

## 27:1- 44 ~ Teacher's Lesson An All-Expense Paid Trip to Italy

**Introduction:** Paul's cruise to Italy might be described by the lyrics of this old TV show: "Just sit right back and you'll hear a tale, a tale of a fateful trip that started from this tropic port, aboard this tiny ship. The weather started getting rough, the tiny ship was tossed. If not for the courage of the fearless crew, the Minnow would be lost. The Minnow would be lost. The ship's aground on the shore of this uncharted desert isle with Gilligan, the Skipper too, the millionaire and his wife, the movie star, the professor and Mary Ann, here on Gilligan's Isle. So this is the tale of our castaways, they're here for a long, long time. They'll have to make the best of things; it's an uphill climb . . ."

Luke brings his long, 28 chapter story to a lively conclusion by going into considerable detail about Paul's harrowing sea voyage from Palestine to Italy. What this section of Acts emphasizes is God's divine protection of Paul.<sup>1</sup>

Arriving in Jerusalem after his third missionary journey, Paul was soon arrested, falsely accused of inciting a riot. Since he was a Roman citizen, he was tried in Roman, rather than local Jewish court. He had two trials and two hearings. He should have been set free after each one due to lack of evidence. However, he had become a political pawn; the Roman governors wanted to keep him in jail as a favor to the Jews. Paul realized that his only way out was to appeal his case to Caesar, which he did. Thus, one of the governors declared, "To Caesar you have appealed; to Caesar you shall go." It was about a 2500 mile trip. The year was around A.D. 60.

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**\*\*\*\*What difficulty did Paul encounter on the start of his to Italy (27:1-8)?** The winds were contrary to the sailing ships making much progress, 27:4, 7.<sup>2</sup>

**Draw on Board:** Draw the Mediterranean Sea like a backwards letter "C", with Palestine at the extreme Western tip. Place modern Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey around the end. Draw the island of Cyprus. Further to the left, draw Crete under Greece and Malta under Italy. Paul's ship hugged the coastline. First they sailed due north, then back towards the west, along the coast of modern Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey.

**In 27:1, who is "we"?** Since Luke wrote Acts, it referred to Luke and Paul.

**1. Luke states that they were accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica (27:2). What was his relationship to Luke and Paul? See 19:29, Colossians**

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall, 422.

<sup>2</sup> Luke recorded they set sail for Italy, not Rome. Ships docked in Southern Italy and passengers walked the rest of the way to Rome (Kistemaker, 916).

4:10. He was a believer who had traveled with Paul to Ephesus and had been drug into the theater by the rioting crowd. He evidently later voluntarily stayed with Paul to minister to his needs:

ESV **Colossians 4:10** Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you . . .

**One Another Encouragement:** Paul did not face the coming storm alone; he was accompanied by two faithful brothers.<sup>3</sup>

ESV **Hebrews 10:25** not neglecting to meet together . . . but encouraging one another . . .

**What was the Augustan Cohort (27:1)?** A cohort was a unit of 100 Roman soldiers. “Augustan” refers to Augustus, a title of office for whoever was Caesar; it meant “emperor”.<sup>4</sup> This was thus a title of honor. Julius led an imperial cohort.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting that Luke knew Julius on a first-name basis.

**The first ship they sailed on was a ship from Adramyttium (27:2)? What is Adramyttium?** It was port city south of Troas in modern Turkey.<sup>6</sup> This ship was chosen because it sailed in the general direction of Italy, following the coast of Asia (modern Turkey) on its way back to Adramyttium. The ship was not suitable to sail on the open sea. There presumably was no choice of a vessel that sailed directly from Caesarea back to Italy straight across the Mediterranean.

**Their first stop was in Sidon, a city 70 miles up the coast from Caesarea. What kindness did Julius show Paul in Sidon (27:3)?** He let Paul leave the ship and spend the night on shore with his friends, presumably members of the church in Sidon.

