

Turning the World Right-side Up: Study 20, Acts 27

Acts Studies for Teens by Mike Apodaca, MA



Begin with prayer for wisdom from God and for the presence of the Spirit.

Note: In a Bible Study, as much as possible ask the questions and let the students answer. Where they

cannot, you supply the answer and keep everything flowing.

Introduction: How do we get a good reputation in the world?

Chapter 27 God Raises Paul's Profile

Section 1: Acts 27:1-12 The Journey Begins

27 When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment^{1,2} We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, was with us.

³The next day we landed at Sidon; and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs. ⁴From there we put out to sea again and passed to the lee of Cyprus because the winds were against us. ⁵When we had sailed across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. ⁶There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷We made slow headway for many days and had difficulty arriving off Cnidus. When the wind did not allow us to hold our course, we sailed to the lee of Crete, opposite Salmone. ⁸We moved along the coast with difficulty and came to a place called Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea.

⁹Much time had been lost, and sailing had already become dangerous because by now it was after the Day of Atonement. So Paul warned them, ¹⁰“Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” ¹¹But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship. ¹²Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail

¹ *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 1075

on, hoping to reach Phoenix and winter there. This was a harbor in Crete, facing both southwest and northwest.

This chapter is not just a travel brochure. It is the account of Paul moving with regular people in the flow of life. He was being transported to Rome for trial. Aristarchus² traveled with Paul. He was a faithful believer who accompanied Paul on his last missionary journey to the churches (Acts 19:29) and shared his imprisonment in Rome. William Ramsay suggests that Luke and Aristarchus traveled with Paul posing as his slaves³. This would not only allow them to be with him, to service his needs, but would also raise his profile in the eyes of the Romans.

Julius allowed Paul to visit the Christians in Sidon. Most likely he had a Roman guard with him and was restricted in his freedom. But here, on the way to his trial, he is allowed to fellowship with believers. Amazing.

The Alexandrian ship was a grain ship going from Egypt to Rome. At this time Rome got much of its grain from Egypt.



We have to wonder why Paul shared his view that the voyage would be a failure. He was not the most knowledgeable seaman among them, although the seas had been rough. The owner of the boat and the pilot would know far more about the conditions and the seas. The final decision was left in the hands of the Julius, the Centurion. We are not told that this knowledge came to Paul from revelation, but it seems possible. Paul makes this statement to prove he knows things they do not know. He may have received this knowledge from God. Paul shares it. Later this will become important.

Section 2: Acts 27:13-26 God Speaks Again

¹³When a gentle south wind began to blow, they saw their opportunity; so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete. ¹⁴Before very

² *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, pg. 113

³ *St. Paul the Traveler*, pg. 316. See also, *The Book of Acts*, F. F. Bruce, pg. 501

long, a wind of hurricane force, called the Northeaster, swept down from the island. ¹⁵The ship was caught by the storm and could not head into the wind; so we gave way to it and were driven along. ¹⁶As we passed to the lee of a small island called Cauda, we were hardly able to make the lifeboat secure, ¹⁷so the men hoisted it aboard. Then they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together. Because they were afraid they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor and let the ship be driven along. ¹⁸We took such a violent battering from the storm that the next day they began to throw the cargo overboard. ¹⁹On the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. ²⁰When neither sun nor stars appeared for many days and the storm continued raging, we finally gave up all hope of being saved.

²¹After they had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. ²²But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. ²³Last

night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood beside me ²⁴and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' ²⁵So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. ²⁶Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

The situation gets worse and worse. Pliny the Elder described these typhoons as "the chief plague of sailors, not only breaking up the spars, but the hull itself."⁴ These were not unusual. The ships were equipped with thick ropes that would go under the ship and be pulled tight to give the hull extra support.

Things get so bad they throw the grain overboard. When clouds covered the stars they lost their ability to navigate. Things became absolutely hopeless.

Paul belonged to God. He was in the middle of a mission. Although it looked by all appearances that he was only a prisoner and that Rome was in control, Paul knew better. Paul was visited by an angel of God and told that Jesus was not only going to get him to Rome, but that God had graciously given him the lives of the crew as well. Paul has gone from criminal to trusted advisor.

