

Shipwreck!

V 1 And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment.

“We.” This marks the return into Paul’s company of Luke, author of the Book of Acts, who, along with the other Greek disciples, had to make himself scarce for awhile after Paul’s capture by the Jews in Acts 21.

“Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment.” A *“Regiment”* (or *“cohort”*) of that name was stationed in Palestine during the reign of Agrippa II. A Centurion commanded 100 men, but here Julius was more likely doing special duty (with a smaller contingent of soldiers) escorting this special prisoner Paul and *“some other prisoners”*.

V 2 So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.

“Entering a ship.” They found a ship going to *“Adramyttium”*, a city on the northwest coast of Turkey (near Troas, or Troy); the ship would *“sail along the coasts of Asia”* and get them part way to Italy.

“Aristarchus.” Known as one of *“Paul’s travel companions”*, he had been seized by the mob during the Ephesus riot (Acts 19:29), then accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (20:4). He later became a *“fellow prisoner”* during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. (Colossians 4:10)

V 3 And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.

“Julius treated Paul kindly.” Likely, it was Paul’s positive conduct that influenced the centurion so that he was more a prisoner in name only. At the port city of Sidon, Julius even *“gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.”*

V 4 When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

“Sailed under the shelter of Cyprus.” That is between Cyprus and the mainland, so as to avoid getting swept out to sea by the ***“contrary winds”***.

V 5 And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

“Sailed over the sea... off Cilicia and Pamphylia.” That is, the ship kept close to the shore of southern Turkey (***“Cilicia and Pamphylia”***) and docked at Myra, one of the main port cities for the imperial grain fleet; these were large ships that carried Egyptian grain to Italy.

V 6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.

“An Alexandrian ship.” They boarded one of those grain ships going to Italy. This would save them from a lengthier journey in a smaller ship that would have to hug the Mediterranean coastline all the way to Italy.

V 7 When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone.

“Cnidus.” A port on the extreme southwest corner of Turkey. ***“The wind not permitting us.”*** From Cnidus the ship could not sail due west for Italy because of a strong, opposing headwind, so it had to turn southwards to Crete, a large island off the southwest coast of Turkey. As they reached the eastern tip of the island near Salmone, they found some relief from the strong northwest winds.



V 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

“Passing it with difficulty.” The ship had to fight its way - tacking or zigzagging back and forth - to the southern coast of the island to a sheltered bay called *“Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea”*.

V 9-10 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.”

“Much time had been spent.” Precious time had been lost trying to sail from the port of Myra against the winds.

“Sailing was now dangerous.” Travel on the open sea (away from shore) was dangerous from mid-September to mid-November, after which shipping ceased altogether until February.

“Because the Fast was already over.” For the Jews this ***“Fast”*** marking the Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur) was a special day of fasting when they would confess and make atonement for their sins. (Leviticus 23:27-32) Since ***“the Fast was already over”***, that meant it was late September or early October. By this reckoning Paul knew the time had come when it would be dangerous to travel further, and so he ***“advised them”*** to stay put: ***“I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss.”***

V 11 Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.

“The centurion.” Because this was an imperial grain ship of Rome, the centurion was the ranking official on board and had the last word, not the captain (***“helmsman”***) nor the ***“owner”***. Had the centurion been able to recognize Paul’s spiritual authority, he might have paid more attention to him, but Paul was, after all, only one of the prisoners. It seems they were just as headstrong as Paul himself had been once upon a time when he was so insistent about getting to Jerusalem in spite of dire warnings from his co-workers.

V 12 And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, 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.

The ***“Fair Havens”*** was known by the professional sailors as ***“not suitable to winter in”***. Apparently, they did not relish the idea of being stranded in a remote outpost for several months and preferred, if at all possible, to go elsewhere. So they decided to head 40 miles to Phoenix, a harbor on Crete’s south coast that was reputed to be a more convenient place for them to endure the winter.

V 13-14 When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.

But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.

“The south wind blew softly.” Conditions looked ideal for this short journey ***“close by Crete”***, but the sea can be an unpredictable master at

times, and sure enough, they encountered *“a tempestuous head wind... called Euroclydon”* ; this was a strong, dangerous windstorm from the northeast, greatly feared in those days by Mediterranean sailors.

V 15 So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.

“The ship was caught... let her drive.” Unable to make any headway, they let the ship be driven by the wind.

V 16-17 And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty.

When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.

“Running under the shelter of an island called Clauda.” In the shelter of this island, 23 miles southwest of Crete, the ship experienced a temporary reprieve. *“Secured the skiff.”* The island provided just enough shelter from the wind to enable them to prepare the ship for the storm. They started off by hauling the ship’s lifeboat on board. Then *“they used cables to undergird the ship”*. By wrapping cables around the hull, winching them tight, this helped the ship endure the battering of the wind and waves.

