

# THE TRIUMPH OF THE GOSPEL

Acts 27:1—28:31

## Opening Thought

1) What's the most exciting adventure novel you've ever read (or movie you've ever seen)? What elements made it thrilling?

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2) Have you ever been on a big, ocean-going ship? If so, what was that experience like? If not, where would you like to take a cruise?

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## Background of the Passage

Paul's longtime dream was finally reached in these final two chapters. At long last, Paul boarded a boat for Rome, probably in October (A.D. 59). He was accompanied, at the very least, by Luke (the first person plural pronoun "we" opens this section) and Aristarchus. This was late in the fall to be on the open seas. Sure enough, bad weather made for rough sailing. Paul sensed real danger ahead and encouraged the crew to find safe harbor for the winter. Nevertheless, the leaders of the voyage pressed on, providing a fitting sense of drama near the end of Luke's masterful history of the early church.

At the height of a violent storm, Paul gathered the ship's crew and encouraged them with the promises of God: (1) that he had been guaranteed safe arrival in Rome; (2) that everyone sailing with him would be protected from harm.

Even so, a shipwreck was inevitable. In time the ship ran aground and began to break apart just off the coast of Malta. Though the experience proved to be harrowing, all 276 people on board were able to swim safely ashore.

On the island of Malta, the forces of hell continued their all-out attempt to keep God's messenger from reaching Rome. Here Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake. Paul not only survived the serpent's attack unharmed, but he also healed a number of sick people on the island. During the three-month stay in Malta (see 28:11), Paul was showered with hospitality. What the Enemy intended for evil, God turned into good.

Reaching Italy, Paul was warmly received by some Italian believers, and he was granted his own private

lodging (that is, house arrest rather than imprisonment in a Roman penal facility). The stage was now set for Paul to begin ministering in the most influential city in the world. His first act in Rome was to call together the Jewish leaders. He wanted to declare his innocence of the charges brought against him in Jerusalem. More than that, he wanted to proclaim the good news to his Hebrew brothers.

Only a few of the Jews accepted his message. But even the ones who rejected the Gospel left quietly. Consequently, for two solid years, Paul was able to preach and minister unhindered to all who came to see him in his rented quarters—and the stream of visitors was apparently quite steady.

## Bible Passage

Read 27:31—28:31, noting the key words and definitions to the right of the passage.

### Acts 27:31–28:31

- <sup>1</sup> *And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment.*
- <sup>2</sup> *So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us.*
- <sup>3</sup> *And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.*
- <sup>4</sup> *When we had put to sea from there, we sailed under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.*
- <sup>5</sup> *And when we had sailed over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.*
- <sup>6</sup> *There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board.*
- <sup>7</sup> *When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone.*
- <sup>8</sup> *Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them,*
- <sup>10</sup> *saying, “Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives.”*
- <sup>11</sup> *Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.*
- <sup>12</sup> *And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.*
- <sup>13</sup> *When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.*
- <sup>14</sup> *But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon.*
- <sup>15</sup> *So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive.*
- <sup>16</sup> *And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty.*
- <sup>17</sup> *When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship; and fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.*
- <sup>18</sup> *And because we were exceedingly tempesttossed, the next day they lightened the ship.*
- <sup>19</sup> *On the third day we threw the ship’s tackle overboard with our own hands.*
- <sup>20</sup> *Now when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up.*
- <sup>21</sup> *But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.*
- <sup>22</sup> *“And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.*
- <sup>23</sup> *“For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve,*

24 *“saying, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.’*

25 *“Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.*

26 *“However, we must run aground on a certain island.”*

27 *Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land.*

28 *And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms.*

29 *Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come.*

30 *And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,*

31 *Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.”*

32 *Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off.*

33 *And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing.*

34 *“Therefore I urge you to take nourishment, for this is for your survival, since not a hair will fall from the head of any of you.”*

35 *And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all; and when he had broken it he began to eat.*

36 *Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves.*

37 *And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.*

38 *So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.*

39 *When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.*

40 *And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.*

41 *But striking a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.*

42 *And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.*

43 *But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,*

44 *and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.*

28:1 *Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.*

2 *And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.*

3 *But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.*

4 *So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live.”*

5 *But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm.*

6 *However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.*

7 *In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days.*

8 *And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him.*

9 *So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.*

10 *They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.*

11 *After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had*

wintered at the island.  
12 And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days.  
13 From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli,  
14 where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.  
15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.  
16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.  
17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans,  
18 "who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death.  
19 "But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.  
20 "For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."  
21 Then they said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you.  
22 "But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."  
23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.  
24 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved.  
25 So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers,  
26 "saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; And seeing you will see, and not perceive;  
27 " "'For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, Lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.'"  
28 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!"  
29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.  
30 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him,  
31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

**we** (27:1)—Luke rejoined Paul, ostensibly to care for him on his voyage and during his Roman imprisonment.

**Adramyrium** (v. 2)—a city on the northwest coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey) where the centurion hoped to find a ship headed for Rome

**Aristarchus** (v. 2)—the man seized by the crowd during the riot at Ephesus (see 19:29); he would be with Paul during the apostle's first Roman imprisonment

**landed at Sidon** (v. 3)—The Christians here ministered to Paul, possibly by providing provisions for his voyage.

**sailed under the shelter of Cyprus** (v. 4)—that is, they stayed between it and the mainland rather than venture out into the open seas

**Alexandrian ship** (v. 6)—part of the imperial grain fleet

**Cnidus** (v. 7)—on a peninsula in extreme southwest Asia Minor; here the headwinds became too strong to continue west

**the Fast was already over** (v. 9)—The Day of Atonement (late September or early October) had come and gone, meaning that the optimal time for sea travel had passed.