**2. Why didn’t Julius consider Paul to be a flight risk (27:3)?** Odds are good that Julius knew Paul from his long imprisonment in Caesarea and had come to respect him.

ESV **Proverbs 21:1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.

**3. Leaving the city of Sidon, they sailed under the lee of the island of Cyprus (27:4). What is a lee?** “Lee” is a nautical term. The lee side of Cyprus was the side sheltered from the wind by the elevation of the land.

**Navigation (27:5):** Sailing past the island of Cyprus, they sailed along the coast past the geographical regions of Cilicia and Pamphylia in what is now modern Turkey, until they came to the port city of Myra (also in modern Turkey). It is about 500 miles from Sidon to Myra.

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<sup>3</sup> Luke and Aristarchus probably paid their own fare.

<sup>4</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, 500.

<sup>6</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, 17.

**4. Why did they change ships in the port of Myra (27:5-6)?** The first ship was a coast hugging that was not going all the way Italy. In Myra the centurion found a ship from Alexandria that was going all the way to Italy.

Since ancient ships were not good at tacking against the wind, grain ships from Alexandria sailed due north to Myra. From Myra they were better able to sail westward along the coast of Asia.<sup>7</sup>

**Big Boat:** Many of the ships from Alexandria that carried grain to Rome measured 180 feet in length and 45 feet in width.<sup>8</sup> It could carry hundreds of passengers on deck (with grain below).

**Why did it take them a long time to sail the 130 miles from the city of Myra to the city of Cnidus (27:7)?** The wind opposed them, so they dropped down to the lee side of the island of Crete, directly below Greece, and finally stopped at a place called Fair Havens in middle of the southern coast of Crete.<sup>9</sup>

**Perspective:** The Lord clearly wanted Paul to travel to Italy to be a witness for Jesus' resurrection. When Jesus was on earth, He calmed the raging sea (Mt 8:24ff). Yet now, God has allowed Paul to face delay after delay caused by the wind.

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**\*\*\*\*Why did the centurion not want to spend the winter in Fair Havens (27:9-12)?** The small harbor of Fair Havens was not really suitable to spend the winter in. The bay is protected by small islands, but is still too open to be an ideal winter harbor.<sup>10</sup>

**5. Why was it necessary to spend the winter somewhere on Crete (27:9)?** The winds had delayed their journey so much that it was late in the season and dangerous to travel by sea due to terrible storms.

**To what "Fast" did Luke refer that was already over (27:9)?** See *Lv 16:29-34*. This was a reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement, which occurred around October. Mediterranean ships were normally in harbor from mid-November to mid-February due to the bad weather. One month before and after this season was considered dangerous.<sup>11</sup>

**Paul advised the centurion not to sail on (27:10). Where did he get his information?** Paul either knew from experience how bad it could be, or he had a revelation from the Lord and was, in essence, giving a prophecy.

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<sup>7</sup> Marshall, 425.

<sup>8</sup> Kistemaker, 919

<sup>9</sup> Both cites on are the coast of Turkey.

<sup>10</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, 366.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107.

**6. Why did the centurion pay more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship (27:11-12)?** It would be natural to give more weight to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to Paul, plus the Fair Havens was not so fair a winter haven, plus the “majority” (of the crew) wanted to go on. Phoenix was just 40 miles down the coast from Fair Havens, still on the lee side of the island.

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**\*\*\*\*What happened soon after they set sail (27:13-20)?** They were hit by a sudden, unexpected, tempestuous wind and driven along in a terrible storm, day after day, until all hope of surviving was lost.

