

Rome at Last! Acts 27:1-28:16

Main Idea: God keeps His promises, so we should trust Him and give thanks to Him.

I. Tracing the Narrative (27:1-28:16)

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II. Thanking God and Taking Courage

Many people book cruises on the Mediterranean Sea; and for good reason. It's beautiful. The cities along the coast are fascinating and historically significant. Cruises are also relaxing and luxurious. The ships are vacations in themselves. In Acts 27, Paul sails on the Mediterranean, but his trip is nothing like a refreshing cruise! The travelers are mainly prisoners; the ships aren't luxury liners. And the most dreadful part of the trip involves violent, life-threatening storm.

Sea voyages were popular in Luke's day, as reflected in Homer's famous *Odyssey* (Bock, 726). Surviving a storm was a mark of great character. Today, many are familiar with the Pirates of the Caribbean movies. Bible readers are also familiar with many storm stories like Jonah, the disciples' experiences at Galilee (cf., Mark 4:35, 6:45-52), and numerous allusions in the Psalms (Ps 42:7; 66:12; 69:2-3, 15; also Isa 43:2). Luke goes into great detail in this storm story to show what it took for Paul to get to Rome.

We should be careful to avoid two extremes with this story. One extreme is to assert that this story didn't really happen. Some suggest that Luke essentially took a storm narrative and inserted Paul into a pre-existing story. This view should be rejected (see Witherington, 757-58). The other danger is to turn this story into an allegory, trying to make every person and thing a symbol representing some hidden meaning. People have tried to make the four anchors, for example, stand for certain things like trusting in *reason*, *religion*, *luck*, or *self*. We should always reject allegory. Anchors are anchors. A ship is a ship (not the Catholic Church!). This story really happened. And if we can simply read through the narrative and get caught up in the story, we will find great encouragement for our lives. We don't need to take away from it, nor add to it.

The trip involves three main sections: (1) Caesarea to Myra on an Adramyttium ship (27:1-5); (2) Myra to Malta on an Alexandrian ship (27:6-44); and (3) Malta to Rome on another Alexandrian ship (28:1-10). The trip then to Rome is then fulfilled in 28:11-16. From the drama that unfolds in route to these places, we see a wonderful picture of the seamless integration between God's providence and human responsibility. Indeed, the most important thing to note in this chapter personally is that *God keeps His Word* (see 27:4-26). God told Paul that he would reach Rome. In the story, God tells Paul that none of the prisoners will be lost. God tells Paul that the ship will run aground. God's Word proves true, just like it always does! God will accomplish His purposes! And so we should obey Him and trust Him. In order to help us trace the drama, I've

built on Alistair Begg's three-part outline, and added six more "Alls" to his list (Begg, "He Plants His Footsteps in the Sea").

Tracing the Narrative (27:1-28:16)

All Aboard (27:1-5). The story begins with a reference to "we." We read, "When it was decided that *we* were to sail to Italy, they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial Regiment" (27:1, my emphasis). To whom does this "we" refer? As we've noted previously (eg., Acts 16; 20), it's *Luke*. Luke references himself throughout the book of Acts, as expressed here in the end of the book. Luke is an intelligent, diligent, and accurate historian. He's precise in providing the details of this trip to Rome. He writes the account as a first-hand observer. He reports about the stops along the trip, the nature of the ships, the sailing practices, and the sailors' experiences, as an eyewitness. Details, details, details fill this account!

If you have ever survived a life-threatening situation, then you may have told your survival story to others with great detail. Everything matters in life and death situations.

Luke tells us that the final destination on this trip was "Italy" (27:1; cf., "Rome," 27:16). Gentiles saw Rome as the center of the earth (Bock, 726). It was a very strategic place to get the gospel to the nations because everything went in and out of Rome. Hence' Paul's desire to go to Rome (Rom 1:10-16; 15:22-23). Rome was the most powerful political center in the world, and Paul was a Roman citizen personally. Paul had spent over twenty five years of ministry in the eastern part of the Roman empire (Rom 15:19-20), but had dreams of taking the gospel as far west as Spain, using Rome as a launching pad (Rom 15:22-29). About three years before this trip, Paul wrote his letter to the Romans preparing them for his visit. Later, in a time of crisis, the Lord assured Paul that he would indeed testify in Rome (23:11). However, Paul probably didn't think he would reach Rome as a prisoner (Fernando, 609).

