

16. Acts 27-28



Acts 27:1-5 (Autumn 59AD)

When it was decided that **we** were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium (a port near Troas) that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus (in Ephesus Acts 19:29; in Corinth Acts 20:4), a **Macedonian** from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for. Putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus (between Cyprus and the mainland), because the winds were against us. After we had sailed across the sea that is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia.



Acts 27:6-II

At Myra the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind was against us, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Sailing past it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. Since much time had been lost and sailing was now dangerous, because even the Fast (Yom Kippur, September) had already gone by, Paul advised them, saying,

“Sirs, I can see that the voyage will be with danger and much heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.



Acts 27:12-17

Since the harbour was not suitable for spending the winter, the majority was in favor of putting to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, where they could spend the winter. It was a harbour of Crete, facing southwest and northwest. When a moderate south wind began to blow, they thought they could achieve their purpose; so they weighed anchor and began to sail past Crete, close to the shore. But soon a violent wind (typhon), called the northeaster, rushed down from Crete. Since the ship was caught and could not be turned head-on into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven. By running under the lee of a small island called Cauda we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control. After hoisting it up they took measures to undergird the ship; then, fearing that they would run on the Syrtis (renowned and dangerous shallow gulfs on the coast of north Africa) they lowered the sea anchor and so were driven.

Acts 27:18-26

We were being pounded by the storm so violently that on the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard, and on the third day with their own hands they threw the ship's tackle overboard. When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest raged, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.

Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul then stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and thereby avoided this damage and loss. I urge you now to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For last night there stood by me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you **must** stand before the emperor; and indeed, God has granted safety to all those who are sailing with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. But we will have to run aground on some island.”

Acts 27:27-32

When the fourteenth night (the night of the liberation from Egypt, Exodus 12:13) had come, as we were drifting across the sea of **Adria**, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. So they took soundings and found twenty fathoms; a little farther on they took soundings again and found fifteen fathoms. Fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. But when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and had lowered the boat into the sea, on the pretext of putting out anchors from the bow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the boat and set it adrift.

Acts 27:33-34

Just before daybreak, Paul urged all of them to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been in suspense and remaining without food, having eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food, for it will help you survive; for none of you will lose a hair from your heads.”

When Jesus warned his disciples of the many trials that they would go through, he added: ‘But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls’ (Luke 21:18-19).

Acts 27:35-38

After he had said this, he took bread; and giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat. Then all of them were encouraged and took food for themselves. (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) After they had satisfied their hunger, they lightened the ship by throwing the wheat into the sea.

‘Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. And all ate and were filled’ (Luke 9:16-17).

‘Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me’ (Luke 22:19).

‘When Jesus was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them ... he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread’ (Luke 24:30,35).