“Syrtis Sands.” Refers to a feared region of sandbars and shoals off the coast of Africa, which had the reputation of being a graveyard of ships.

“Struck sail.” They would have lowered the topsails and/or a drift anchor to slow the ship’s progress since the wind from the northeast was blowing straight towards the *“Syrtis Sands”*. As much as possible, they might have angled the other sails in such a way as to guide the ship westwards and thereby avoid getting shipwrecked on the southern shoals.

V 18 And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship.

“They lightened the ship.” Still *“exceedingly tempest-tossed”*, they threw overboard some of the cargo so that the ship could ride more easily

over the waves.

V 19 On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands.

"The third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard." Perhaps the beam that supported the mainsail with its ropes and rigging.

V 20-26 Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.

But after long abstinence from food, then 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 to 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 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 it was told me.

"However, we must run aground on a certain island."

"Neither sun nor stars appeared for many days." Not having compasses or GPS systems in those days, sailors relied on the sun and stars to ascertain their direction and position. But cloudy skies had obscured any view of the sun and stars, and the ship was now completely lost and directionless.

When it seemed that *"all hope that we should be saved was finally given up"*, Paul who had experienced so many times God's hand pulling him out of dire situations, said, *"Take heart, men"*. His faith was a great strength to those on board the ship. His I-told-you-so reminder that *"you should have listened to me"* was mercifully brief, but it was enough to establish his authority as the one in charge of the situation.

He went on to recount that *"there stood by me this night an angel"* who told him, *"You must be brought before Caesar"*. This reaffirmed the

promise the Lord had made to Paul in chapter 23:11 and was the guarantee that the ship was in God's hands and would be saved. Paul was even able to predict, *"We must run aground on a certain island."* There was nothing the forces of Darkness could do to prevent Paul and his message from reaching Rome.

An interesting comparison: In the account of Jonah and the whale, because he had rebelled against God's call, Jonah's presence on the ship threatened to destroy it, but in this case, because Paul was in God's will, his presence on the ship was its guarantee of protection. (Jonah 1:9-12)

V 27 Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.

"Fourteenth night." Fourteen days had passed since the ship's departure from the Fair Havens. *"Adriatic Sea."* The central Mediterranean Sea, not the modern Adriatic Sea between Italy and the Balkan coast.

"Sensed that they were drawing near some land." Unable to see anything at night, nevertheless, the sailors' instincts told them that land was nearby; perhaps it was the crashing of waves on a shoreline or the presence of seagulls or something else.

V 28 And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms.

"Took soundings." They measured the sea's depth using a weight attached to a length of rope. *"Twenty... fifteen fathoms"* - 120 feet... 90 feet.

V 29 Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.

"Dropped four anchors from the stern." Anchors from the rear would hold the boat in place, hopefully, and keep the bow pointed towards shore. The idea now was to delay the landing until daylight came, and

they could see where it would be safe to guide the ship.

V 30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,

“Under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow.” Pretending they needed to stabilize the ship’s front section, these scoundrel sailors let down the same lifeboat they had hauled in earlier (v16) so they could *“escape from the ship”*. Dire situations seem to have a way of bringing out either the best, or in the case of these sailors, the worst in human nature.

V 31-32 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 skiff and let it fall off.

“Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” Paul saw through the sailors’ ruse and faithfully reported it to those concerned, knowing the sailors’ skill would be needed to further guide the ship. *“The soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff.”* Paul’s warnings were being taken seriously now, and though the boat could have been helpful to use for the shore landing, it was still better to get rid of it and thus make sure the sailors stayed on board the ship.

V 33-36 And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, **“Today is the fourteenth 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 the head of any of you.”

And when he had said these things, he took bread and 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.

“Continued without food.” Because of seasickness and the difficulty of preparing and preserving food, there had been a *“long abstinence from food”* (verse 21). Passengers and crew had eaten little or nothing in the two weeks since departing from Fair Havens. It was likely too that feelings

of despair and the hope of finding divine favor had encouraged the fasting to continue even though it wasn't needed anymore. In fact, they needed some extra strength now - *"this is for your survival"* - as they would soon embark on the difficult struggle of making their shore landing.

"Not a hair will fall." A common Jewish saying to indicate absolute protection. (Luke 21:18) *"Then they were all encouraged."*

V 37 And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.

"276 persons." That was a large number, typical of ocean-going vessels of that time. Modern jet airplanes may average a similar number of passengers.

V 38-39 So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.

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.

They lightened the ship." Now in shallow water, and needing to get as close to shore as possible, the main cargo of wheat was thrown *"into the sea"*.