Under the best of conditions, and sailing straight to Rome from Caesarea, it would take five weeks. But when this trip is over it will have taken well over four months (Bock, 746).

Luke also adds in verse 1 that others prisoners were with the group, along with a centurion named "Julius," who will display a spirit of generosity and kindness in his leadership. These prisoners may have been going to Rome, not to serve trial, but to serve in the arena as part of entertainment for the emperor and the citizens (Keener in Witherington, f. 17, 758).

Julius and the prisoners boarded a ship that was apparently returning to its home port in "Adramyttium" (27:2, east of Troas). This first ship appears to be a coastal vessel. It would have traveled close to the shore, and put in at the various ports along the way (Polhill, 516). The ports "along the coast of [southern] Asia" (27:2) offered a good prospect for finding a more suitable vessel for the trip to Rome (Ibid.).

Luke tells us that he wasn't Paul's only friend on the journey. He says that "Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica" also made the trip (27:2). Later, when Paul writes to the Colossians from the Roman prison, he mentions the presence of both Luke and Aristarchus (Col 4:10, 14). Aristarchus had been traveling with Paul for some time, and took one on the chin in Ephesus (cf., Acts 19:29; 20:4). Paul describes him as his "fellow prisoner" (Col 4:10), and in Philemon (another prison epistle), he calls him his "fellow worker." Julius and others probably viewed Aristarchus as Paul's servant, but we know him better as a member of the missionary team. (Gangel, 446)

The coastal vessel then sailed about seventy nautical miles north to the ancient city of "Sidon" (27:3). Upon arriving, cargo was either loaded or offloaded. While there, Julius kindly

gave Paul permission to go enjoy the fellowship of some of “his friends” (27:3); that is, some Christians in the area (cf., Acts 11:19). Julius didn’t see Paul as dangerous. These friends cared for Paul, providing essentials for his trip. There was no “food cart” on this vessel. It was every man for himself.

We should notice once again the importance of Christian friendship in the book of Acts. Some suggest that Christians commonly used “friends” as a term of themselves (Gangel, 446). Paul definitely had some wonderful friends like Aristarchus and Luke, and also shared a relationship with other believers scattered throughout the world, like those in Sidon. Notice how John ends his third epistle by referring to fellow Christians as “friends.”

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. Peace be to you. The *friends* greet you. Greet the *friends*, each by name. (3 Jn 13-15, ESV, my emphasis)

Christian friendship is a gift of God that’s rooted in our relationship with Jesus, who calls His disciples “friends” (cf., Luke 12:4; John 11:11; 15:13–15). Thank God for Christian friends.

At times we have to say good-bye to friends, but we can have the assurance that true Christian friends will have eternity to hang out together in the presence of the glorified Jesus. This fact really encourages me when I think about my friends who are laboring among the nations, and in other states, for the sake of the gospel. I would love to see them more often! But we must sacrifice now for the King’s sake. Soon we can enjoy each other’s company in a renewed world forever.

Due to the western winds, the ship sailed north and east and Cyprus (27:4). Sailing “under the lee” means sailing in such a way that the island protects the ship from the winds. Luke then says that sailed “through the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia,” before reaching “Myra in Lycia” (27:5).

All Change (27:6-12). In Myra, Julius finds a ship from Alexandria that was “sailing for Italy” and so he puts the passengers on board (27:6). This ship was a freight ship used for transporting grain (27:38), with Egypt being Rome’s main granary (Stott, 387).

In verse 7-8, Luke describes the “difficulty” of the next part of the trip, as conditions deteriorated. He says, “Sailing slowly for many days, we came with difficulty as far as Cnidus. Since the wind did not allow us to approach it, we sailed along the south side of Crete off Salmone. With yet more difficulty we sailed along the coast and came to a place called Fair Havens near the city of Lasea” (27:7-8). So, progress was slow due to the winds. The group arrived with difficulty to Cindus. Then they were forced to travel south toward Crete, hugging the southern coast of Crete before finally putting in at “Fair Havens” (8). It seems that they were fighting for their lives, and no doubt relieved to stop at Fair Havens to rest and make further plans.