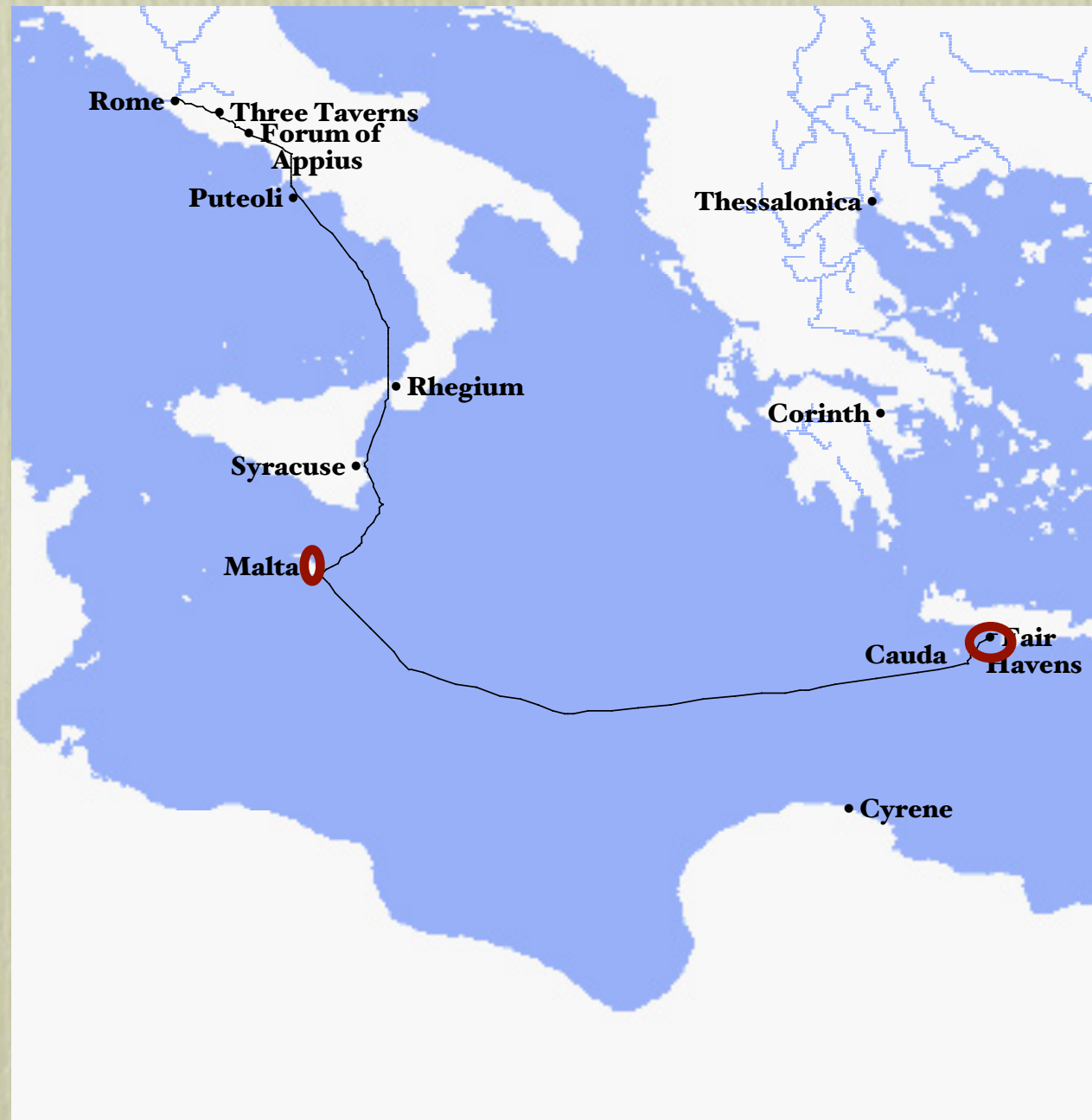
Acts 27:39-44

In the morning they did not recognise the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned to run the ship ashore, if they could. So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea. At the same time they loosened the ropes that tied the steering-oars; then hoisting the foresail to the wind, they made for the beach. But striking a reef, they ran the ship aground; the bow stuck and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the force of the waves. The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none might swim away and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, and the rest to follow, some on planks and others on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

For earlier shipwrecks see 2 Corinthians 11:25

Acts 28:1

After we had reached safety, we then learned that the island was called Malta.



Acts 28:2-6

The natives showed us unusual kindness. Since it had begun to rain and was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed all of us around it. Paul had gathered a bundle of brushwood and was putting it on the fire, when a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand. When the natives (barbaroi) saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “This man must be a murderer; though he has escaped from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.” He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm (compare Luke 10:18). They were expecting him to swell up or drop dead, but after they had waited a long time and saw that nothing unusual had happened to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

Acts 28:7-10

Now in the neighbourhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It so happened that the father of Publius lay sick in bed with fever and dysentery. Paul visited him and cured him by praying and putting his hands on him. After this happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They bestowed many honours on us, and when we were about to sail, they put on board all the provisions we needed.

Acts 28:11-14

Three months later we set sail on a ship that had wintered at the island, an Alexandrian ship with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead. We put in at **Syracuse** and stayed there for three days; then we weighed anchor and came to **Rhegium**. After one day there a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to **Puteoli** (in the Bay of Naples). There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. **And so we came to Rome.** (Spring 60AD)



Acts 28:15-16

The believers from Rome, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us (50-60ks south of Rome). On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage. When we came into Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

Acts 28:17-20

Three days later he called together the local leaders of the Jews. When they had assembled, he said to them, “Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors, yet I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Romans. When they had examined me, the Romans wanted to release me, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case (compare Luke 23:15-20; Acts 24:12-13; 25:8). But when the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to the emperor (see Acts 25:21) – even though I had no charge to bring against my nation. For this reason therefore I have asked to see you and speak with you, since it is for the sake of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

Acts 28:21-25

They replied, ‘We have received no letters from Judea about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken anything evil about you. But we would like to hear from you what you think, for with regard to this sect we know that everywhere it is spoken against.’