**Word Study:** “tempestuous” (27:14), from *typhonikos* (basis for “typhoon”).

**What initially lured the men into thinking they could make it to Phoenix (27:13)?** There was a gentle south wind, so they headed out, sticking close to the shore. Phoenix was close, only a day’s sail in good weather.<sup>12</sup>

**7. The wind drove them off course to a small island called Cauda, about 50 miles from their destination (Phoenix). It was in the shelter of the lee of the island they were able to secure the ship’s boat (27:16)? What was this boat for?** It was a small boat that was being towed for use in the harbor.<sup>13</sup> They probably wanted to pull it in either to keep it from smashing into the bigger ship or keep it from sinking.<sup>14</sup>

**8. The storm was so intense that they used supports to undergird the ship (27:17). How did they do that?** They evidently passed ropes under the ship, from side to side, to strap its timbers firm.<sup>15</sup>

**“The Syrtis” (27:17):** Syrtis is the Greek word for a sandbank. These well-know sandbanks west of Cyrene were near the Libyan coast, about 400 miles away. Today it is called the Gulf of Sidra.<sup>16</sup> These sailors were not taking any chances! Exactly what gear they let down to prevent being run around is unknown. It may have been a sea anchor or perhaps it was the mast’s top gear.<sup>17</sup>

**Why did they jettison the cargo (27:18)?** See *Jonah 1:5*. Evidently the ship was taking on water and they wanted to make it lighter.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Marshall, 428.

<sup>13</sup> *New Bible Dictionary*, 117.

<sup>14</sup> Marshall, 429.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1107.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1004.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1007.

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, 430.

**Why was it noteworthy that they threw the ship's tackle overboard "with their own hands" (27:19)?** Perhaps it was to heighten the effect for the reader: they were in serious trouble. It may have been in contrast what normally would have happened on shore, where lifting gear would have helped them unload.<sup>19</sup>

**9. According to 27:20, what caused them to finally abandon all hope of being saved?** It was because neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and because of the immensity of the tempest. Most storms pass over fairly quickly. The problem here seems to have been that they stayed with the storm that started at Crete and ended at Malta.<sup>20</sup> Not being able to see the sun or stars prevented them from getting their navigational bearings (they had no idea where they were).

The Scriptures describe lost people this way:

ESV Ephesians 2:12 . . . having no hope and without God in the world.

**Truth:** The sailors were lost, but they were never off God's radar screen.

ESV 1 Peter 5:6-7 . . . casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

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**\*\*\*\*What did Paul say to encourage the men to take heart (27:21-26)?** He said that an angel appeared to him and promised him that none of them would be lost at sea.

**10. What did Paul say in 27:21 that might have irritated the sailors?** In essence he said, "I told you so!" However, he was not being a smarty pants. This statement was necessary to establish the credibility of his next prediction. The men had not eaten for a long time, so now was the time for Paul to encourage them.

**11. What good news/bad news did Paul announce in 27:22?** He said that the ship would be lost, but all lives would be spared. The reason given was that Paul had a divine date with Caesar.

**Jonah: Not!** The ship Jonah was on was sinking and everyone's life was threatened due to Jonah's presence. The ship Paul was on guaranteed the lives of everyone on it.<sup>21</sup>

**Based on what the angel said in 27:23-24a, how was Paul feeling?** He was afraid.

**12. Based on 27:25, why did Paul himself take heart?** Paul had faith in God that things would turn out exactly as the angel said they would.

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<sup>19</sup> Marshall, 430.

<sup>20</sup> Kistemaker, 928.

<sup>21</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, 2143.

**According to Paul in 27:26, what would they need to do to survive?** They needed to run the ship aground on some island.

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**\*\*\*\*What cowardly deed did Paul prevent (27:27-32)?** The sailors pretended to use the harbor boat to lay out anchors, but in reality they were planning to escape in it.

**Based on 27:27, how long had this terrible storm lasted?** It was into its fourteenth night.

**Where were they on the fourteenth day (27:27)?** They were being driven across the Adriatic Sea (the gulf between Greece and Italy).<sup>22</sup>

**What did the sailors do to keep the ship from crashing into rocks (27:27-29)?** They put out sea anchors, which were like underwater parachutes. This also kept the bow facing the shore so they could try to run the ship shore at daylight.