"Did not recognize the land." The landscape was not familiar to the sailors, but they saw a place where there was a *"bay with a beach"*, a quiet spot where they could more easily land.

V40 And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.

"Made for shore." No doubt it was a tense moment as they allowed the ship to be driven into the shore. The seamen *"let go the anchors"* while *"loosing the rudder ropes"* that had been girding the ship to help it endure the storm; without them the pilot could more easily steer the vessel. They *"hoisted the mainsail to the wind"* and headed at long last for shore. We could perhaps relate to this in modern times by thinking of what it would be like to be in an airplane that had to make an emergency

landing in a farmer's field instead of at an airport.

V 41 But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.

“A place where two seas met.” A sandbar formed just short of the shoreline by the converging of two currents.

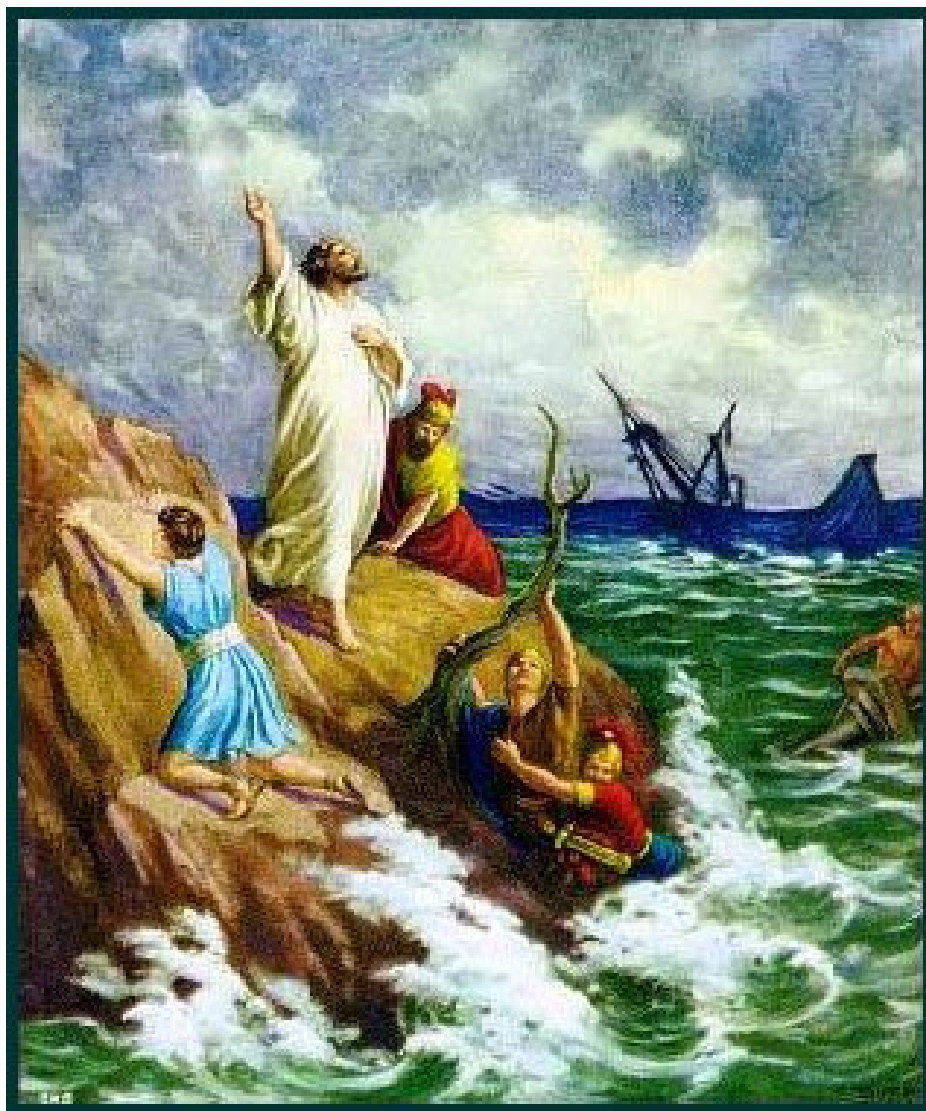
V 42-43 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.

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 soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners.” They feared facing punishment or even death if they let the prisoners escape. *“But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose.”* He commanded the soldiers *“who could swim”* to go first so they could be ready to receive and guard the prisoners as they came to shore.

V 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

“And the rest... all escaped safely to land... some on boards, and some on parts of the ship”. As the Lord had promised to Paul, *“God has granted you all those who sail with you.”* (verse 24).



[\(Continue to ACTS, chapter 28\)](#)