The Shipwreck: All Safe to Land

Bible Stories Anthology — Acts 27–28

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Fourteen Days in the Dark

Two hundred and seventy-six people were crammed aboard a grain ship caught in a winter gale in the middle of the Mediterranean. For two weeks they had seen neither sun nor stars. They had thrown the cargo overboard, then the ship's gear with their own hands. They had lashed cables around the hull to keep it from breaking apart. Nobody had eaten properly in days. The sailors, the soldiers, the merchants and the prisoners had all given up hope.

Then one of the prisoners stood up in the middle of them. He was an old man in chains, on his way to Rome to be tried before Caesar. He told them to be of good cheer. In the night, he said, an angel of the God he belonged to and served had stood by him: the ship would be lost and they would be cast upon an island, but not one of them would lose his life. Then he said four words: **"I believe God."**

It happened exactly as he said. The ship broke apart on a sandbar off an island none of them recognised, and every soul aboard — swimming, or clinging to planks and broken timbers — came safe to land.

Luke, who was on board, tells the story in more nautical detail than any other voyage that has come down to us from the ancient world. Sailors have tested it for two hundred years, and it holds. And through all of it runs one thread: the promise of God to one man, and the faith of that man, saved everyone who sailed with him.

The Setting

When. The autumn of about A.D. 59–60, by the most common reckoning.

Why Paul was a prisoner. Arrested in Jerusalem after a riot in the temple, Paul had spent two years in custody at Caesarea while one Roman governor after another delayed his case. At last, as a Roman citizen, he had **appealed to Caesar** — the right of every citizen to have his case heard in Rome by the emperor. King Agrippa had said, **"This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar"** (Acts 26:32). But Paul was not trying to get free. He was going where God had told him to go.

Two promises about Rome. Years earlier Paul had said, **"I must also see Rome"** (Acts 19:21). Then, on the night after the riot in Jerusalem, **"the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome"** (Acts 23:11). He had written to the believers in Rome that he longed to come to them (Romans 1:15; 15:23-24). He did not know he would arrive in chains, by way of a shipwreck.

Who was aboard. Paul; **Luke**, the writer ("we"); **Aristarchus**, a believer from Thessalonica; **Julius**, the centurion in charge of the prisoners; soldiers; other prisoners; the ship's master and owner; the crew; and passengers. Two hundred and seventy-six in all.

Sailing in the ancient world. There was no compass. Ships steered by the sun by day and the stars by night, and hugged the coasts whenever they could. The sailing season on the open Mediterranean was short: from about mid-September sailing became dangerous, and from about mid-November it stopped altogether until spring. Storms, clouds and short days made open-sea voyages in winter deadly.

The grain ships. Rome's bread came from Egypt. Great freighters from Alexandria — some able to carry over a thousand tons of wheat and hundreds of passengers — sailed each year to Italy. The ship that carried Paul was one of them.

The administration. The age of grace. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was carrying the gospel to the capital of the Gentile world.

The Story, Told Faithfully

Julius the Centurion

> **Acts 27:1** *And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.*
>
> **Acts 27:2** *And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.*
>
> **Acts 27:3** *And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.*

"Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band." A cohort bearing the emperor's title. Through the whole voyage Julius treats Paul with respect: **"Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself."** At Sidon, believers cared for the prisoner-apostle. God gave Paul favour with his guard.

"We launched." "We." Luke was there, and so was Aristarchus, who had been dragged into the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:29) and who later shared Paul's imprisonment (Colossians 4:10). Paul was not alone.

Slowly, Against the Wind

> **Acts 27:4** *And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.*
>
> **Acts 27:5** *And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.*
>
> **Acts 27:6** *And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.*
>
> **Acts 27:7** *And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone;*
>
> **Acts 27:8** *And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.*

"The winds were contrary." From the start, the winds were against them — westerly winds that forced them to creep along the coast.

"A ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy." At Myra, on the southern coast of what is now Turkey, the centurion found a grain ship bound for Italy and put his prisoners aboard.

