore, take heart, men: Paul leveraged his own belief to strengthen the hearts of others. As far as we can tell, few of the people on this ship were Christians, but Paul cared enough about all of them to strengthen their hearts by telling them about his belief in God. It’s not that God had revealed everything that was going to happen; “on a certain island” indicates Paul didn’t know which one, but Paul trusted that God knew which island they would run aground on!

Land ho! Oh, no! (27:27-38)

The sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land: Sensing land was near (perhaps hearing breakers in the distance), the sailors dropped four anchors from the stern, taking proper precautions against being crashed against some unseen rocks.

"Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.": Paul knew two reasons why they had to stay together. First, the ship's passengers desperately needed the crew's expertise, and it would be fatal if the crew abandoned the passengers. Second, Paul probably sensed that God's promise to preserve the lives of the whole ship's company meant that they should stay together.

...He took bread and gave thanks to God... and began to eat: I can't say for sure, but this makes me think that Paul regarded this meal as communion at the Lord's table, at least for the Christians present.

They lightened the ship: Throwing out the wheat into the sea reflected the level of their desperation. Grain was the most essential cargo of the ship, financially, and they were throwing away all chance of making a profit or breaking even on the trip. This was truly a struggle for survival.

The Ship Runs Aground (27:39-44)

They did not recognize the land: They did not know it at first, but they had arrived at an island named Malta. The place where the ship came aground is now called St. Paul's Bay.

"If they missed Malta, there would have been nothing for it but to hold on for 200 miles until they struck the Tunisian coast, and no one could have expected the ship to survive that long." (F. F. Bruce)

...The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should... escape: This is not unexpected. For the soldiers, it only made sense to kill the prisoners, because Roman military law decreed that a guard who allowed his prisoner to escape was subject to the same penalty the escaped prisoner would have suffered - in the case of most of these prisoners, death.

But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose: This is just plain ole' interference being run by the Holy Spirit in the heart and mind of the Roman centurion, and that interference (maybe "favor" is a better word) kept Paul and all the prisoners alive - in fulfillment of the promise God made to Paul.