

Acts 27 Handout

Some refer to the last two chapters in Acts as Paul's fourth missionary journey, which is actually pretty accurate when you consider he is encountering territory that is new to him and evangelizing all the way! This chapter presents the saga of Paul's journey from Caesarea to Malta en route to Rome. We are going to read a very detailed description of Paul's voyage. The question that many ask, myself included is, *why would Luke devote such a long section of his book to describe a voyage and shipwreck?*

There is no clear answer, but some ideas that have been put forth include:

- To emphasize Paul's journey to Rome.
- To show a parallel to Jonah and his storm (Jonah 1:4-15)
- To show God's sovereign protection and direction in Paul's ministry.
- To show Paul's leadership.
- Some see it as an allegory

Verse 1

Where was it decided that they would set sail to? _____

The Roman authorities (most likely Festus and King Agrippa) made the decision.

Notice the 'we' again in this verse, meaning that Luke is with Paul on this voyage. It is thought that perhaps Luke was allowed to go with Paul as his personal physician and Aristarchus as Paul's personal attendant.

Who else is going to be on the ship with Paul? _____

The Greek here means "others of a different kind" and suggests that these other men were going to Rome to die rather than stand trial like Paul.

They are going to be escorted by a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. He was a Roman centurion who was a man of superior character who treated Paul with consideration and kindness.

Verse 2-3

We are told Paul boarded an Adramyttian ship. Adramyttian is an ancient city of Mysia.

Who are we told Paul was accompanied by? _____

We are told he is a Macedonian of Thessalonica. Aristarchus was a Jewish believer. He first appears during Paul's three year ministry in Ephesus. If you remember, he was seized along with Gaius by the rioting mob back in chapter 19. He accompanied Paul on his journey back to Jerusalem in Acts 20, and now on his journey to Rome. Some think he stayed with Paul throughout his imprisonment in Palestine as well.

Where did they stop the next day? _____

They would have traveled about 70 miles before stopping here, presumably to take on supplies because the next leg of their journey was about 500 miles. It is thought that they would have been here for several days as the ship would need to unload.

We are told Julius treated Paul with consideration. What did he allow him to do?

This would have been a big deal for the centurion to allow Paul to disembark. He was a prisoner of Rome and if a guard allowed their prisoner to escape, it would usually mean death. Somewhere along the way or during Paul's trials, it seems that Julius developed trust in Paul to allow him to do this, otherwise he would never have let him off the ship.

Verses 4-5

Where are we told they sail? _____

Why? _____

They were sailing in such a way as to get protection from the wind under the sheltered side of the island. This was usually the southern side of the island in the Mediterranean Sea because the wind usually came from the North.

Verses 6

What did the centurion find in Lycia? _____

Alexandria was the capital of Egypt and was the port of origin for this ship. There were no ships at this time that were strictly devoted to passenger travel. This would have been a grain ship. Egypt was the major supplier of grain for Italy, and a large fleet of ships sailed between Egypt and Italy, along the coasts of Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor carrying food. It is thought that these ships were about 180 feet long, and could accommodate at least 276 passengers (vs.37).

According to a contemporary description, these large ships were usually 180 feet long, 50 feet wide and 44 feet deep from the deck to the hold. It would have been a sturdy ship, but in high seas it had definite disadvantages. It had no rudder like a modern ship, but instead was steered by two great paddles that extended from the stern. It only had one mast which had a huge square sail. The biggest drawback though was that it couldn't sail into the wind.

Verses 7-8

How are we told they sailed for many days? _____

What was the problem? _____

We are told they arrived off Cnidus and then sailed under the shelter of Crete

The wind was so strong out of the west that they had to turn southwest and sail along Crete to get some shelter from it.

Where are we told they came to? _____

Verses 9-10

How is the voyage now described? _____

Since what? _____

This is referring to the Fast on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) which at this time would have been on October 5. This is an important detail because it was well known among ship captains that sailing was pretty much safe up to mid-September. However, from mid-September to mid-November sailing was difficult and from mid-November to February it was impossible.

What are we told Paul started to do at the end of verse 9? _____

The word 'admonish' here (paraineo) means to advise strongly; to give urgent advice.

What did Paul perceive about the voyage?

The word 'perceive' in Greek means "to perceive from past experience."

Paul's perception doesn't seem to be given by a divine communication, but rather using good judgment based on personal experience.

II Corinthians 11: 25 Paul says that "*three times I was shipwrecked.*"

It is thought that these three shipwrecks that Paul is talking about have already happened to him. If this is the case, Paul would certainly be knowledgeable about the sea. He realizes the potential danger and is trying to give a warning.

Verse 11-12

What are they trying to decide? _____

Who did the centurion listen to? _____

The 'pilot' was the shipmaster who guided the path the ship would take and was responsible for managing and directing the ship.

The 'captain' refers to either the owner of a ship or one who took passengers and freight for hire.

Why would they continue to sail on rather than staying in Fair Havens?

Where are they trying to reach? _____

Which was 40 miles further along the coastline, and would normally be about a day's journey.

The centurion of course is going to respect the nautical knowledge of the captain and pilot more than a Jewish prisoner's warnings. This ship would have most likely been one of the last ships of the shipping season. The captain's best hope at this time would have been to make it to a better harbor before the seas closed down for the winter. He couldn't have hoped to make it all the way to Italy this late in the year.

Because this ship would have been a part of the imperial grain fleet, the centurion, who would be functioning as a Roman official, would have greater authority than the ship owner. He would have the final word. Grain ships like this one were part of a fleet that was under the control of the Roman government, even though they could be owned by private citizens.