"we had sailed slowly many days… the wind not suffering us… hardly passing it." Luke's words pile up: slowly, scarcely, hardly. It took them many days to cover what should have taken a few. They sheltered along the southern side of Crete and reached a small bay called **Fair Havens**.

Paul's Warning

> **Acts 27:9** *Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,*
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> **Acts 27:10** *And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*
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> **Acts 27:11** *Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.*
>
> **Acts 27:12** *And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.*

"Because the fast was now already past." "The fast" is the **Day of Atonement**, the only fast day commanded in the Law, on the tenth day of the seventh month — in late September or early October. Every Jew aboard would have known what that meant: the safe sailing season was over.

"Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives." Paul was an experienced traveller — he had already been shipwrecked three times and spent a night and a day in the open sea (2 Corinthians 11:25). **"I perceive"** — this was his own seasoned judgment. And notice: part of what he foresaw did *not* happen. He expected loss of life; in the end not one life was lost. Scripture is honest. Paul's first warning was his own experienced opinion. What came later was a word from God — and that proved true in every detail.

"The centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul." Naturally. The captain and owner were the experts, and they had money riding on getting the cargo to Rome. Fair Havens was **"not commodious to winter in"** — not a good harbour for

the winter — and most of them wanted to try for **Phenice** (Phoenix), a better harbour about forty miles further west.

Euroclydon

> **Acts 27:13** *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.*
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> **Acts 27:14** *But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.*
>
> **Acts 27:15** *And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.*
>
> **Acts 27:16** *And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:*
>
> **Acts 27:17** *Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.*

"When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose." A gentle south wind — exactly what they needed to run west along the coast. It looked like the right decision. Things often do.

"Not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon." A violent north-easterly gale sweeping down off the mountains of Crete. Sailors gave it a name, as they still do for dangerous winds. The Greek word for "tempestuous" is *typhōnikos* — related to our word "typhoon."

"When the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive." An ancient ship with one great square sail could not sail into such a wind. They had no choice but to let the storm carry them.

"Running under a certain island which is called Clauda." In the brief shelter of a small island (modern Gavdos), they did three things any sailor would recognise:

- **"We had much work to come by the boat."** They hauled aboard the small boat that was normally towed behind the ship, before it was smashed or swamped.
- **"They used helps, undergirding the ship."** They passed cables under the hull and drew them tight, to hold the timbers together under the strain of the waves.
- **"Fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail."** The "quicksands" were the **Syrtis**, the notorious shallows and sandbars off the coast of Libya far to the south-west, where the wind was driving them. "Strake sail" means they lowered the gear — the great sail and its yard — to slow their drift.

All Hope Was Taken Away

> **Acts 27:18** *And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;*
>
> **Acts 27:19** *And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.*
>
> **Acts 27:20** *And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.*

"The next day they lightened the ship." They began throwing cargo overboard to keep her afloat.

“The third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.” Spars, rigging, equipment — anything heavy. “With our own hands”: even the passengers joined in.

“When neither sun nor stars in many days appeared.” Without sun or stars they could not know where they were. For ancient sailors, the lights of the sky God had set **“for signs, and for seasons”** (Genesis 1:14) were their only map. Now the map was gone.

“All hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” Luke says “we.” Even the believers had reached the end of human hope.

“I Believe God”

> **Acts 27:21** *But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.*
>
> **Acts 27:22** *And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship.*
>
> **Acts 27:23** *For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,*
>
> **Acts 27:24** *Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.*
>
> **Acts 27:25** *Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*
>
> **Acts 27:26** *Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*

“After long abstinence.” They had not eaten for days — from seasickness, fear, and the impossibility of cooking in the storm.

“Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me.” This was not scolding. Paul reminded them that he had been right before, so they would listen to him now.

“Be of good cheer.” The same words the Lord had spoken to Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11) — and Jesus to His disciples in their storm-tossed boat on Galilee (Matthew 14:27). Paul passed on the comfort he had received.