Fair Havens (“Good Harbor”) sounds like a nice place to stay, but it wasn’t suitable for facing the winter season, for whatever reason. The group had already been delayed, as Luke notes that “the Fast” (i.e., the Day of Atonement) was already over (27:9). The Day of Atonement was observed at various times but always in late September or early October (Polhill, 518). The time between September and November was particularly dangerous for sea travel. Time is slipping away. Sea travel ceased between November to mid-February or mid-March (cf., 28:11; Bock 733). Paul’s counsel reflected this understanding of sea travel in the Mediterranean. Paul thought it was unsafe to venture out west to find another place to endure winter, and so he warns the

men, in what seems to be a meeting, with his own personal advice (not as a word of prophecy), telling them that if they proceed, they would lose cargo and lives (27:10).

Even though Paul was an experienced traveler, having already experienced three shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25), he was outnumbered by the majority, who determined to travel about forty miles or so west to a better harbor at Phoenix (Acts 27:12). How harmful could that be? Well, Paul's counsel turns out to be true in that the crew did lose the ship and the cargo, but fortunately no lives were lost. The important thing to note is that his apprehensions proved true (Polhill, 519). Later, Julius learns from his mistake and listens to Paul (27:31).

All Over (27:13-20). Initially, everything was smooth sailing: "When a gentle south wind sprang up, they thought they had achieved their purpose. They weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete" (27:13). They had all the wind they needed. You can imagine the sailors making fun of Paul for giving them the unnecessary word of caution. But then, they had more wind than they ever needed! Luke says, "But not long afterward, a *fierce wind* [*typhōnikos*, "typhonic" or "hurricane force," NIV] called the 'northeaster' rushed down from the island" (27:14, my emphasis). This violent storm nicknamed with a hybrid formation of the Greek term *Euros*, the east wind, and Latin term *Aquilo*, the north wind (*Eurakylon* or "Northeaster"), came down from the mountain took over the ship. In the grip of the Northeaster, they could only let the ship drift southwest toward the African coastal city of Cyrene (27:15)

Luke goes on telling the story with great detail, "After running under the shelter of a little island called Cauda, we were barely able to get control of the skiff ["lifeboat" or "dinghy"]" (27:16). The small island of Cauda was about twenty-three miles from Crete. The ship then ran under the lee, i.e., the sheltered east and south side of the island. Luke then describes the attempt to secure the ship, first hauling in the ship's lifeboat, and then trying to "undergird the ship" itself (27:17a). Then they attempted to lower "the sea anchor" to act as a brake as they kept drifting (17b, NIV; *skeuos* could be translated "gear," a reference to any kind of equipment). Luke says that they did this because "they feared the sand bars of Syrtis" (27:17b). They hoped to slow progress in case this great storm blew them toward the deadly shoals.

We can only imagine what the next two weeks must have been like (cf., 27:27). Luke tells us in verse that they jettisoned at least part of "the cargo" (27:18). Then, the third day out, they threw the ship's "gear" overboard (27:19), discarding any unnecessary equipment that would lighten the load and make the ship sit higher. Great panic filled the ship. The group saw no light for days, and the "severe storm kept raging" (27:20a). So despite all these efforts to survive, Luke says, "Finally all hope that we would be saved was disappearing" (27:20). They have no gear, no stars, and no hope (Bock, 736). In their minds, it was "all over."

At this point, the story of Jonah comes to mind. He too encountered a violent storm, in which the crew jettisoned equipment, and despaired of life itself. But the prophet and the crew were delivered, but for a different reason than Paul and his crew. It was Jonah's presence in the ship that caused the storm, and in his absence the others were saved. Here, it's Paul's presence in the ship that leads to the experience of safety for all. (Polhill, 522)

All Listen (27:21-26). It's in this crisis, that Paul gives his first of three intervening words (21-38). The Lord uses the apostle to lead everyone to safety. Paul's leadership ability emerges in the next three paragraphs. John Stott summarizes these following scenes:

So far in the Acts Luke has depicted Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, the pioneer of the three missionary expeditions, the prisoner, and the defendant. Now, however, he portrays him in a different light. He is no longer an honored apostle, but an ordinary man among men, a lonely Christian (apart from Luke himself and Aristarchus) among nearly three hundred non-Christians, who were either

soldiers or prisoners or perhaps merchants or crew. Yet Paul's God-given leadership gifts clearly emerge. 'It is quite certain', writes William Barclay, 'that Paul was the most experienced traveller on board that ship.'... Yet it was more than mature experience at sea which made Paul stand out as a leader on board ship; it was his steadfast Christian faith and character. (389-390)

