

Woodland Baptist Church

September 11, 2013 - Wednesday Night in the Word

Acts 27:27-44 - The Shipwreck - Fulfillment of Paul's Prophecy

1) OPENING REMARKS

2) READ ACTS 27:27-44 - The Fulfillment of Paul's Prophecy

3) Verses 27-29 The Water gets More and More Shallow

a) **27 When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. 28 So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. 29 And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come.**

- i) **Sailors suspected they were nearing land** - There was a rocky promontory on the northeast extremity of Malta now known as Point Koura. The breakers against Koura are audible for some distance, and it was perhaps this sound that alerted the sailors to the possibility that they were nearing land (v. 27b) [Polhill]¹
- ii) **Taking soundings [bolizo]** The term derives from the ancient practice of determining the depth of water (making a sounding) by feeding out a line with a weight at the end.

- (1) They thus began to take soundings. The first came to **twenty fathoms, or a depth of 120 feet**. The second, perhaps taken half an hour later, gave **fifteen fathoms—a depth of ninety feet**. With the rapidly decreasing depth and the sound of the breakers, it was decided to put out anchor rather than risk being dashed against the rocks in the darkness (v. 29).
- (2) Four anchors were dropped from the stern. Ancient ships generally carried multiple anchors, and the advantage of throwing them off the stern was that this would keep the vessel pointed toward the shore and thus give immediate command of the ship for beaching. As in the shipwreck of Odysseus, the pagan sailors now prayed to their gods for daylight to come and for deliverance through the night. Their prayer was ultimately answered—not by their gods but by Paul's God. They owed their salvation to Paul. [Ibid]

¹ All footnotes in this study are taken from Dr. Pohill's commentary from New American series.

4) **Verses 30-32 The Dinghy is Cut from the Ship**

a) **30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.**

i) **Sailors seeking to escape from the ship** - Evidently the sailors did not trust their gods to deliver them and decided to take matters into their own hands.

(1) On the pretext of letting out anchors from the bow, they lowered the dinghy into the water, planning to use it to take them to the shore. On all outward appearances, *this would have seemed a perfectly natural operation.*

(a) Anchors from the bow would have given the ship even greater stability, and it would have been necessary to set these out some distance from the bow, which could only have been accomplished by using the dinghy.

(b) Paul, however, realized their *true motive and reported it* to the centurion Julius. He pointed out that there was no way the rest of them could be saved if the seamen abandoned ship. The rescue operation required their expertise.

(2) **The soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go** - The soldiers' hasty response in cutting away the dinghy might be questioned. It would seem that the small boat could have been used to take the passengers to shore in the morning in shifts, perhaps even avoiding the wrecking of the ship. In any event, Paul's advice was sound. The rest of them would have been doomed had the sailors been allowed to abandon ship.

(a) Paul's advice did not go unheeded this time as it had at Fair Havens (v. 11). The apostle had gained the respect of the soldiers. Their deliverance depended upon Paul, and above all on Paul's God. [Ibid]

5) **Verses 33-38** Paul encourages everyone on the ship to eat

a) **33 As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. 34 Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." 35 And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. 36 Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) 38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.**

- i) At the height of the storm, when spirits were at their lowest ebb, Paul had spoken words of reassurance (vv. 21–26). With the thwarted attempt of the sailors, a ship badly battered by the storm, and no assurance they could get it safely to shore, Paul again rose to encourage the shaky voyagers. [Polhill]
- ii) Paul then set the example, taking food and eating it in the presence of all. The wording is striking: he took bread (*labōn arton*), gave thanks (*eucharistēsen*), and broke it (*klasas*). The familiar terminology is associated with the Lord's Supper (cf. Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23f.).

(1) The breaking of bread and giving of thanks was the customary Jewish form of blessing a meal, and Jesus was observing that custom in the Lord's Supper. Paul also was observing that custom and in the presence of a predominantly pagan group. In short, the eucharistic language of the meal on the ship may not be so much an indication that they celebrated the Lord's Supper there as that Paul and the other Christians were reminded of how Jesus broke bread with his disciples and continues to do so, continues to be present in the lives of his people. The meal thus had a meaning for them it could not have had for the pagans—their Lord continued to be present with them. He was present in that time of particular need. For them the meal was more than needed sustenance—it reassured them of their Lord's presence to deliver them. [Polhill]

- iii) **276 Persons on the ship** - It underlines the main theme of the entire voyage narrative and in particular the emphasis on the Lord's providence in the immediate context of the meal and Paul's encouraging words. It was no small affair—a host of people were delivered from the sea, and not one suffered the least harm (cf. v. 34b).

6) **Verses 39-44** The Ship runs aground and everyone swims to shore

a) **39** Now when it was day, they did not recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a beach, on which they planned if possible to run the ship ashore. **40** So they cast off the anchors and left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that tied the rudders. Then hoisting the foresail to the wind they made for the beach. **41** But striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground. The bow stuck and remained immovable, and the stern was being broken up by the surf. **42** The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any should swim away and escape. **43** But the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land, **44** and the rest on planks or on pieces of the ship. And so it was that all were brought safely to land.

i) **Kill the prisoners** - The concern of the soldiers that the prisoners might escape is understandable (v. 42).

(1) Roman law held guards personally responsible for their charges, and those who allowed prisoners to escape could pay with their own lives (cf. 12:19).

(2) Julius, however, intervened, thwarting the soldiers' plot to kill the prisoners. Luke explained that the centurion was primarily concerned with preserving Paul's life. So once again it was a Roman official who intervened to save the life of the apostle.

(3) Further, it is again evident that it was Paul's presence that was responsible for the preservation of the other voyagers—in this instance the other prisoners.

(a) With the dinghy gone, there was but one way the voyagers could flee the sinking ship and safely reach land—in the water. Those who could swim were ordered to jump in first (v. 43b). The rest made it to shore on planks or "pieces" from the ship's wreckage. The phrase translated "pieces of the ship" in the NIV is ambiguous in Greek and could also be translated "on some people from the ship." The picture would be that of the non-swimmers being carried on the backs of those who could swim.

7) CLOSE

- a) In either instance, all were able to reach shore safely (v. 44b). And the whole narrative from v. 23 on has made it clear that Paul's presence on the ship and God's protection of him was responsible for the remarkable deliverance of all 276 on board.
- b) In a real sense, it was something of a reversal of expectations. In many ancient shipwreck stories there is a motif in which a storm or shipwreck is attributed to the presence of one on board who has incurred the wrath of a god. The presence of the guilty party endangers the lives of all the voyagers.
 - i) In this instance the opposite took place. Paul's presence was in no sense responsible for the storm. Had his advice been followed, the ship would never have encountered the storm in the first place. On the contrary, Paul's presence was responsible for their deliverance from the storm. His God was with him, and because he was with the apostle, all were saved.