“There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve.” *Whose I am* — belonging. *Whom I serve* — obedience. In the dark, in chains, in a sinking ship, Paul knew exactly whose he was.

“Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar.” God’s word from two years before still stood: Paul would bear witness at Rome. So he could not die at sea.

“Lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” *Given thee.* As this series understands it, these words suggest that Paul had been praying for the lives of everyone aboard, and God granted his prayer. Two hundred and seventy-five people lived because of one man’s relationship with God.

“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” Here is the heart of the story, in four words: **I believe God.** Not merely that God exists — Paul believed what God had *said*. Faith is taking God at His word.

“Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.” God told him the outcome, and He also told him the hard part.

The Fourteenth Night

> **Acts 27:27** *But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;*
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> **Acts 27:28** *And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.*
>
> **Acts 27:29** *Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.*
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> **Acts 27:30** *And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,*
>
> **Acts 27:31** *Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*
>
> **Acts 27:32** *Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.*

“When the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria.” “Adria” was the ancient name for the whole central Mediterranean between Greece, Italy and Africa — not only the modern Adriatic Sea.

“About midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country.” Perhaps they heard breakers on rocks.

“Sounded, and found it twenty fathoms… fifteen fathoms.” To “sound” was to drop a weighted line to measure the depth. A fathom is six feet: 120 feet, then 90. The water was getting shallower fast.

“They cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.” Anchoring from the stern kept the ship pointed toward the shore, ready to run aground bow first in the morning. “Wished for the day” — prayed for dawn.

In the nineteenth century a Scottish yachtsman and scholar, James Smith, studied this voyage in detail. He worked out that a ship of this kind, drifting before a north-easterly gale with its gear lowered, would cover about thirty-six miles a day — and that the distance from Clauda to the island of Malta is about 476 miles. Thirteen and a quarter days: the fourteenth night. At St Paul’s Bay on Malta, he found, the soundings still run twenty fathoms and then fifteen, over a bottom of heavy clay that holds anchors well. Luke’s account is the work of an eyewitness who wrote down exactly what he saw.

“As the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship.” Pretending to lay anchors from the bow, the sailors were lowering the lifeboat to save themselves and leave everyone else.

“Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.” God had promised that all would live — but that did not mean the sailors could abandon their posts. God’s promises work through obedience, not around it. **“Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.”** Now there was no way out but God’s way.

He Took Bread and Gave Thanks

> **Acts 27:33** *And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.*
>
> **Acts 27:34** *Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.*

> **Acts 27:35** *And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.*
>
> **Acts 27:36** *Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.*
>
> **Acts 27:37** *And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.*
>
> **Acts 27:38** *And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.*

"Paul besought them all to take meat." "Meat" means food. The prisoner was now giving the orders, and taking care of everyone.

"For this is for your health." The Greek word is *sōtēria*, the word usually translated "salvation." Eating was part of their being saved; they would need strength to reach the shore.

"There shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you." A proverbial expression of complete safety (compare Luke 21:18).

"He took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat." In front of two hundred and seventy-five frightened pagans, soldiers and sailors, the prisoner stood in the grey light and thanked God for bread. It was an ordinary meal — and a public confession of faith in a God who was about to save them all.

"Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat." Courage is catching.

"Two hundred threescore and sixteen souls." Two hundred and seventy-six. Luke counted them — perhaps as they ate, perhaps as they came ashore. Every one would be accounted for.

"They lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea." The last of the precious cargo went overboard, so the ship would float higher and run further up on the beach.

A Place Where Two Seas Met

> **Acts 27:39** *And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.*
>
> **Acts 27:40** *And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.*
>
> **Acts 27:41** *And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.*

"They knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore." A bay with a beach — somewhere to run the ship aground.

"Taken up the anchors... loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail." Ancient ships were steered by two great steering oars at the stern, which had been lashed up during the storm. Now they cut the anchors loose, freed the steering oars, raised the foresail, and ran for the beach.

"Falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground." At St Paul's Bay a narrow channel separates the shore from a small island, and the water from both sides meets over a sandbank. The bow stuck fast in the mud; the stern was pounded to pieces by the waves.