After they had set a day to meet with him, they came to him at his lodgings in great numbers. From morning until evening he explained the matter to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets. Some were convinced by what he had said, while others refused to believe. So they disagreed with each other.

Acts 28:25-29

As they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, ‘Go to this people and say,

You will indeed listen, but never understand,
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.

For this people’s heart has grown dull,
and their ears are hard of hearing,
and they have shut their eyes;
so that they might not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and understand with their heart and turn—
and I would heal them.’ (Isaiah 6:9-10)

Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

In quoting Isaiah Paul is making two statements.

i) A warning to Israel, a warning that has been building up throughout both parts of Luke's work. Again and again, throughout the history of Israel, the prophets called for obedience to God and for fidelity to the covenant. The destruction of Jerusalem and the exile in Babylon symbolise what happens when God's word is met with stubborn resistance. We recall the almost desperate pleading of Jesus that his contemporaries would finally listen to God's word (Luke 11:37-54) lest 'this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world' (Luke 11:50). With a broken heart Jesus cries: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you' (Luke 13:34-35).

Jesus warned his disciples that they would face the same kind of rejection (Luke 21:12), and the story of the Acts has been a long saga of hostility. At the conclusion of his address in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia, Paul cries: ‘Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers! Be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you’ (Acts 13:40-41).

Speaking of the failure of the synagogue in Corinth to listen, Luke writes: ‘When they opposed and reviled Paul, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

It is against this background that we are to read Paul's words to the Jews in Rome. To this point only a remnant have listened – those, like Paul himself, who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, who repented and put their trust in Jesus as Saviour. For the most part, however, Israel has continued its history of refusal to listen to the words of the prophets, even to the words of God's only Son and of his witnesses, Peter, Stephen and now Paul. Jesus is God's final word. Luke concludes the Acts with Paul pleading with his Jewish brothers and sisters. It is a matter of life and death for them and for Israel that they listen to the word being proclaimed to them.

2) The word of God spoken through Isaiah is not a rejection by God of his people. God's fidelity is greater than our infidelity, no matter how obstinate we may be. Even though as a whole the people fail to understand, even though they do not want to understand because of the demands which the truth will make upon them, God will never stop revealing his love to them and offering healing and salvation. Jesus himself spoke strongly, because it mattered that people listen. 'This generation' has only 'now' to repent and to find life.

After lamenting over Jerusalem, Jesus goes on to say ‘**I tell you, you will not see me**’, but then he adds a word that is full of hope and promise: ‘**until the time comes when you say, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord”**’ (Luke 13:35).

After declaring that Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles, Jesus adds: ‘**until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**’ (Luke 21:24). Because of God’s fidelity, there is always hope. As Paul writes to his beloved Timothy: ‘If we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself’ (2 Timothy 2:13).

Even though as a whole the Jews fail to listen, Paul, as one of them, promises to take up on their behalf the mission entrusted by God to Israel. He will take the message of salvation to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:46; 18:6).

For salvation is offered to all: 'May your way be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you' (Psalm 67:2-3).

'The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together' (Isaiah 40:5; see Luke 3:6).

Acts 28:30-31

Paul lived there **two whole years** at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Letter to the Philippians



The fact that in this passage he tells us that Paul lived in Rome ‘two whole years’ hints at Paul being released at the end of the stipulated time. This fits with tradition. But Luke says nothing of any later ministry, and about Paul’s death he is silent.

He has chosen a perfect note on which to close his narrative. The word is being proclaimed with all the power and freedom of the Spirit of the risen Lord. And it is being proclaimed by one who is following his Master in humiliation and suffering. The Suffering Servant of the Lord, now glorious, is living and ministering again in his suffering servant Paul. As Paul said very early in his missionary life: ‘It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God’ (Acts 14:22). Luke leaves us listening to the word as it is being proclaimed by a ‘prisoner of Christ’. If we are Jews may we take up our privileged mission. If Gentiles, may we rejoice in sharing the faith of our elder brothers and sisters in the faith.



The Servant Song