

## Acts 27

"And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan band" (Acts 27:1). Once more the "we" passages surface. It is interesting to see where these begin and end. The first appearance was in Troas on Paul's second journey (Acts 16:10). The narrative continued in the first person through Paul's preaching at Philippi, where the account returns to the third person (Acts 16:40). From this is inferred that Paul left Luke behind to continue the work in that city. The narrative continued in the third person as Paul continued his preaching in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens and Corinth. Thus, when Paul returned to Ephesus, spending about three years there, the history is biography. It is not until Paul is gathering the messengers of the churches to travel with him to Jerusalem that suddenly the narrative returns again to the "first person". Interestingly enough, this passage begins in Philippi (Acts 20:5f). The history from hence is chronicled as that of an eye witness. And so it continues until Jerusalem is reached. Again the narrative reverts to third person in Acts 21:18 where Luke indicates he was with Paul when he went to salute James and all the elders were present. But the trials of Paul, his narrow escape of death when Lysias, chief captain snatched him from the Jews who intended to kill him; his speech on the castle steps; his address before the council, his flight to Caesarea and subsequent appearances before Felix, Festus and Agrippa: are all recorded as a biography by Luke.

Now Luke emerges once more (Acts 27). He will travel to Rome with Paul. Since Paul was in a Caesarean prison for more than two years one cannot help but wonder what Luke did during these years. Had he returned to Troas or Philippi and has returned again to Caesarea? Has he set up a medical practice somewhere near Paul so that he might support himself and other men who had traveled with him and Paul? Did he use this time to gather information from eyewitnesses in order to compose his gospel of the life of Christ? Sometime, somewhere Luke had "traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write in order" so that Theopolis might know the certainty of the things wherein he had been instructed (Lk. 1:3f). At some time Luke had talked with eyewitnesses and these two years when Paul was prisoner in Caesarea would have been an excellent time for he was in the very place where those wondrous events had occurred.

And he was with Paul through the long, perilous journey to Rome. He

was with Paul when he wrote his prison epistle to the Colossians (Col. 4:14). And, when Paul wrote his last letter (the second to Timothy) he said, "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11). The wise man said, "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (Pr. 18:24). Luke was that kind of friend for Paul.

There had been eight companions who traveled with Paul to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4f). What happened to these in these intervening years? Luke tells that "Aristarchus was with them" (Acts 27:2). In Paul's letter to the Colossians he sends greetings to them from some who were in Rome with him, one of whom was Aristarchus whom Paul identifies as my "Fellow prisoner" (Col. 4:10). Luke does not tell that Aristarchus was a prisoner in Acts 27 but that was a great possibility. But what of the other six brethren?

Paul's company boarded a craft that sailed from town to town along the coast line before embarking over the open sea. Paul's company had earlier traveled near here on his last journey to Jerusalem for the ship had paused at Tyre to unlade its cargo (21:3). There were brethren in Tyre and apparently at Sidon for the centurion "treated Paul kindly and give him leave to go unto his friends and refresh himself" (27:4). Their destination was Myra, a city of Lycia. They had sailed under the lee of Cyprus and bypassed Celicia and Pamphylia. Many memories might have clogged Paul's mind when they passed Cyprus--the first point of his preaching when he and Barnabas began together his first journey (13:4f). Cyprus was Barnabas's home and the destination Barnabas set off for when he and Paul separated because the sharp contention they had over Mark (Acts 4:36; 15:39). Had they resolved their dispute at this point in time? Perhaps. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians sent some years before, mentions Barnabas with no hint of a continued alienation. "Or I only, and Barnabas, have we not a right to forbear working?" (1 Cor. 9:6).

When they landed at Myra the centurion sought a ship traveling to Italy. He found such in a vessel from Alexandria, and put his company thereon (27:6). The weather now was difficult and the sea was surely troubled for they "sailed slowly many days and were come with difficulty over against Cnidus, they sailed under the lee of Crete until they reached a harbor called Fair Havens" (Acts 27:7f). They spent much time here and it was now a dangerous time of the year to travel. Paul was an experienced traveler and had crossed the sea many times. All experienced sailors knew that voyage after the Fast was past was dangerous and the light, flimsy ship made it even more so. Drawing on

his knowledge, Paul urged the centurion and Captain of the vessel thus: "Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives" (27:10). His advise to them was that they "stay put" and winter in Fair Havens.