All Safe to Land

> **Acts 27:42** *And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.*
>
> **Acts 27:43** *But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:*
>
> **Acts 27:44** *And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

"The soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners." Under Roman practice, a soldier who let a prisoner escape could pay with his own life (compare Acts 12:19; 16:27). Better, they thought, to kill them all.

"But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose." Because of Paul, Julius stopped them — and so every other prisoner was spared too.

"And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land." Swimmers first, then the rest **"on boards, and… on broken pieces of the ship."** Two hundred and seventy-six people, soaked and freezing on a winter beach — and not one missing. Exactly as God had said.

The Psalms describe it:

> **Psalm 107:28** *Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses.*
>
> **Psalm 107:29** *He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still.*
>
> **Psalm 107:30** *Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.*

The Viper

> **Acts 28:1** *And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.*
>
> **Acts 28:2** *And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.*
>
> **Acts 28:3** *And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.*
>
> **Acts 28:4** *And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.*
>
> **Acts 28:5** *And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.*
>
> **Acts 28:6** *Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.*

"The island was called Melita." Malta, south of Sicily.

"The barbarous people shewed us no little kindness." "Barbarous" did not mean savage. It was the Greek word for people who did not speak Greek. The people of Malta spoke a Phoenician dialect. **"No little kindness"** is a **litotes** — saying less to mean more: they were exceptionally kind. In cold rain they lit a fire and took in two hundred and seventy-six strangers.

“When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks.” The great apostle, the man God had just used to save everyone aboard, was gathering firewood. No task was beneath him.

“There came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.” Driven out of the sticks by the heat, a snake struck and clung to his hand. (There are no venomous snakes on Malta today, and some have questioned this detail. But the islanders knew their own island and fully expected him to die — and over two thousand years, as Malta’s forests were cleared, its wildlife has changed.)

“No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.” “Vengeance” was, to them, a goddess — *Dikē*, Justice. They reasoned that a man who escaped the sea only to be bitten by a snake must be guilty of something terrible.

“He shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.” Jesus had said, **“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you”** (Luke 10:19).

“They changed their minds, and said that he was a god.” First a murderer, then a god — people are quick to judge either way. Paul was neither. Luke does not record his answer here, but at Lystra, when people had tried to worship him, Paul had cried out, **“We also are men of like passions with you”** (Acts 14:15).

Healing at Malta

> **Acts 28:7** *In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.*
>
> **Acts 28:8** *And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.*
>
> **Acts 28:9** *So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:*
>
> **Acts 28:10** *Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.*

“The chief man of the island, whose name was Publius.” “Chief man” (Greek *prōtos*, “first”) is the very title found on ancient inscriptions from Malta for the island’s leading official. Luke got even this detail right.

“The father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux.” Fever and dysentery. Luke, the physician, uses precise medical terms, in the plural — recurring bouts of fever. (In 1887 a disease causing recurring fevers was identified on Malta and named “Malta fever”; whether this was it, no one can say.)

“Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.” Paul prayed first. The power was God’s.

“Others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.” For three months, the shipwrecked prisoner was the island’s source of healing. And when they left, the people of Malta **“laded us with such things as were necessary”** — loaded them with supplies for the rest of the journey.

Castor and Pollux

> **Acts 28:11** *And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.*
>
> **Acts 28:12** *And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.*
>
> **Acts 28:13** *And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli:*
>
> **Acts 28:14** *Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.*

"After three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle." Another grain ship, one that had wisely wintered at Malta rather than risk the sea. Three months — the whole of the closed season.

"Whose sign was Castor and Pollux." The ship's figurehead was the Twins, Castor and Pollux — the "Dioscuri," sons of Zeus in Greek myth, the patrons of sailors, pictured in the sky as the constellation Gemini. Luke simply records the ship's name. The old ship had been saved by no pagan gods; the whole company had been saved by the true God, who made the stars.