Verses 13-15

What comes up? _____

They weigh anchor (take it up) and sail along Crete close to shore so they are protected from the northerly winds.

Before long, what happens? _____

Euroquilo means northeastern. The wind changed from a mild southerly breeze to a violent northeastern wind.

What did they end up having to do? _____

The wind changed abruptly and suddenly became the wind of a hurricane. Instead of heading in their current direction, they had to let the wind have its way with the ship, driving them 30 miles south.

Verse 16

By sailing under the shelter of the small island of Cauda, what were they able to do?

This is talking about the ship's lifeboat. This boat would have been used for landings and such. These boats were often kept on deck, or as in this case, towed behind. Usually at the first sign of bad weather, they would bring the boat onto the deck, but since the storm came on so suddenly, they didn't have time. By this time in their journey, this boat most likely had taken on much water, making it difficult to hoist up onto the ship.

Verse 17

We see they are finally able to hoist the boat up.

What did they use to undergird the ship? _____

These cables would already be fitted in place and helped to protect the hull from damage during fierce storms.

What do they fear might happen? _____

This was referring to the sandbars and quicksand in this area.

What do they do to combat this?

'Sea anchor' here most likely means equipment and can refer to gear like the sails and rigging.

Verse 18-20

What is happening the next day? _____

We are told they began to jettison the cargo. This means they started throwing the cargo overboard to lighten their load which would hopefully allow the ship to rise up further and stop taking on so much water.

What did they end up having to do on the third day? _____

This seems to be referring to the ship's equipment and furniture.

This creates a frantic picture of men grabbing whatever they can and tossing overboard.

What are we told they could not see for many days? _____

And since it was no small storm that was assailing them, what happened?

Verse 21-26

What happened to many of the men? _____

What does Paul stand up and say? _____

Paul isn't gloating here. He's trying to show them that what he had said was true and so was what he was about to tell them.

What does Paul urge them to do? _____

What does Paul tell them? _____

How does Paul know this? _____

Notice how Paul says, “an angel of the God to whom I belong, whom I also serve, came to me.” This shows Paul’s total commitment to the Lord.

What does the angel tell Paul?

‘Has granted’ (charizomai) means grace, undeserved merit or favor. It means to bestow as a gift of grace or out of grace, giving help to those who don’t deserve it. The phrasing used here is often used in the context of prayer, specifically answer to one’s prayer. The implication here is that Paul had prayed for each of the passengers. Back in verse 10 Paul had said, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” It is easy to imagine Paul interceding in prayer on behalf of all those onboard. The lives of the people on board this ship, God had spared as a gift to Paul.

Paul tells them again to ‘take courage’. Why?

What does Paul say they must do? _____

Verse 27-29

What is the time phrase in verse 27? _____

Think about this for a minute. That’s two weeks – over 300 hours they’ve been battling this storm out on the sea with no idea where they even were.

What did the sailors suspect? _____

What made them come to this conclusion? _____

We are told they took ‘soundings’. This means they dropped a rope with something weighted on it to measure the depth of the water. A fathom is about six feet or just under two meters (originally the length of a man’s outstretched arms).

When they say that they were at 20 fathoms and then at 15 fathoms, that would have been about 120 feet and then about 90 feet.

What are they afraid was going to happen? _____

What did they do? _____

They are trying to put the brakes on at this point. Ancient ships had numerous anchors, so they probably had more than even these four.

Verse 30-32

What do some of the sailors do? _____

What does Paul tell the centurion? _____

The soldiers cut away the ropes so the boat fell into the sea.

Verse 33-37

What did Paul keep encouraging everyone on board to do? _____

If they were going to survive and make it to shore, they needed to eat to get their strength up.

What does Paul assure them at the end of verse 34?

_____ Paul takes the bread and gives thanks to God in front of everyone, broke it and began to eat.

What are we told in verse 36? _____

How many people were onboard the ship? _____

Verse 38-40

What did they start to do after they had eaten?

_____ They needed to get the ship higher up in the water to avoid hitting the rocky shoals.

What did they notice once daylight came? _____

What do they get rid of? _____

They loosened the ropes of the rudders, which evidently means they had tied while they were drifting in the storm. They also hoisted the foresail which would allow them to maneuver and head towards the beach.

Verse 41

What happens? _____

We are told the prow (the portion of a ship's bow that is above the water) stuck firmly and was immovable.

What happened to the stern? _____

Verses 42-44

What did the soldiers want to do? _____

These soldiers were personally responsible for their prisoners. If one prisoner escaped, it would mean the soldier's life was forfeit. So you can see why they wanted to just kill them all right then and there. In the Roman army, under these circumstances, a dead body was just as acceptable as a live body. If 50 bodies were signed for, 50 bodies had to be delivered - dead or alive or the soldiers would have to make up the difference themselves.

But what about the centurion? _____

He commanded those who could swim to jump over and get to land and the rest would follow using pieces from the ship to get them there.

How does the chapter end? _____

Why would Luke devote such a long section of his book to describe a voyage and shipwreck?

Takeaways:

- Storms have a way of revealing our character.
- Even the worst storms can't hide the face of God or hinder his purposes.
- Storms can give us opportunities to serve others and witness about Christ.
- We need to recognize the presence of God and understand that God is with us even in our darkest times.
- We need to rely on people of God and lean on those whom God graciously puts into our lives.
- We need to rest on the promises of God and know that what He has said He will do.
- We need to remember the purposes of God and keep our eyes on the destination and ultimate goal.