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THE BEGINNING OF PAUL'S VOYAGE TO ROME

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 134
ACTS 27:1-3

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ACTS 27:1-3 "And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself."

We have now come to that fascinating story of Paul's voyage to Rome. This is a very difficult part of Acts, but thus far we have gone verse by verse and we are going this way right to the end of this book. This passage is a part of the word of God and it was put here for a purpose. Now I realize that a travelogue is not the most interesting thing in the world. I know that ships and water and a shipwreck is usually not the kind of material that will exalt you into the seventh heaven. And I suppose that some of you have already concluded that you are going to be bored with these strange details. But let me remind you that hidden in these next two chapters are many interesting principles of life, and God the Holy Spirit saw fit to have Dr. Luke record these things for us. It is hard for us to realize that the Bible has to be interpreted in the light of the time in which it was written. So in Paul's day if you were in Caesarea and you wanted to get to Rome, the only way to go was by sea. They had a very interesting system for this kind of travel. Quite often they would go from Alexandria in Egypt and would sail close against the coast and by Crete and then land at the port of Naples and then go to Rome by land. Or they would sail up to the port of Rome and then go overland into the city of Rome. Communication in that part of the world was conducted by sea.

Now the Romans were the worst sailors in the world. They built some ships but they depended on the Phoenicians or Greeks or Egyptians to do their sailing for them. The Phoenicians were great sailors and went places no other people dared go. Historians agree that Columbus was not the first one to come to our shores, but the first ones to arrive in this land were the Phoenicians. The other great sailors in the ancient world were the Greeks. The Phoenicians went west and the Greeks went east.

The Romans passed laws that when a Roman officer stepped on a ship, no matter the nationality of the crew, that ship became a part of Rome. So in order to understand this passage we have to understand something about ships and the climate of the Mediterranean and something about the ancient compass.

SOME INFORMATION ABOUT SHIPS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

1. The ships of the Roman world were not steered by a single rudder. They had a two paddle rudder system. They had a double type steering mechanism. In Acts 27:40 we have the word "rudders" and it is in the plural and this is quite correct.

2. Most of the ancient ships had one large mast. Their ships did not have many masts. They usually had one large sail. The difficulty with this is that it puts all the pressure on one section of the ship and causes the ship to break in two easily. Later on they learned to distribute the weight over the whole ship and in this way they were able to keep their ships from breaking apart. Ships in that day just couldn't sail through storms and that is why they didn't venture out on the Mediterranean between October and March. The sail is going to be mentioned in Acts 27:17 and 19 and it is singular and this is absolutely accurate. About 100 years later ships were designed with several masts and many sails. This little detail is another vindication of the truth of the Bible.
3. The one sail model ship and one mast model ship caused the ship to break in two during a storm. It also caused the ships to be damaged rather easily, and it caused them to leak badly.
4. Because of leakage and the danger of foundering, these ships were equipped with undergirders as in Acts 27:17. The technical term for undergirders is frapping. This is the system of passing ropes and chains all the way around and under the ship and in this way holding it together. This kept the planks from being twisted out of place, thereby causing the ship to leak.
5. These ships we are talking about in this passage were not canoes. The ship in which Paul sailed was a large ship. It carried 276 people. After the wreck they got on another ship called the Castor and Pollux and it was large enough to handle the crew and take on these 276 people in addition. Josephus was once in a storm and the ship was wrecked and it carried 600 people and only 80 survived.
6. In the description of the ship on which Paul sailed, we read that the ship could not look at the wind. "Bear up" is a technical term for sailing into the wind. They had to let their ships run with the wind and could not sail into the wind. Their ships could only sail within seven points of the wind. Their compasses had only 32 degrees on them, not like our compasses which have 360 degrees.
7. The speed of an ancient ship can be determined from historical information. Pliny writes that it took three days to sail from Carthage to Rome and it took nine days to sail from the port of Rome to Alexandria. Now we know these distances and we know with fair wind conditions the speed of these ships. They could sail about seven knots per hour.
8. The Romans had no natural love for the sea so they left sailing in the hands of the Phoenicians, the Greeks and the Egyptians.
9. But seamanship had a great deal to do with Rome. The ports of Naples and Rome were always filled with ships. They brought wool from Spain, food from Sicily, granite and furniture and wood from Egypt, silks and spices from Asia Minor, grain from Egypt, fish from the black sea, and corn from Africa. This means that Rome depended on shipping which they despised. They despised it but they depended on it.