"We fetched a compass." An old English phrase meaning they *sailed a roundabout course*, tacking against the wind.

"We came the next day to Puteoli: where we found brethren." Puteoli, on the Bay of Naples, was Rome's great grain harbour. Already there was a church there. The gospel had travelled the grain routes ahead of the apostle.

The Brethren Came to Meet Us

> **Acts 28:15** *And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.*
>
> **Acts 28:16** *And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.*

"They came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns." Appii Forum was about forty-three miles from Rome on the Appian Way, and Three Taverns about thirty-three. The believers in Rome, who had received Paul's letter to the Romans about three years before, walked a day or two down the road to meet him.

"Whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." Even Paul needed encouragement. Seeing the faces of the believers he had written to but never met, he thanked God and took heart.

"Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him." Chained to a soldier, but allowed to live in his own lodging.

No Man Forbidding Him

> **Acts 28:23** *And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.*

> **Acts 28:24** *And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.*

Paul called the Jewish leaders of Rome together and, **"from morning till evening,"** expounded the kingdom of God and persuaded them concerning Jesus, **"both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets"** — exactly as Jesus had done on the road to Emmaus. Some believed; some did not. Paul quoted Isaiah's words about hearts grown dull (Isaiah 6:9-10), and then declared:

> **Acts 28:28** *Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.*
>
> **Acts 28:30** *And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,*
>
> **Acts 28:31** *Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.*

"Two whole years in his own hired house." Rented at his own expense, while he waited for his case to be heard.

"Received all that came in unto him." Visitors came and went. From that house, very likely, came letters that have fed the church ever since — to the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, and to Philemon. Paul wrote to the Philippians: **"the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace"** (Philippians 1:12-13).

"With all confidence, no man forbidding him." The last word of the book of Acts in Greek is *akōlytōs* — "unhindered." Paul was in chains. The word of God was not. As he later wrote, **"I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound"** (2 Timothy 2:9).

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

The Lord keeps His word. "So must thou bear witness also at Rome." Two years, two governors, a king, a storm, a shipwreck and a viper stood between Paul and that promise — and none of them could stop it.

The Master of the storm. On the Sea of Galilee, Jesus rose and rebuked the wind, "and there was a great calm" (Matthew 8:26). On the Mediterranean, He did not calm the storm, but He carried every soul through it.

The gospel reaches Rome. The Lord Jesus Christ — crucified, raised, ascended, Lord of all — was preached in the capital of the world, by a man in chains, "no man forbidding him."

To the Grace Administration

Believe God. "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." That is the whole of faith: believing what God has said. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

Whose I am, and whom I serve. Every believer belongs to God and serves Him — in a palace, in a prison, or on a sinking ship.

One believer blesses many. A whole shipload of people was saved because of one man's standing with God. Believers are to be a blessing to everyone around them.

Suffering and God's will. Paul was exactly where God wanted him, and he was shipwrecked, bitten and chained. None of it meant God had abandoned him. All of it carried the gospel further.

The word is not bound. Chains could hold Paul. They could not hold the word of God.

To the Topic of Storms

- **Listen to wise counsel** — and know when your own judgment is only judgment, and when God has spoken.
- **Don't abandon your post.** "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved."
- **Eat, and give thanks.** Faith takes care of ordinary things.
- **Pass on the comfort you receive.** "Be of good cheer."
- **Take courage from other believers.** Paul did, at Three Taverns.
- **God may not stop the storm, but He will bring you through it.**

The Main Takeaway

When every human hope was gone, one prisoner who belonged to God and served Him said, "I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" — and God brought every one of the two hundred and seventy-six souls safe to land, carried His apostle to Rome, and saw His word preached there with no man forbidding him.