However, Paul's advise was ignored. The master and the owner of the vessel urged the centurion that they travel a little further to another harbor on the island called Phoenix because Fair Havens was not commodious to winter in. For whatever reason, they threw "caution to the wind" and when an apparently fair day for sailing dawned; they weighed anchor and sailed along shore toward Phoenix.

But the fact that the "south wind blew softly", suggests that their hope could be realized, the respite was only temporary. Very soon a tempestuous wind called "Euraquilo" beat down upon them. The ship was caught and could not face the wind and the sailors gave way to it (27:14f). The sailors were able to navigate the vessel under the lee of a small island called Cauda and with difficulty were able to secure the vessel. They used helps to under gird the ship, an effort to hold it together (27:16f). The repeatedly use of the pronoun "us" as involved in the activities tells that there were no "bystanders" on this ship. All labored to save what could be saved. They were struggling mightily against being cast upon the Syrtis, so they lowered the gear and allowed the vessel to be driven by the winds. One could imagine the ship being battered back and forth much like a plastic ball on a rough sea.

Day by day the tempest beat down upon them. Day by day everything that could be thrown overboard was; the freight, then the tackling (furniture) of the ship. Astonishingly the vessel stayed afloat! Still the constancy of the storm persisted. Neither sun nor stars were visible for many days and a great cloud of despair come to settle on both passengers and sailors "all hope that we should be saved was now taken away" (Acts 27:18-20).

But, an "unseeing Eye" watched the craft as it bobbed back and forth on the angry sea. On board that tiny craft were some of His own and one particular whom He had called to the mission of preaching the gospel of His Son to the gentiles. Already that one had suffered much. He had suffered three shipwrecks and spent a night and day in the deep, likely surviving shipwreck by clinging to some scrap to stay afloat. Now he was about to experience a fourth shipwreck (2 Cor. 11:25). God had promised that one that he would witness of Him at Rome. Paul's faith was great but he needed reassurance. And, just as in other crises in his life God

had appeared to him to strengthen him (See Acts 18:9f; 23:11), that assurance again is given! "Fear not, Paul, thou must stand before Caesar" he is told (27:24). And, because Paul had been praying not only for himself but for all his shipmates, God continued his assurance "Lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee". Earlier, as a seasoned traveler, Paul had warned that the voyage would be with injury and loss of life but now he has a direct revelation that injury would only be to the vessel, all lives on board would be saved.

This was good news, news to be shared with others who were threatened with danger just as he. So Paul stood forth in the midst of them and reminded them he had warned of the danger they now faced. "I told you so", he said! Yet the news they would live lifted their spirits--all were going to survive! And what was Paul's reason for such a promise? "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve" which angel conveyed the message of salvation to Paul. In view of such Paul said "Wherefore sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it hath been spoken unto me" (27:25). Often Paul had said of the "Unseeing Eye" "in Him we live and move and have our being" and Paul's faith gave him a calmness that had a remarkable effect on others (Acts 17:28). After all, Jesus had calmed the boisterous waves on the Galilean sea (Mt. 8:23-27). He could AND would calm this sea as well. He is in control!

The despair which had held all these souls in its grip, was now loosened. Paul's continued exhortations through even harrowing times ahead caused them to believe in him and in his God. Paul was now in control of this vessel. When sailors attempted to escape the ship to save their own necks, Paul said to the soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship ye cannot be saved," and the centurion and the soldiers cut the ropes that held up the small boats the sailors attempted to escape in (Acts 27:31f).

For fourteen days the passengers had fasted and they needed strength for the trauma of shipwreck which lay ahead. Just as Elijah was urged to eat before he undertook a long journey and mission for God, Paul urged these to eat. Paul took bread and in the sight of all he gave thanks (27:35). He was not ashamed that others would see him give thanks to Him who held his life in His Hands! Soon all 276 folks were "of good cheer and themselves also took food" (27:36). Never forget what a powerful effect your own faith can have on the unbelieving!

Already, by sounding, it had been concluded that land was near. They threw out the remaining cargo to lighten the vessel and spying a certain

bay to which they might possibly get to shore, they headed for the beach. But, they hit upon a place where two seas met and grounded the ship, which began to break up by the violent waves. The soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out and escape" but the centurion stayed them from this purpose, desiring to save Paul (27:42). So the soldiers were commanded to go first and then as each of the others, including the prisoners, reached shore, the soldiers could prevent the escape of any prisoner. His command executed and so all safely reached land. God's word once more was proven to be sure and steadfast. Did not Jesus say, "Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Mt. 24:35).

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