Outline Of This Passage

Acts 27 is the first leg of the trip to Rome. Chapter 28 is the second lap of the trip. The first lap was from Caesarea to Malta and the second lap was from Malta to Rome. So in this chapter we actually see two storms, not one.

In verses 1-13 we see the trip from Caesarea to Crete. Secondly, there will be a great storm in verses 14 to 32. They sailed in this storm from Crete to Malta. You will find the word quicksand, but it should be sandbar and these are off the coasts of Africa and run out as far as 25 or even 50 miles. In verses 33-44 we have the shipwreck at Malta and behind the scene and in all these events we see the picture of God's fantastic grace. There are no miracles until almost the end of the journey. This is a chapter of one man who knew doctrine and applied doctrine and he was the man of the hour. It is a miracle how 276 people survived and they survived because one man knew doctrine and applied it. The captain of the ship was a slave to the details of life and this will come out in this chapter. When they broke out into the open sea for 400 miles, they fought through a storm and this captain proved to be an amazing character. His guiding that ship through that storm is one of the most amazing events of recorded history. The shipwreck itself is amazing and in the midst of it all, Paul made a speech and the content of that speech did not come from that vision, but it came from his knowledge of doctrine.

ACTS 27:1 "And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band." The most revealing statement here is "When it was determined." Evidently there was a great concentration of demons in that part of the world for they all combined to fight Paul and try to keep him from going to Rome. When you find a concentration of demons, you find great depression. In another part of this story also, we will see great depression. Doctrine can break up mass depression anytime and anywhere. "When it was determined" is an aorist, passive, indicative of "Krino" and it means to judge, to discern, to determine, to decide, and it was a bad decision. It was no time of year to send a boat out into the Mediterranean. But the only way to get to Rome was by sea and the decision was made by the Roman governor named Festus. It was a very bad decision, and he thought this was the best way to get rid of Paul. He wanted to get rid of Paul and also a brilliant young officer who was bugging him, and that is why he sent Julius along. Apparently Festus knew that their chances to get through to Rome was quite bad. I want to show you why we know this. The easiest way was to go to Alexandria and go to Rome from there. But Festus found an old ship that was making its last trip and it was not a safe sea-worthy ship at all. It had to hug the coast and Festus picked an old leaky tub to carry them. Now this tells us something about Festus. He didn't want Paul to get to Rome and he didn't want Julius to get to Rome. So he sent them out in the sea to drown. He probably waited until the time when it was most dangerous and then sent them out. But the principle we will see is how the plan of God can overrule the plans of man. God often uses the wrath of man to praise his name. Already here in this passage we smell something when we read this phrase. "It was determined" lets us know something was wrong. If the word used here had been "boulomai" then we would have known that this was a bona fide thoughtful operation. But when the word "Krino" was used the first thing we smell

is politics and scheming. So we know that something was going on behind the scene here and Festus was determined to get Paul and Julius out of there and wash his hands of them forever. So we read, "It was determined." Festus is pictured here as a cheap politician and he tried to destroy Paul and Julius in one act. The Greek says, "He determined" that they should sail. The word for sail is "apopleo" and means to depart by ship.

Julius was a young aristocrat who realized that Festus had messed things up and he is about to give Festus trouble. So Festus wants to get rid of him and that is why he sent him along with Paul and the other prisoners. The names given this man and his family background lets us know that Julius was an aristocrat.

ACTS 27:2 "And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us" Take a look at the leaky tub, Adramyttium was a place where they made sorry ships. Their ships just went up and down the coast carrying cargo from place to place and they hugged the land and dared not get out in the open sea. Festus also sent Aristarchus along and you remember he was a believer, one of those in the traveling Seminary Paul had with him. We studied about him back in Acts 20:4. He went to Jerusalem with Paul and evidently he had been placed in jail along with Paul.

ACTS 27:3 "And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself." It took a whole day to go from Caesarea to Sidon, and this is just seventy miles. It says here that "Julius courteously entreated Paul" and the word is "Philanthropos." It comes from "phileo" and "anthropos" one meaning love and the other meaning man. So Julius was a noble man and showed genuine love for Paul. He permitted Paul and Luke and Aristarchus to go into Sidon and visit with old friends. This shows that Julius had confidence in Paul.

So Festus was trying to destroy them, but they fell right into the protection of God and the principle of Romans 8:28 worked for them all through those terrible days. He allowed Paul and his companions to go in to meet friend and refresh themselves. God always takes care of his own.

We will pick up their sea voyage at this point next time.