- **God's promises outlast every storm.**
- **Faith is believing what God has said.**
- **Know whose you are.**
- **One faithful believer can be a blessing to hundreds.**
- **Obedience is part of God's deliverance.**
- **Humble work and great power go together** — Paul gathered sticks and healed an island.
- **The word of God is not bound.**

For Our Learning — The People

- **Paul.** The apostle to the Gentiles, a prisoner who had appealed to Caesar; the man God used to save everyone aboard.
- **Luke.** The physician and writer of Acts, an eyewitness of the whole voyage ("we").
- **Aristarchus.** A believer from Thessalonica who travelled with Paul and later shared his imprisonment.
- **Julius.** The centurion in charge of the prisoners, who treated Paul kindly and saved his life.
- **The master and owner of the ship.** Who advised sailing on from Fair Havens.
- **The shipmen.** The crew, who tried to abandon the ship in the lifeboat.
- **The soldiers.** Who wanted to kill the prisoners, and were stopped.

- **The angel of God.** Who stood by Paul in the night with God's promise.
- **The people of Malta.** Non-Greek-speaking islanders who showed "no little kindness."
- **Publius.** The chief man of Malta, who received them; his father was healed.
- **The brethren at Puteoli and Rome.** Believers who welcomed Paul and came to meet him.
- **The chief of the Jews at Rome.** Who heard Paul out; some believed.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Appeal to Caesar.** A Roman citizen's right to have his case heard by the emperor.
- **The sailing season.** Dangerous from mid-September, closed from mid-November until spring.
- **The Day of Atonement ("the fast").** The tenth day of the seventh month, late September or early October.
- **Grain ships.** Large freighters carrying Egyptian wheat to Rome, with room for many passengers.
- **Navigation.** By sun and stars, without a compass; hugging coasts where possible.
- **Undergirding.** Cables passed around a ship's hull to hold it together in a storm.
- **Sounding.** Measuring depth with a weighted line; a fathom is six feet.
- **Stern anchors and steering oars.** Ships were steered by two large oars at the stern.
- **Figureheads.** Ships carried a carved sign of their patron gods.
- **"Barbarians."** People who did not speak Greek.
- **Hospitality to the shipwrecked.** Kindness to strangers was highly valued.
- **The Appian Way.** The great paved road running south from Rome.
- **House arrest.** A prisoner of rank could live in rented lodgings chained to a guard.

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Litotes** — saying less to mean more. "No small tempest" (27:20), a very great storm; "no little kindness" (28:2), great kindness.
- **Idiom** — "we let her drive" (27:15), let the ship run before the wind; "wished for the day" (27:29), longed for dawn; "fetched a compass" (28:13), sailed a roundabout course; "there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you" (27:34), complete safety.
- **Personification** — speaking of a thing as a person. "Vengeance suffereth not to live" (28:4), the islanders' goddess of justice.
- **Antithesis** — setting opposites side by side. "A murderer… a god" (28:4, 6).
- **Synecdoche** — a part put for the whole. "Souls" (27:37), for persons.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **Paul went to Rome as a prisoner** because he had appealed to Caesar — and because God had said he would bear witness there.

- **Paul's first warning was his own judgment** ("I perceive"), and he expected loss of life; God's later word said no one would die, and that is what happened.
- **Neither sun nor stars appeared for many days**, and all hope was taken away.
- **An angel of God told Paul** that he must stand before Caesar and that God had given him all who sailed with him.
- **Paul said, "I believe God."**
- **The sailors tried to abandon ship**, and Paul warned that everyone must stay.
- **Paul gave thanks for bread before them all** and ate.
- **There were 276 people aboard, and all reached land safely.**
- **"Barbarous" means non-Greek-speaking**, not savage.
- **Paul felt no harm from the viper.**
- **Paul prayed and laid hands on the sick**, and they were healed.
- **The ship's sign was Castor and Pollux.**
- **Acts ends with Paul preaching in Rome "no man forbidding him."**

God's Will and Intent

- **God keeps every promise He makes.**
- **God cares for everyone aboard** — sailors, soldiers and prisoners alike.
- **God speaks to His servants** in their darkest hour.
- **God works through the faith and obedience of His people.**
- **God heals** and shows His love to strangers.
- **God encourages His people through one another.**
- **God's word cannot be bound** by chains, storms or rulers.