

# ACTS

## Chapter 27

### *Paul Sails for Rome*

When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. <sup>2</sup> We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us. <sup>3</sup> The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. <sup>4</sup> From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. <sup>5</sup> When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. <sup>6</sup> There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. <sup>7</sup> We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. <sup>8</sup> We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea. <sup>9</sup> Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Fast. <sup>a</sup> So Paul warned them, <sup>10</sup> “Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” <sup>11</sup> But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. <sup>12</sup> Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

**27:1** See map No. 11 at the end of the Study Bible.

*we would sail.* † The “we” narrative (see note on 16:10) begins again (the last such reference appeared in 21:18). Probably Luke has spent the two years of Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment nearby, probably gathering material for his two-volume document (cf. Lk 1:3), and now he joins those ready to sail.

*centurion named Julius.* Otherwise unknown. Perhaps he was given the specific duties of an imperial courier, which included delivering prisoners for trial.

*Imperial Regiment.* The Roman legions were designated by number, and each of the regiments also had designations. The identification “Augustan,” or “Imperial” (belonging to the empire), was common (see note on 10:1).

**27:2** *Adramyttium.* A harbor on the west coast of the province of Asia, southeast of Troas, east of Assos.

*ports along the coast.* At one of these stops, Julius would plan to transfer to a ship going to Rome.

*Aristarchus.* See 19:29; 20:4; see also Phm 24 and Col 4:10, indicating he was in Rome with Paul later. – Like Luke, had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem with the relief offering (20:4). He was one of the men who, with Gaius, were rushed into the theater of Ephesus by a raging mob (19:29). In Colossians 4:10, written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, the apostle refers to Aristarchus as “my fellow prisoner. (PBC)

**27:3** *Sidon.* About 70 miles north of Caesarea.

**27:4** *the lee of Cyprus.* They sought the protecting shelter of the island by sailing north on the eastern side of the island, then west along the northern side.

*winds were against us.* Prevailing winds in summer were westerly.

**27:5** *Cilicia and Pamphylia.* Adjoining provinces on the southern shore of Asia Minor. From Sidon to Myra along this coast would normally be a voyage of 10 to 15 days.

*Myra in Lycia.* The growing importance of the city of Myra was associated with the development of navigation. Instead of hugging the coast from point to point, more ships were daring to run directly from Alexandria in Egypt to harbors like Myra on the southern coast of Asia Minor. It was considerably out of the way on the trip to Rome from Egypt, but the prevailing westerly wind would not allow a direct voyage toward the west. Myra became an important grain-storage city as well.

**27:6** *Alexandrian ship.* A ship from Egypt (with grain cargo, v. 38) bound for Rome. Paul and the others could have remained on the first ship and continued up the coast to Macedonia, then taken the land route over the Egnatian Way across Greece and on to Rome, entering Italy at the port of Brundisium. But Julius chose to change ships here, accepting the opportunity of a voyage direct to Rome. Some suggest that Aristarchus from Macedonia stayed with the first ship and went to his home area to tell of Paul’s coming imprisonment in Rome. If so, he later joined Paul in Rome (see note on v. 2).

**27:7** *Cnidus.* From Myra to Cnidus at the southeast point of Asia Minor was about 170 miles. The trip probably took another 10 to 15 days.

*Crete.* An island 160 miles long. Rather than cross the open sea to Greece, the ship was forced to bear south, seeking to sail west with the protection of the island of Crete on the north (“to the lee of Crete”).

*Salmone.* A promontory on the northeast point of Crete.

**27:8** *Fair Havens ... Lasea.* The former was a port about midway on the southern coast of Crete, and the latter was a city about five miles away.

**27:9** *the Fast.* The Jewish Day of Atonement fell in the latter part of September or in October. The usual sailing season by Jewish calculation lasted from Pentecost (May-June) to Tabernacles, which was five days after the Fast. The Romans considered sailing after Sept. 15 doubtful and after Nov. 11 suicidal. – Paul’s observation about what would

happen if they continued the voyage was not a prophecy but a commonsense warning that to continue to Sicily from Crete at that time of the year was too dangerous. (PBC)

**27:12** *Phoenix*. A major city that served as a wintering place, having a harbor with protection against the storms.

### *The Storm*

<sup>13</sup> When a gentle south wind began to blow, they thought they had obtained what they wanted; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. <sup>14</sup> Before very long, a wind of hurricane force, called the “northeaster,” swept down from the island. <sup>15</sup> The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. <sup>16</sup> As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure. <sup>17</sup> When the men had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. <sup>18</sup> We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. <sup>19</sup> On the third day, they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved. <sup>21</sup> After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. <sup>23</sup> Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me <sup>24</sup> and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ <sup>25</sup> So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. <sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island.”