**What does it mean to pray for day light to come (27:29)?**

**13. How did Paul know the sailors were planning to escape (27:30-31)?**

**How did the soldiers keep the sailors from escaping (27:32)? Was this an over-reaction?**  
The soldiers cut the ropes and let the boat go.

**14. What can you glean from 27:27-32 about the relationship between God's Sovereignty (27:23-24) and man's responsibility?** God often uses human agency to carry out His sovereign purposes.

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**\*\*\*\*How did Paul convince the men to eat (27:33-38)?** He reassured them that they would all survive, and then Paul began eating himself.

**15. Why did Paul want them to eat (27:34)?** Nourishment was needed for the escape that would happen at daybreak.

**Witness:** The people in the ship were pagan, but Paul publically gave thanks to the true God in the presence of all (27:35).

**Why did Luke record how many people were on the ship (27:6; 27:37)?** It heightens the miracle of the coming rescue in which no soul was lost.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> When Luke wrote, the boundary of the Adriatic Sea went all the way down to Crete and Malta (*ESV Study Bible*, 2143).

<sup>23</sup> Josephus records 600 aboard a ship in the Adriatic (Marshall, 434).

**After eating, why did they further lighten the ship (27:38)?** Perhaps the sailors reckoned that the ship was more likely to float over any sand bars if it rode higher in the water.

This was a grain ship was from Alexandria. Egypt was Rome's chief granary, and Myra was one of the chief ports for the grain fleet that sailed between Egypt and Italy.<sup>24</sup>

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**\*\*\*\*How did the centurion save Paul's life (27:39-44)?** The centurion liked Paul, so he cancelled the soldiers their plan to kill the prisoners (to keep any from escaping).

**What thwarted their plan to run the ship up on the beach (27:39-41)?** They hit a reef, got stuck, and the surf began breaking the ship up.

**16. Why were the soldiers going to such an extreme to keep any prisoners from escaping (27:42)?** *See 12:19.* They were evidently accountable for the prisoners with their own lives. The centurion ordered everyone overboard, evidently figuring no one would be able to escape the island.<sup>25</sup>

**Great Mystery: How did Luke manage to keep his writing materials dry?**<sup>26</sup>

### So What?

**22. God is sovereign over the seas, yet he allowed Paul's ship to be tossed in a storm for over a week. What was God's purpose in that?** It reveals Paul's absolute trust in God, even a God who allows his servant to descend into the deepest need before he delivers him. It also shows that God's purposes cannot be thwarted, even by the powerful forces of nature.<sup>27</sup>

### Insights:

1. God is sovereign over the storms on our life. The ship was out of man's control, but it was not out of God's control.
2. We are not necessarily out of God's will when we get caught in a storm. In Matthew 14:22-24, Jesus purposely made his disciples get out on the sea where He knew they would be caught in a storm. He had a lesson he wanted to teach them.

ESV **Isaiah 43:1-3a** But now thus says the LORD, he who created you . . . who formed you . . . : "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce, 502.

<sup>25</sup> Kistemaker, 940

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 941.

<sup>27</sup> Steven Cole, "Lesson 69: Weathering Life's Storms (Acts 27:1-44)", Bible.org, accessed September 1, 2018.

**Application:** We all face storms in life. Nothing can get through to us except that which God allows. The only question is whether we will trust him in the storm or not. It might be God's will for us to go down with the ship, but we are to be faithful to Him no matter what. If we will trust in God's sovereign care for us in life's storms, He will use us to bear witness to many, just like with Paul. Often the Lord puts His people into a storm for the good of others.

**Example:** John Wesley was sailing from Georgia back to England with his tail between his legs, a failed missionary. Worse yet, he went to convert the Indians, but he himself was not converted. On the way back, the ship encountered a terrible storm that easily could have sunk it. Wesley was petrified. However, also sailing on the ship were Moravian Christians, who calmly praised the Lord in the midst of storm, ready to face death. This made a profound impression on Wesley, and was an important step leading to his conversion.

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at [SermonAudio.Com/NTRF](http://SermonAudio.Com/NTRF).

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