

Woodland Baptist Church
 August 28, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word
 Acts 27:1-26 - Paul Sails for Rome

1) OPENING REMARKS

2) READ ACTS 27:1-16

- a) **2 Corinthians 11:25-26** - 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers;
- i) It is as though Paul embarks on another missionary adventure. This may be observed in three ways. **First**, instead of being an isolated prisoner, Paul is accompanied by others—prisoners, soldiers, sailors, and, notably again, fellow Christians (Aristarchus and Luke at least, vv. 1–2)—and is encouraged by believers along the way (v. 3; cf. 28:14–15). **Secondly**, Paul regains his authority as the crisis develops: ‘in a striking reversal of roles, the centurion and the entire crew essentially come under Paul’s command as the storm hits’. **Thirdly**, as prophet and servant of God, he becomes a source of salvation for others because of an angelic revelation which he receives and applies to the situation (vv. 21–26, 31–32, 33–38). [Pillar NT]
- b) Paul’s actions during the storm demonstrates the opportunity that the believer has in such a situation to draw attention to the character of God and to encourage unbelievers to turn to him for mercy. For some people, this might be the first step towards trusting God for salvation in the ultimate sense. [Pillar NT]
- i) “There is no such detailed record of the working of an ancient ship in the whole of classical literature.”[Walker by Stott].
- c) The book that has done the most to vindicate Luke’s account is *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, by James Smith Jordanhill.

3) Verses 1 - The First Several Days of Sailing

- a) **And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius.**
- i) This cohort is likely to have been part of the army of Syria and Judea, located in Batanea (Bashan) in the Transjordan, under Herod Agrippa II. Like Claudius Lysias in Acts 21–23, Julius is introduced as a named Roman official, who begins to take Paul’s advice (vv. 31–32), and to care for him (vv. 42–43). The name ‘Julius’ suggests that ‘one of his forbears acquired his freedom (and citizenship) during the reign of either Julius Caesar or Augustus’. Since Claudius had prohibited the use of the simple nomen to all but Roman citizens, the name ‘Julius’ on its own suggests that he was an older man who possessed Roman citizenship. The sharing of Roman citizenship doubtless formed a basis for the respect shown to Paul by Julius.
 - ii) The vessel was likely a coasting vessel, which would travel close in to shore and put in at the various ports along the way. Since it was unlikely a vessel bound for Rome would be found along the Palestinian coast, Julius probably took the Adramyttian ship with the intention of transferring to one with a Roman destination. The ports of southern Asia offered a good prospect for finding such a vessel. [Polhill]
 - iii) It might be inferred that Julius was a *frumentarius*, an officer charged with supervising the transport of grain (frumentum) to Rome. [Bruce]
- b) **2 And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.**
- i) As a prisoner in that culture, Paul might well have inspired the shame and revulsion of his associates and many others. But Luke consistently shows how ‘Christian co-workers stand by the prisoner-missionary rather than taking the easier and safer route of slipping away from him. Luke and Aristarchus “cover” Paul with what status they have and show solidarity with him as he goes to Rome.’ [Pillar NT]
- c) **3 The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. 4 And putting out to sea from there we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us.**
- i) **Kindly** - Philanthrōpia is literally love for humanity. In Acts 27–28 it is demonstrated by Christians and pagans alike. Luke’s implicit message is that

Christians fulfill the best aspirations of human society in their care for one another (cf. 2:42–47 note). [Polhill]

- ii) We have no knowledge of the way the gospel reached Sidon, though it could well have been a result of the outreach mentioned in 11:19. The word friends (philous) suggests that Paul had visited Sidon previously (cf. 15:3) and had established good relationships with the believers there. [Polhill]
- iii) The ship sailed “to the lee” of Cyprus, i.e., under the shelter of the island from the winds. The prevailing summer winds in the eastern Mediterranean come from the west and northwest, so it was the eastern coast that provided shelter. [PNT]

d) 5 And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. 6 There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board.

- i) From v. 38 this appears to have been a grain ship. ‘Egypt was an indispensable source of supply for Rome, providing a third of the corn used in the year.’ Although such ships were privately owned, they operated under state control when they were contracted to bring grain to Rome. This was the second ship requisitioned by the centurion for the transport of his party.
- ii) A common route for grain ships bound for Rome was evidently from Alexandria to Myra and from thence north of Crete to Sicily. This was likely the intended route of the Alexandrian ship on which Julius boarded his prisoners. It was an Egyptian grain ship headed for Italy (v. 6). Such ships seem to have been privately owned and leased by the Roman government. [Polhill]
- iii) The Adramytiian ship crept on from point to point up the coast, taking advantage of every opportunity to make a few miles, and lying at anchor in the shelter of the winding coast, when the westerly wind made progress impossible. [Ramsay]

e) 7 We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. 8 Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

4) Paul’s Prediction

a) 9 Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, “Sirs, I perceive

that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."