**end with disaster** (v. 10)—Paul advised wintering at Fair Haven to avoid trouble at sea.

**centurion** (v. 11)—Because the ship was part of the imperial grain fleet, Julius (see verse 1), not the helmsman or the ship’s owner, was the ranking official.

**Phoenix** (v. 12)—The sailors considered this a better harbor than Fair Havens.

**Euroclydon** (v. 14)—Euraquilon is the preferred reading; the word refers to a strong, dangerous windstorm greatly feared even by experienced sailors in the Mediterranean.

**secured the skiff** (v. 16)—They brought the dinghy on board.

**used cables** (v. 17)—Known also as “frapping,” this practice helped hold the ship together.

**lightened the ship** (v. 18)—throwing all unnecessary gear and cargo overboard to lighten the ship and help it ride the rough waves

**stood by me this night an angel** (v. 23)—the last of Paul’s six visions recorded in Acts

**before Caesar** (v. 24)—a reaffirmation of the promise Jesus had made earlier to Paul (see 23:11)

**sensed** (v. 27)—The sailors probably heard the sound of the waves breaking on the shore.

**took soundings** (v. 28)—using a weight attached to a length of rope; the decreasing measurements confirmed they were nearing land

**putting out anchors from the prow** (v. 30)—a common practice for additional stability

**without food** (v. 33)—due, likely, to the conditions and perhaps also to seasickness in the rough waters

**not a hair will fall** (v. 34)—a common Jewish saying (see 2 Samuel 14:11; 1 Kings 1:52; Luke 21:18)

**a place where two seas meet** (v. 41)—a sandbar or reef

**kill the prisoners** (v. 42)—to protect themselves from punishment lest one or more prisoners escape

**a viper** (28:3)—a venomous snake

**leading citizen** (v. 7)—Publius was governor of Malta.

**sick of a fever** (v. 8)—Gastric fever (caused by a microbe in goat’s milk) was common on the island.

**Twin Brothers** (v. 11)—Castor and Pollux, Zeus’s sons according to Greek mythology, were believed to provide special protection to sailors.

**Rhegium** (v. 13)—a harbor on the southern tip of the Italian mainland

**dwelt by himself ... guarded** (v. 16)—Paul, possibly through Julius’s intervention, was allowed to live under guard in his own rented quarters.

**the customs of our fathers** (v. 17)—Paul denied that he was guilty of the charges against him, that is, that he had violated Jewish laws or customs.

*persuading them ... Law of Moses ... Prophets* (v. 23) —Paul’s method of Jewish evangelism was to show from the Old Testament that Jesus is the Messiah.

*preaching the kingdom ... no one forbidding him* (v. 31) —Paul evangelized Rome with the help of his loyal fellow workers.

## Understanding the Text

3) In what ways was the voyage to Rome described in chapter 27 an ill-advised decision?

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4) How did Paul demonstrate the qualities of a leader during the harrowing voyage to Rome?

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5) What happened when Paul arrived at Rome?

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## Cross Reference

Read Philippians 2:1–16.

## Exploring the Meaning

6) What incidents in chapters 27 and 28 demonstrate that Paul practiced what he preached in Philippians 2—that is, that he considered others as more important than himself?

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7) Read 2 Timothy 4:1–5. Why was Paul so adamant about preaching the Word? As you re-read the last paragraphs of chapter 28, do you get the sense that Paul was a dull and dry teacher of the Word or a passionate communicator? Why?

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8) How many references can you find in chapters 27 and 28 to believers ministering to the Apostle Paul? Why is this mentioned? Why are these acts significant?

### **Summing Up ...**

“The church in Acts faithfully carried out Christ’s charge, ‘Be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth’ (1:8). The church has passed the baton through many hands down through the centuries to us. Will future generations find that we ran our segment of the race carefully?” —*John MacArthur*

### **Reflecting on the Text**

9) As you think back over the record of the first century church as recorded by Luke, what impresses you most? Convicts you most?

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10) In what ways does your church emulate the believers in Acts? In what ways is your congregation unlike the early church? Give reasons for your answers. What specifically needs to change?

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11) Why is it important to demonstrate love and support to those in positions of spiritual leadership? How could you pastor to your minister this week in a tangible, meaningful way?

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12) Compose a prayer that summarizes your thoughts and feelings now that you have concluded this study. What do you want to say to God?

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## **Recording Your Thoughts**

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**For further study, see the following passages:**

Leviticus 23:26–32

1 Samuel 14:45

Isaiah 6:9–10

Mark 16:18

Acts 13:16–41

Philippians 1:13

Colossians 4:10

Philemon 24