

# Furtherance of The Gospel

<b>Key Text:</b>	Acts 27 & 28
<b>Key Verse(s):</b>	“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.” (Acts 27:20)

## Background to the Study

The pronoun “we” in verse 1 indicates that Luke, the author, accompanied Paul and recorded their journey to Rome. Although not a sailor, Luke's accurate nautical terms suggest he learned about sailing during the trip. Aristarchus, mentioned in verse 2, was a Macedonian who had travelled with Paul to Jerusalem two years earlier and later stayed with him in Rome. The friends Paul met in Sidon (verse 3) were likely Christians from previous visits, and Julius, the Roman centurion, trusted Paul enough to allow him to meet them and possibly provided provisions.

They travelled on an Alexandrian grain ship, part of the imperial fleet, carrying Egyptian grain to Rome. These wooden, sail-powered ships were 50-120 feet long and could carry 200-300 tons. Julius oversaw the prisoners, and Paul warned of the journey's dangers due to the timing, as it was past the Day of Atonement, a risky period for sea travel.

The sailors preferred Phoenix over Fair Havens for wintering. Luke described a severe storm, Euroclydon, and their efforts to protect the ship by sailing between Clauda and Crete. They used a smaller boat to reinforce the ship and faced dangerous sandbanks, the Syrtis. As they neared land, they took depth measurements and lightened the ship by throwing cargo overboard to reach shore safely.

Luke concluded his account of the Acts of the Apostles by detailing the end of Paul's transport to Rome along with other prisoners. After their ship broke apart in the storm, they came to shore on the island of Malta, known by the Greeks and Romans as Melita. There they encountered “barbarians” – people who were not educated in the Greek language. Being descendants of the Phoenicians, the islanders were actually very civilized and educated in their own right. Being educated did not prevent them from being superstitious, however. First, they assumed Paul must be receiving “vengeance” or justice from the gods after he was bitten by a snake they knew to be poisonous. Then, in a matter of minutes, their suspicion turned to admiration at his divine protection and they decided he must be a god himself.

After three months, Paul and his companions continued to Rome, stopping at Syracuse and Rhegium, and finally Puteoli, where they stayed with Christians. Paul was under house arrest in Rome but met visitors freely.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul's first Roman imprisonment; Luke states that Paul lived two years under house arrest. According to tradition, Paul was set free for a time after this. Historians indicate that charges had to be brought within two years, so he possibly was released when that time ran out. His letter to the church at Philippi, which was written during this first imprisonment, records Paul's expectation of being released shortly (see Philippians 2:24). Later, Paul was imprisoned again, most likely in Rome, and under much more strict conditions. It was then that he wrote his final epistle, 2 Timothy. The New Testament does not say when or how Paul died, but historians believe he was martyred sometime after the Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64 and before the last year of Nero's reign in A.D. 68.

## Testimony from Our Day

Everyone faces stress, but recently I experienced severe anxiety. In crowded rooms, my heart raced, my breathing became laboured, and my body shook, even though there was no real threat. These panic attacks occurred frequently, affecting my daily life. I often had to pull over while driving or retreat to a dark room during social events, including church. Despite my efforts to appear cheerful, I felt isolated and guilty when I had to step back from responsibilities.

Eventually, I reached out to a trusted Christian friend. Her support and prayers provided immediate peace, though stress still came occasionally. This experience reminded me of Paul's ordeal during the storm at sea. Like Paul, I felt overwhelmed, but talking to someone was crucial in managing my anxiety.

From Paul's experience, we can learn two key lessons:

**Follow God's Guidance:** In difficult times, it's important to seek and follow God's direction. For me, that meant confiding in a friend. Your path may differ, but obeying God's guidance is essential.

**Stay Connected to God:** We must not abandon our faith during trials. Paul warned the sailors that abandoning the ship would lead to disaster. Maintaining our relationship with God is vital for overcoming challenges.

Trials are tough, but God is our Deliverer. As Paul said, "*Be of good cheer.*" By trusting in the Lord and following His guidance, we can overcome our struggles. Seize opportunities to share the Gospel, knowing that our faithfulness will yield eternal results.

# A Closer Look

Question 1	According to Acts 27:11, why did Julius depart Fair Havens against Paul's warning?
Question 2	In chapter 27, Paul was taken by ship toward Rome. As winter approached, the weather became more and more dangerous for traveling by sea. The ship made a good start from Crete, but in time, they encountered great difficulty in a storm. When the weather became so tempestuous that a shipwreck was certain, Paul stepped forward and offered words of encouragement and comfort to the terrified sailors. What was his message, and on what basis was he able to offer it so assuredly? Acts 27:20-26
Question 3	What are some positive steps we can take when we face storms in our lives?
Question 4	What was the initial reaction of the island natives when the snake bit Paul? How did it change when he wasn't hurt?
Question 5	Why do you think the captain of the ship allowed Paul such freedom? What are some ways you can serve others on a day-to-day basis?
Question 6	Paul carried on his ministry even while imprisoned in Rome. According to Acts 28:23, "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." The final verse of the Book of Acts relates that Paul continued "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." As we come to the close of this book, what are some of the key lessons that we can learn from the life of Paul?

## Take Home

God is not unmindful when we face challenges in our lives. As we look to Him for help, He will send instruction and encouragement, just as He did for Paul and his fellow travellers. Opportunities to share the Gospel message will come to each of us, sometimes in unexpected ways. Let us purpose to be alert for such times, and be faithful to utilize them for the furtherance of God's Kingdom.