This first word from Paul is a word of encouragement, rooted in word from the Lord. Luke recounts it for us:

Since many were going without food, Paul stood up among them and said, "You men should have followed my advice not to sail from Crete and sustain this damage and loss. Now I urge you to take courage, because there will be no loss of any of your lives, but only of the ship. For this night an angel of the God I belong to and serve stood by me, and said, 'Don't be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And, look! God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.' Therefore, take courage, men, because I believe God that it will be just the way it was told to me. However, we must run aground on a certain island." (27:21-26)

In the middle of the storm, everyone was hungry, hopeless, and directionless. Then Paul "stood up" to speak (27:21), reflecting the posture of previous authoritative messages (e.g., Acts 2:14; 17:22). His first words seem at first to be an "I told you so" speech ("You should have followed my advice," 27:21). But I don't think Paul was trying to "rub it in their noses;" I think he was simply trying to encouraging the group to listen to him as a credible speaker. He tells them good news on this occasion saying that no one will die, but the ship will be lost (27:22). He urges them to keep up their courage and not despair (27:22, 25). He attempts to lift their spirits with this word.

How could Paul be so confident? This time his word to the crew came from the Lord, who visited him with an angel in the night (27:23). This charge wasn't simply Paul's opinion or wish. This angel gave Paul two promises: (1) Paul *must* appear before Caesar; and (2) because God would preserve Paul for this purpose, all aboard the ship would be delivered (27:24). Because of these promises, there was no need to fear. God was going to rescue Paul, and in His grace also rescue these prisoners.

We should notice how central Paul's first speech is to the narrative. Paul and the others will make it safely through the storm because of *the providence of God*. God will keep His promises. He will see to it that God gets to Rome. Even so, Paul still exhorted the crew to take heart, and warned them there was more storm to endure, and that they would *must* run aground on some island before final deliverance (27:26). So *human responsibility* is also in view. There is no indication of belief or unbelief at this point on part of the group.

In the storm narratives in the gospels Jesus addresses the disciples' fear (Mk 4:35-41, 6:45-52). In these moments, Jesus shows the disciples that He is Lord of the storm. His words, "Take heart it is I; Do not be afraid" (Mk 6:50, ESV) are words of comfort for all His saints. We are prone to have "little faith" (Mk 4:4). But Jesus can be trusted. The Lord said through Isaiah these reassuring words: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isa 43:1b-2a, ESV). What set Paul apart from the others on the ship was the presence of God and the promises of God. And that's what we have also. Fight fear with God's faithful promises, resting in His comforting presence.

All Stay (27:27-32). Verses 27-30 set up Paul's next intervening word to the crew. We read that they were drifting in the Adriatic Sea on the fourteenth night since the storm first struck (27:27). Imagine fourteen days adrift like this! Luke's reference to the "Adriatic Sea" shouldn't be confused with the modern Adriatic Sea. Luke was using a first century reference to the North

Central Mediterranean between Crete and Malta (Gangel, 451). The seasoned sailors sensed that land was near, and so they dropped anchors and prayed to their gods for daylight (27:28-29). But the pagan sailors apparently didn't trust in their gods very much. In verse 30, we read that some of them tried to escape, under the pretense of letting out anchors from the bow (these anchors would have to be set out at a distance from the bow, accomplished with the use of a lifeboat). Their real plan was to use the boat to take them to shore (27:30).

Paul discerned their plan, and reported it to Julius and the soldiers saying, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved" (27:31). They listened to Paul's advice this time, and cut the ropes of the lifeboat, letting it go free, and ensuring that everyone stayed together (27:32). This action reveals how respected Paul has become, even though this decision to actually let the lifeboat go free was perhaps reckless! God's promise to preserve everyone seems to have presupposed that all stay in the same ship (Stott, 391).

All Eat (27:33-38). As dawn drew near, Paul gave his third word of instruction to the group, urging them to eat. He said, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting and going without food, having eaten nothing. Therefore I urge you to take some food. For this has to do with your survival, since none of you will lose a hair from your head" (27:33b-34). Their failure to eat probably had to do with the craziness of the situation and seasickness. If you've ever been in a hospital waiting room during crisis situations, you know what this is like. We lose our appetites. Food doesn't matter. But Paul uses good common sense here. He knew that they had to eat in order to have the strength to reach land. Paul again assured them of God's protection, using a biblical metaphor, "not a hair will perish" (cf., 1 Sam 14:45; 2 Sam 14:11; Lk 12:7; 21:18). Once again, providence and responsibility are intermingled.

