

**Text: Ac 27.13-26**

We are in the dramatic narrative of Paul's voyage to Rome. Again, we will note there is very little theological matter in these verses. We have to look at the main theme of the passage and use it as the point of application for our use.

The big theme of this passage is the providence and plan of God. Despite all the perils Paul and the 275 others faced in their voyage, God's plan would not fail and they all benefited from it (including all the pagans on board the ship).

We have to conclude that God's plans succeed. We live in a very violent, stormy, anti-God world. In recent years, it seems the whole rational order of our world has turned upside down (or is about to go upside down).

We should not despair.

In our passage today, Paul encourages those on board the ship with a message from God. I've taken our title from the KJV version of his speech:

*Be of Good Cheer*

I've mentioned the book that all the commentaries mention about this sea voyage, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, by James Smith. I've read about a third of the book this week, including the section devoted to our passage today. It really is a remarkable work and brings the story to very vivid life.

Read Ac 27.13-26

**Proposition:** God's plan always succeeds, no matter what happens to us. Be of good cheer, "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

**I. The threat to God's plan (13-20)****A. The humanistic attempt to provide for safety from the storm (12-13)**

1. Not "humanistic" in a negative sense
2. Rather, relying on reason
  - a. The harbour at Phoenix is safer than Fair Havens
  - b. It is only about 37 miles away
  - c. If they get a good wind...

They are relying on their reason and experience, not necessarily a bad thing, but they are too confident in their assumptions as we see in v. 14.

3. Note their sailing “close *inshore*” — though confident enough to go, they are cautious

## B. The intervention of the typhoon (14-15)

### 1. The sudden change of weather

- a. Remember, if AD 59, this is after Oct 5, into the dangerous time of the year
- b. As they round the point, they fall under the influence of a new weather system
  - 1) Mt. Ida, over 8,000 ft a prominent feature/weather maker
  - 2) Wind rushing down off the mountain storm called a “typhoon” (Gk)
  - 3) That is, a whirling wind system, very violent
  - 4) Also called, Euraquilo or Euroclydon (spelling not consistent in ancient docs outside NT mss.)
    - a) From Euros (southeast)
    - b) Aquila (north)
    - c) Or, a “nor’easter”

### 2. The ship is caught and cannot “put it’s eyes to the face” of the wind

- a. Ancient ships were not built like modern ships
  - 1) Usually one mast only (Egyptian ships had no keels)
  - 2) Three-masters distribute the leverage of the wind more evenly over the ship, but a later development

“Ancient ships were not built to head into such a violent wind, and there was no way the Alexandrian ship could hold its course for Phoenix.”<sup>1</sup>

- b. Consequently, the only option is to turn and go with the wind

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<sup>1</sup> John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 520.

## C. Every effort to face the storm (15-20)

### 1. Clauda (or Cauda, modern Gaudo or Gozzo) (15-17)

- a. About 23 miles from the point where they had to turn with the wind
- b. No safe harbor, but gives some respite from the wind
- c. Bring in ship's boat (lifeboat) — difficult, full of water, all hands help ("we")

"'With difficulty,' says Luke, probably remembering his blisters!"<sup>2</sup>

- d. Gird cables around the ship (to tighten joints and resist wind and waves)
- e. Fearful of "Syrtis" – shallow water near N. coast of Africa (400 mi away!) – put out "gear" (our trans. prob correct: "sea anchor") to avoid

"Even in good weather, Alexandrian grain ships sailed northward to Asia and then westward to Italy, rather than directly northwest, because a sudden change in winds could wreck them on this shoal."<sup>3</sup>

### 2. They are now at the mercy of the wind, tacking "to the starboard" (NW), and adrift (17)

- a. Gk. "thus being borne along"
- b. They will drift all the way to Malta, about 475 miles

### 3. Lightening the ship (18-19)

- a. Second day begin jettisoning cargo (18)

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<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 485.

<sup>3</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ac 27.17.

### b. Third day cast off the “ship’s tackle” by hand (19)

“Smith suggested that it was the ship’s mainyard, the long spar used to support the mainsail. This would explain his reference to the sailors doing this ‘with their own hands.’ There would be no equipment sufficient for jettisoning such a huge beam. It would have taken the combined manual effort of the crew.”<sup>4</sup>

### D. The course of their journey (20)

1. Many days unable to see the sky – navigation impossible
2. Have no idea where they are: in despair of salvation

“Pagans felt that those who died at sea never entered the realm of the dead; instead their souls wandered aimlessly forever above the waters in which they perished.”<sup>5</sup>

- One writer suggested Luke deliberately uses “saved” with a double meaning: no hope in this life or the next.

Certainly, this is the case for someone who doesn’t know Christ: ultimately unable to handle the storms of this life.

## II. Divine assurance of God’s plan (21-25)

### A. A reminder of human folly (21)

1. Note: haven’t had much food (too sick, too tired to eat, and food/galley may have suffered damage)

Smith quotes John Newton [*Amazing Grace*] from his sailing days: “We found that the water having floated all our movables in the hold, all the casks of provisions had been beaten in pieces by the violent motion of the ship. On the other hand, our live stock, such as pigs, sheep and poultry, had been washed overboard in the storm; in effect, all the provisions we saved ... would have subsisted us but a week, at a scanty allowance.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 522.

<sup>5</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background: NT*, Ac 27.20.

<sup>6</sup> John Newton, *Omicron’s Letters* (London, 1774), Letter 7, quoted in James Smith, *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul: With Dissertations on the Life and Writings of St. Luke, and the Ships*

2. Paul speaks ironically (not sarcastically) “you should have listened and not *gained* this loss”

“Paul is not trying to make them feel worse here, but he is making an appeal to be heard now as a credible speaker.”<sup>7</sup>

## B. A prophecy of hope (22-24)

1. Keep your courage: you will live, but lose the ship (22)
2. Proof: an angel of God appeared and spoke to me (23)
3. Message: You must stand before Caesar, God has granted you all on the ship (24)

Compare the story of Jonah: “It was Jonah’s *presence* on the ship that gave rise to the storm, and only in his *absence* were the others saved. It was altogether different for Paul’s ship. The apostle’s *presence* on the ship led to the deliverance of all aboard.”<sup>8</sup>

Also note God *granting* the souls: God has “graced” them to you.

- We are not given a record of what these men believed, and it is unlikely that they responded just then, but God’s grace had to impact some hearts.

## C. An exhortation of spirits (25)

1. Keep your courage
2. I believe God

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*and Navigation of the Ancients*, ed. Walter Edward Smith (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 118.

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 737.

<sup>8</sup> Polhill, *Acts*, 522.

### III. The outcome of God's plan (26)

- A. A simple plan: we will live, the ship will be lost
- B. Therefore, we must [*it is necessary*] to run aground on an island

They don't yet know it, but the island is Malta, 475 miles away.

If they miss Malta, they must be driven into Africa, at Tunisia, another 200 miles: unlikely for ship to survive that long

**The big point:** God will provide in the storm.

#### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** God's plan always succeeds, no matter what happens to us. Be of good cheer, "greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world."

The story ought to encourage the faith of Christians.

The story calls for faith in those who aren't Christians. The ship you are sailing in will not survive the storms coming your way. You need Jesus Christ to overcome the storms.