**27:14** “*northeaster*.” A typhoon-like, east-northeast wind (the Euroquilo), which drove the ship away from their destination.

**27:16** *Cauda*. About 23 miles from Crete. This provided enough shelter to make preparation against the storm.

*to make the lifeboat secure*. A small boat was being towed behind the ship. It was interfering with the progress of the ship and with the steering. It may also have been in danger of being crushed against the ship in the wind and the waves. It had to be taken aboard (v. 17). – The lifeboat was usually towed behind a ship. Such a “trailer” would cause problems in a storm, as the wind and waves tended to dash it against the mother vessel. (PBC)

**27:17** *passed ropes under the ship*. Probably crosswise, in order to keep the ship from being broken apart by the storm.

*Syrtis*. A long stretch of desolate banks of quicksand along northern Africa off the coast of Tunis and Tripoli—still far away, but in such a storm the ship could be driven a great distance.

*sea anchor*. Lowered apparently to keep the ship from running onto the sandbars of Syrtis, but the Greek for this expression should perhaps be rendered “mainsail.”

**27:18** *throw the cargo overboard*. To lighten the ship. They kept some bags of grain, however (see v. 38).

**27:19** *ship's tackle*. Spars, planks and perhaps the yardarm with the mainsail attached. At times these were dragged behind, serving as a brake.

**27:20** SUN AND STARS – Ancient sailors steered by the sun and stars. When these were hidden for several days during a raging storm, it was impossible to navigate intelligently. (PBC)

**27:21** *should have taken my advice*. Although they had not done so, Paul had good news for everyone (vv. 22–26). – At that worst moment Paul gathered them together. His reason for the reminder was to get them to heed and believe his words of encouragement. Although they had not done so, Paul had good news for everyone (vv.22-26). (CSB – LL – PBC)

### *The Shipwreck*

<sup>27</sup> On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic<sup>a</sup> Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet<sup>b</sup> deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet<sup>c</sup> deep. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. <sup>30</sup> In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. <sup>31</sup> Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” <sup>32</sup> So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away. <sup>33</sup> Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. “For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. <sup>34</sup> Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” <sup>35</sup> After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. <sup>37</sup> Altogether there were 276 of us on board. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea. <sup>39</sup> When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. <sup>40</sup> Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the

stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.<sup>42</sup> The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping.<sup>43</sup> But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.<sup>44</sup> The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety.

**27:27** *fourteenth night.* After leaving Fair Havens.

*Adriatic Sea.* The sea between Italy, Malta, Crete and Greece. In ancient times the Adriatic Sea extended as far south as Sicily and Crete (see NIV text note). (Some think this sea included all the area between Greece, Italy and Africa and that it was known as the Adrian, not the Adriatic, Sea.) Its extent now has been considerably reduced.  
*sensed.* By the sound of breakers.

**27:28** *took soundings.* Measured the depth of the sea by letting down a weighted line.

**27:30** *attempt to escape.* Without a port for the ship, the sailors felt their chance for survival was better in the single lifeboat, unencumbered by the many passengers. – Now with implicit faith in Paul's judgment, the centurion had his men cut away the ropes of the lifeboat. (LL)

**27:31** *Unless these men stay.* If the sailors had been allowed to desert the ship in seeking to save themselves, the passengers would have been unable to beach the ship the following day.

**27:33** *haven't eaten anything.* No provisions had been distributed nor regular meals eaten since the storm began.

**27:35** *took some bread and gave thanks.* Paul gave two good examples: He ate food for physical nourishment and gave thanks to God. To give thanks before a meal was common practice among God's people (see Lk 9:16; 24:30; 1Ti 4:4–5).

**27:37** *276 of us on board.* To note the number on board may have been necessary in preparation for the distribution of food or perhaps for the coming attempt to get ashore. The number is not extraordinary for the time. Josephus refers to a ship that had 600 aboard (*Life*, 15).

**27:38** *lightened the ship.* They threw overboard the remaining bags of wheat (see v. 18), which had probably been kept for food supply. The lighter the ship, the farther it could sail in to shore.

**27:40** *untied the ropes that held the rudders.* In order to lower the stern rudders into place so the ship could be steered toward the sandy shore. Ancient ships had a steering oar on either side of the stern.

**27:42** *soldiers planned to kill the prisoners.* If a prisoner escaped, the life of his guard was taken in his place. The soldiers did not want to risk having a prisoner escape.

**27:43** Once more the centurion is to be admired for stopping this plan and trusting the prisoners.