The occasion to eat gave Paul an opportunity to give a visible display of his devotion to the Giver of all good things. Taking the role of a father or a host, Luke says, "After he said these things and had taken some bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of all of them, and when he broke it, he began to eat" (27:35). Luke's methodical description of each step of this meal reminds us of the feeding of the five thousand (Lk 9:16), and Jesus' meal with the Emmaus disciples (Lk 24:30), and especially the institution of the Lord's Supper (Lk 22:19).

These men aboard the ship were not taking the Lord's Supper but were eating for the sake of nourishment. Paul knew that hungry men are useless men. Nevertheless, Johnson points out, "Paul's calm consumption, and especially his public thanksgiving to the God of all grace, bears witness to the peace amid life's storms that Jesus gives through the new covenant" (335). It wasn't a sacred meal, but it was indeed a "sacred moment." (Bock, 740)

The crew was "encouraged" (27:36; cf., 22, 25) and followed Paul's example by eating food themselves (27:36). After consumption, the crew of 276 (only now do we get numbers; perhaps in connection with food distribution) jettisoned the rest of the grain in order to lighten the ship (27:37-38). This act indicates that they were confident that they would obtain access to food again; and they also wanted to lift the boat higher as they were drawing near to the shore. (Ibid)

Looking back over Paul's exemplarily leadership in this storm, a few applications are worth noting. What can we learn about leadership in "secular situations?" Consider just two quick characteristics of Paul's leadership that we should desire. *First, Paul was a man of both spiritual depth and practical wisdom.* Paul wasn't a wild mystic. He had a real faith in the living God that gave him the confidence he needed to stay calm and lead. But he also had Proverbs like wisdom that enabled him to give basic instructions to those in need. We really need leaders in secular situations who are both wise and have a vibrant walk with God, who serve as agents of hope in a world of darkness. Stott says, "He was a man of God and of action, a man of the Spirit and of common sense" (Stott, 392). Follow this example!

Second, Paul gave a clear and appropriate testimony in the situation (Fernando, 620). We don't see real aggressive evangelism in this story, but we do see Paul taking opportunities to point people to God. He spoke of His God in verse 23 before speaking God's Word in verse 24, and later he head gave thanks to God in prayer, in front of others, before taking something to eat (27:35). Paul spoke and prayed in the midst of hopelessness, giving the crew an alternative perspective, a ray of hope, and something important to ponder. We too should look for clear and appropriate ways to bear witness to Jesus in the public sphere.

All Survive (27:39-44). Next, the crew didn't know where they were but they saw a place to run the ship ashore (27:39). That must have been a hopeful sight! With the storm still blowing, they cast off the anchors, lifted the rudders, and went straight for the beach (40). Then suddenly, the ship shuddered and stopped because it struck a sandbar (41). The bow was hung up on the sandbar, and the stern was exposed to the pounding waves (41b). Soon the ship would be totally shattered, as Paul said.

Now, Julius' soldiers faced a double threat. To stay alive, they must swim to shore. But if making it to land, and having found that some prisoners had escaped, then the guards themselves would face execution for letting prisoners go free (cf., Acts 12:19; 16:27). In light of this fear, the soldiers prepared to kill the prisoners (27:42) before jumping overboard themselves. But Julius intervened because he wanted to save Paul (43). Julius' respect for Paul had grown, and he may have believed Paul's prophecy. So Julius ordered everyone to head for the land by swimming or floating to shore (43b-44a). Luke concludes, "In this way, everyone safely reached the shore" (44b). All survive!

God's Word proves true. God's presence is with Paul. God is accomplishing His purposes. We can trust Him.

All Warm (28:1-10). The 276 survivors must have breathed a massive sigh of relief when making it to land. After making it safely through the awful storm, Luke says that he group arrived at "Malta." Upon arrival, they receive some very warm hospitality by some "native people" (28:2a); that is, some non-Greek speaking people (*barbaroi*, cf., Rom 1:14-15). They were rustic people, preferring their own dialect. But the Maltese people weren't barbaric in their character. They displayed "extraordinary kindness" to the survivors (2b). They kindled a fire and welcomed everyone (2c). The fire must have been a wonderful feeling after the storm, and since it was cold and rainy (2d).