- i) The author clearly thought that those he was addressing were sufficiently influenced by a Jewish ethos to make sense of this way of reckoning time. The Jewish calendar was a lunar one, the fast associated with the Day of Atonement (on the tenth day of the month Tishri) fell at a different time each year, either in the latter part of September or early October (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.66; 18.94; *m. Menah.* 11.9). According to the Roman writer Vegetius (*De Re Militari* 4.39), the dangerous season began after 15 September, and sailing ceased for the winter from 11 November to 10 March. Luke's allusion gives us a clue about the most likely date of this journey to Rome. [PNT]
 - ii) Paul's first assessment of the situation was not dependent on a divine revelation (as in vv. 21–25), but appears to have been based on his own wisdom and experience as a traveller. His intervention can be further explained in terms of his status on the ship: 'though under guard, and not free, he was in a sense a privileged person, who must be delivered to the Emperor'. [PNT]
 - iii) The fast" (v. 9) refers to the Day of Atonement. Calculated by the phases of the moon, the Day of Atonement fell at various times from year to year but always in late September or early October. For ancient travel on the Mediterranean, mid-September to early November was considered a dangerous time for traveling the open sea. After early November such travel ceased altogether and generally was not resumed until the beginning of February at the earliest. Paul's advice was based on this well-known fact. It was well into the dangerous season. Any travel now would be risky business. They had already encountered bad winds. [polhill]
- b) 11 But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said.**
- i) Perhaps the pilot and the owner of the ship had economic and personal reasons for wishing to keep going. Emperor Claudius (41–54) offered a bounty to shipowners willing to sail in the dangerous season to bring extra grain to Rome. A recompense was also promised for any loss or damage to ships (cf. Suetonius, *Claud.* 18.2). These incentives, which remained operative under Nero (54–68), were designed to cope with famine in the capital and forestall insurrections. [PNT]
- c) 12 And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they**

could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

5) The Great Storm at Sea

- a) **13 Now when the south wind blew gently, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, close to the shore. 14 But soon a tempestuous wind, called the northeaster, struck down from the land. 15 And when the ship was caught and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along. 16 Running under the lee of a small island called Cauda, we managed with difficulty to secure the ship's boat.**
- i) Ancient ships could not head into the wind as modern sailing boats can, and so they were carried before the wind some 23 miles (37 km.) southwest.
 - ii) Since they were sailing close in to shore, the trip should not have taken Paul's ship but a few hours with the favorable south wind. Such was not to be. Crete is dotted with mountains, some of them towering 7,000 feet above the sea. Perhaps as the ship rounded Cape Matala a violent wind rushed down from the mountains, striking the ship broadside. Luke described it as being "typhonic" (typhōnikos) in force, a word that in Greek as well as in its English cognate refers to a whirling, cyclonic wind formed by the clash of opposing air masses (v. 14; "hurricane force," NIV). More specifically, he designated the storm as the dreaded "northeaster," the deadly winter storm of the Mediterranean known by sailors as the gregale. [Polhill]
 - iii) The sailors "gave way" to the wind, which probably means they shortened sail and tried to make what progress they could against it (v. 15). It was all to no avail. Helpless before the wind, the ship was carried some twenty-five miles southeast to a small island called Cauda. Cauda is often mentioned in ancient sources, sometimes referred to as "Clauda"; the variant spelling is reflected in the textual tradition of v. 16. Today the island is known as Gozzo. [Polhill]
 - iv) By this time the dingy must have been full of water, and this made it more difficult to secure. There were certain jobs which only trained members of the crew could carry out, but any landlubber could haul on rope, and able-bodied passengers were pressed into service. "With difficulty," Luke says, probably remembering the blisters. [Bruce]
 - v) Syrtis is a combination of sandbars and shoals off the coast of North Africa. Is about 400 miles from where they started. The site was known as a graveyard for vessels, equal in fame to the often catastrophic journey between Scylla and Charybdis.