Paul, as a servant-leader, began gathering sticks to put them on the fire (27:4). In passing, note how no job was beneath Paul. During this whole trip, he displays a servant lifestyle. Barclay says, "It is only the little man that refuses the little task" (William Barclay, in Fernando, 621).

On this occasion, Paul picks up more than sticks. Luke writes, "a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself to his hand" (28:3b). Imagine this scene. After surviving a life-threatening storm at sea, Paul makes it to land, only to be bitten by a poisonous snake!

The natives draw the conclusion that Paul is guilty of a great crime, like murder (28:4a). They say, "This man is probably a murderer, and though he has escaped the sea, Justice does not allow him to live!" (4b). "Justice" is personified as a goddess, the daughter of Zeus and Themis (Bock, 743). But to the natives' surprise, Paul shakes the snake off his hand into the fire, and suffered no harm (5-6). The natives then changed their minds when nothing abnormal happened to Paul. They then concluded that he was "a god" (6b; cf., Acts 14:11).

While Paul was certainly not a god, the God who rules heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in it, was with Paul. And the islanders had a visible display of God's power. As we have noted previously in our study, God often revealed Himself to various groups of people in a way that got their attention in order to make His saving message known to them (cf., Acts 19). This is an act of

God's kindness, then, displayed to these superstitious islanders. They were surprised by this act; Paul was probably surprised at the ministry opportunity that it afforded him. Since the group stayed here for three months during the winter (28:11), Paul was able to make God's truth known to the barbarians.

The chief of the island, Publius, hosts them for three days (28:7). Here's another example in Acts of Paul establishing a relationship with the leading figures in an area (cf., Acts 13:7; 16:22; 17:19; 18:12; 19:31). This is also an example of a pagan displaying kindness and warm hospitality, and of a believer receiving it! Paul didn't act like a Pharisee, and try to distance himself. He acted like Jesus and became a friend of sinners.

Both Julius and Publius (sounds like a great hip-hop group!) illustrate how – in God's common grace – human beings can display lovely virtues. While every human being is sinful, and in need of redemption, this fact doesn't mean that unbelievers have no capacity to do good. Believers should compliment unbelievers when such acts of kindness are displayed, and perhaps even take these moments to draw attention to the characteristics of our Savior, who invites everyone – Jew, Greek, Barbarian, slave, free, educated, uneducated, kind and unkind – to His banquet (cf., Lk 14:21-24; Col 3:11).

Publius' father was sick with fever and dysentery (28:8a). This fever could last for months or even a few years (Bock, 744). So, Paul visits the sick man; prays, making clear to everyone that healing power comes from God (cf., Acts 3:12; 9:34; 40); and then lays his hands on him (cf., Acts 9:12, 17; Jam 5:13-14) and heals him (Acts 28:8b; cf., Lk 4:38-39). Even though Paul is held unjustly as a prisoner, he is actually a blessing to everyone (Ibid).

Following this event, word got out on the island, and sick people from all over the island flocked to Paul and received cures (28:9). They were extremely grateful for Paul's ministry to them. Luke says, "So they heaped many honors on us, and when we sailed, they gave us what we needed" (28:10). They displayed their gratitude not only with words, but also in deeds. They gave provisions to the crew for the rest of the voyage. The Lord is very creative in the ways He provides!

All Arrive (28:11-16). If my kids were traveling on this journey they would be asking, "Are we there yet?" Almost. Luke concludes the trip to Rome by describing how all arrive safely.

The ship that took Paul to Italy (a 210 mile journey, Bock, 745) in mid-February was also a ship from Alexandria (28:11). Luke says it had a figurehead of the "Twin Brothers," Castor and Pollux, who were seen as protectors. However, it was the Lord of all creation that was the real protector. Once off, the crew first stopped at Syracuse for three days (28:12); and then to Rhegium with some difficulty (13a), at the toe of the Italian mainland. They finally reached Puteoli (28:13a), the port of Neapolis (present day Naples, about 130 miles south of Rome).

Once arriving in Puteoli, Paul was invited to stay with the brothers for seven days (28:14). This stop was probably due to Julius wanting to rest before making the rest of the trip by foot. The freedom given to Paul was probably due to the level of respect Julius had for Paul, and so as another display of kindness, grants Paul this privilege. It's possible that the church provided fresh provisions for the rest of the trip.