(1) *Scylla and Charybdis* -Scylla and Charybdis were mythical sea monsters noted by Homer; later Greek tradition sited them on opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and the Italian mainland. Scylla was rationalized as a rock shoal (described as a six-headed sea monster) on the Italian side of the strait and Charybdis was a whirlpool off the coast of Sicily. They were regarded as a sea hazard located close enough to each other that they posed an inescapable threat to passing sailors; avoiding Charybdis meant passing too close to Scylla and vice versa. According to Homer, Odysseus was forced to choose which monster to confront while passing through the strait; he opted to pass by Scylla and lose only a few sailors, rather than risk the loss of his entire ship in the whirlpool.
[wikipedia]

6) The Struggle to Save the Ship

a) **17 After hoisting it up, they used supports to undergird the ship. Then, fearing that they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the gear, and thus they were driven along. 18 Since we were violently storm-tossed, they began the next day to jettison the cargo. 19 And on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned.**

- i) This possibly involved the technique called **frapping**, which means passing ropes under the ship to strengthen it. But they could also have braced the ship by tying ropes around the hull or transversely across the deck. Part of their concern would have been the movement of cargo in the storm and the fact that grain when wet can swell dramatically and split the planks of a ship.
[PNT]
- ii) For the first time the sailors were able to take measures to secure the ship. The **first operation** was to haul in the lifeboat, or dinghy (v. 16). Luke noted that this was only accomplished with difficulty, and his use of “we” may indicate that some of the passengers assisted. The dinghy probably had filled with water in the course of the storm and become excessively heavy. **The next step** was to “undergird” the ship (v. 17). Precisely what this involved is not altogether clear. Luke said that they used “helps” (boētheiais) to “undergird” (hypozyōnyntes) the ship. Evidently the “helps” were cables passed under the ship or around it that served to brace it against the waves and prevent it from breaking up. **The third measure** taken by the sailors is even less clear. Luke said they lowered “the equipment” (skeuos, v. 17).

(1) It is more likely that they lowered the gear for the topsails and only set the small storm sail, allowing the ship to drift. A third possibility is that they lowered a drift anchor from the stern that would drag in the water and slow their progress. This is the option followed by the NIV. Whatever the specific measure taken, Luke stated that their greatest fear was running aground on the Syrtis. The Syrtis consisted of sandbars and shoals off the North African coast. They were some 400 miles to the south of Cauda, but their menace was so proverbial and the storm so violent that the sailors considered them a very real threat. [Polhill]

iii) The story of Paul's stormy voyage is reminiscent of the voyage of Jonah. The prophet also encountered a violent storm at sea. Jonah's crew also jettisoned the cargo and began to despair of life. And the crew and passengers of Jonah's ship were ultimately delivered. There is, of course, a major difference between the two. It was Jonah's presence on the ship that gave rise to the storm, and only in his absence were the others saved. It was altogether different for Paul's ship. The apostle's presence on the ship led to the deliverance of all aboard. This becomes evident in the next passage. [Polhill]

(1) Neither sun nor stars for several days - they were totally unable to navigate and were at the complete mercy of the storm.

7) Paul's Second Prediction

a) **21 Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. 22 Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, 24 and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island."**

i) In ancient literature one often encounters the main character of a narrative giving an address at the very peak of a storm. In those accounts the speech usually emphasizes the danger of the situation and increases the impression of impending doom.

(1) Paul's words serve the opposite function, introducing a message of hope in the midst of despair. He had given them his opinion previously, and

there was perhaps a very human “I told you so” in his reminder that they had failed to follow his advice on the former occasion (v. 21b). He had been right then, so his words now should be taken with more confidence. Then he spoke of coming disaster. Now he spoke of deliverance. Since their failure to hear his words of warning led to the present catastrophe, they must not fail to heed his message of deliverance; they must keep up their courage and not give in to despair (v. 22). [Polhill]

- ii) Note that it is an angel, rather than the ascended Lord Jesus, who addresses Paul here (contrast 18:9–10; 23:11). This angelic revelation confirms the personal word of the Lord Jesus to Paul in 23:11 and expands on its implications to include all who accompany him on the boat.

(1) Like Jonah, he confesses his devotion to the God whom they do not acknowledge (Jon. 1:9). Unlike Jonah, he is not seeking to escape from the implications of his service to God! Paul is no ‘divine man’ but the servant of one who alone can bear the title God. [PNT]

8) CLOSE

- a) In this mostly unbelieving company, Paul functions as a prophet, by praying, predicting (cf. 11:27–28; 21:10–11), and exhorting (cf. 15:32). [PNT]
- b) Paul’s vision is the center of the narrative and provides the key for interpretation. The deliverance from the storm is due to the providence of God and his preservation of the apostle for the witness before Caesar. This also marks the dramatic turning point in the account of the storm. The storm had reached its fullest fury. Despair had turned to hope. The focus was no longer on destruction but on deliverance. Still their rescue was in the future. Paul exhorted them accordingly to be of good courage but warned them there was more to come, and they would have to run aground on some island before final deliverance (v. 26) [Polhill]