Luke's premature comment "And so we came to Rome" in verse 14b, rather than in verse 16, is explained in various ways. It may be that Luke is eager to get to the climax the story, as he anticipates their actual arrival in Rome (Fernando, 615). He may be saying something like, "Here's how we came to Rome" (Witherington, 787). Or, he may view Puteoli as part of greater Rome. Or better yet, related to this second option, he probably was saying that for all practical purposes, the goal for reaching Rome was *as good as attained* (Polhill, 536-37). Polhill adds, "In a real sense, v. 14b can be considered as the climax to the entire Book of Acts" (Ibid., 538). We

can't read of Paul's arrival in Rome without reflecting on Jesus' plan for His witnesses in Acts 1:8 to go "to the ends of the earth."

It was about a five-day walk from Rome by means of two well-traveled Roads, the Campanian Way and the Appian Way (Bock, 746). Word reached the church in Rome that Paul arrived in Italy. His magisterial letter had reached them three years earlier. Some of the Roman believers then decided to meet Paul along the way (28:15a). Some believers met him at the famous Forum (market) of Appius, which was about forty-three miles from Rome (15b). It didn't have a great reputation. Others met Paul at Three Taverns (a settlement that had grown around an isolated inn by that name), ten miles closer to the capitol (15c). Cicero mentions both places as resting places along the way (Witherington, 787). When Paul saw these men, Paul "thanked God" and "took courage" (15d). Observe once again, how sweet Christian fellowship is. The sight of other brothers and sisters in Rome must have filled Paul's heart with happy delight.

It was almost two and a half difficult years since Paul was given divine assurance in Jerusalem that he would reach Rome (Fernando, 614). But finally, Luke made it. Luke writes, "When we entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him" (28:16). So Paul made it to Rome, as a prisoner, with certain freedoms to minister.

Thanking God and Taking Courage

Back in Acts 27:23, Paul told the crew that the God to whom he "belonged" and "served" assured him of safe arrival to Rome. In saying this, Paul identifies what it means to be a Christian. Christians belong to God through Jesus, and have the indwelling Spirit (cf., Gal 5:24; 1 Cor 6:20). Christians also worship and serve God, through Jesus, by the Spirit. We don't serve the idols of money, pleasure, or success. We serve and worship God, in easy times and hard times. So we must ask the question, "Do you belong to God through Jesus?" (cf., Rom 8:9). If not, then embrace Him. Trust Him. He is the Savior for all types of people (cf., Col 3:11). If you do belong to Jesus, then take courage and be thankful. More specifically, let me encourage you with three applications.

First, trust in the providence of God. God is at work accomplishing His purposes and conforming us into Christ's image (cf., Rom 8:28-30). God keeps His promises. William Cowper reminds us in his classic hymn of these sweet words:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face. (William Cowper, "God Moves in a Mysterious Way")

Trust Him. Though you may not understand everything that's happening, God is working for the believer's good and for God's glory.

Second, rejoice in the saving grace of God. Think about it. If you're a Christian, you are among *the reached*. The gospel came to you. Don't ever get over this. Paul wanted to get the gospel to Rome

and then to Spain. Just as it took a lot for Paul to get to Rome, it took a lot for the gospel to get to you. Marvel at God's grace.

Third, align yourself with the mission of God. Acts 27-28 reminds us of Acts 1:8. Jesus has a mission that extends to the ends of the earth. What a mission it is! Let's not waste our time on earth, but use it wisely and missionally for the good of the nations and the glory of our great King.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Have you ever been in a life-threatening situation? How did you react? How might this passage encourage someone facing a great trial?
2. How does this narrative highlight the big idea that God keeps His Word?
3. Why are Christian friendships important? How do we see Paul valuing friendships in this narrative?
4. How does this narrative display both the sovereign providence of God and the responsibility of human beings?
5. Explain some ways in which Paul displays great spiritual and practical leadership in this story.
6. Identify some ways unbelievers display kindness in this narrative. When we see unbelievers display kindness, how should we respond?
7. Explain how Paul gave an appropriate and clear witness on this trip? How might you apply some of these lessons in your life?
8. How did Paul respond to Julius' hospitality? Have you ever been invited to spend time with unbelievers? How should Christians view these invitations, and how do we respond to them?
9. At the end of the narrative, Paul "thanked God." Think about some of the ways God has provided for you and give thanks to Him.
10. Take a few moments to pray for God to grant you – and others – *peace* in the midst of great trials.