⁴ *Natural History*, ii:132

In some situations, we need to earn the right to be heard. If we are listening to God, he will give us these moments when we can earn credibility. He can speak to us in the Word, through the Spirit directly, or by an angel. God will make our reputation so we will be heard. He did the same thing with Joseph and Daniel.

Section 3: Acts 27:27-44 Paul Takes Charge

²⁷On the fourteenth night we were still being driven across the Adriatic Sea, when about midnight the sailors sensed they were approaching land. ²⁸They took soundings and found that the water was a hundred and twenty feet deep. A short time later they took soundings again and found it was ninety feet deep. ²⁹Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight. ³⁰In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the life boat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow.³¹Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved." ³²So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it drift away.

³³Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. "For the last fourteen days," he said, "you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven't eaten anything. ³⁴Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head." ³⁵After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. ³⁶They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. ³⁷Altogether there were 276 of us on board. ³⁸When they had eaten as much as they wanted, they lightened the ship by throwing the grain into the sea.

³⁹When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but they saw a bay with a sandy beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could. ⁴⁰Cutting loose the anchors, they left them in the sea and at the same time untied the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and made for the beach. ⁴¹But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

⁴²The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. ⁴³But the centurion wanted to spare Paul's life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. ⁴⁴The rest were to get there on planks or on other pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land safely.

There are two key points here, places where Paul's wisdom saved the day. The first came when the sailors tried to lower the lifeboat and save themselves. Paul saw what they were doing. He knew that the Lord had promised to protect all the lives aboard only if they all stayed together. Paul tells the centurion and he jumps into action. The second place is where the soldiers want to kill all the prisoners. If any of the prisoners had escaped, it would have cost the soldiers their own lives. But Paul has earned a place of respect and Julius wants to protect him. The centurion prevented the slaughter and everyone made it to shore alive, even as Paul had said.

What have we learned?

God is responsible for our reputations. When we leave our lives in His hands, and live in an honorable way before him, He will raise us up before those of the world.

There was a young Christian man who got a job in a frame store. He spent his days working "as unto the Lord." His manner was of Christ. His morals higher than those of his co-workers and he gladly outworked them all. When the boss was gone on an

errand, he his quality work never changed, while the other workers would use this as an excuse to take it easy and goof off. In time the boss noticed. Although he did not become a Christian, his assistant manager did. Soon the boss was hiring only Christians for his store, saying they made the best workers. We need to remember, we are being watched all the time. We are always God's representatives.

God wants His gospel heard. As we walk in Him, He will raise us up in the esteem of others in order that our message about Him will be heard.

What the Text Says

Section 1 Acts 27:1-12

Paul is being taken to Rome. He begins in chains. He has two companions who help him—Luke and Aristarchus. The centurion allows him to meet with the Christians in Sidon. Paul warns the men not to sail, that the ship will not survive it. We are not told how he knows.

Section 2 Acts 27:13-26

Paul knows that God is in control. He is not a prisoner by chance. Even this was in God's plan. He has already been told by Jesus that he would testify to Jesus in Rome. So he is probably the only one who is calm on this voyage. When the storms rage and all seems lost an angel tells Paul that God has graciously decided that all would survive. Paul encourages the passengers.

Section 3 Acts 27:27-44

Paul has risen in the esteem of the centurion. He is now a trusted advisor. We see the same situation in Joseph and Daniel when they begin in a low position and rise to the top because of God's favor. Paul saves the day twice in this section: Firstly, he does not allow the sailors to drop the lifeboat and escape. The angel had said that the passengers would only survive if they all stayed together. Secondly, the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to keep them from escaping. The centurion wants to keep Paul alive. He stops the soldiers and allows all to swim safely to shore.

Connecting to the Scripture

We find ourselves in many new and difficult situations in our lives. We might get a new job or enter a new school or find ourselves in a new unusual group. When we enter these groups, we do so at the bottom. We are the unknown and uninitiated.

As we live our lives in the presence of God, allowing the Holy Spirit to manifest His character and gifts through us, we live a more exemplary life. We will have true holiness in our lives because we are inhabited by the Holy Spirit who is making us like our father, the Holy God. We value the truth and are honest. I once had my boss order me to tell someone on the phone that he was not there. I told him I could not do it. He was furious. Afterwards I told him, "If I am willing to lie for you, how will you know I would not lie to you?" He couldn't answer me. As Christians we genuinely love people with God's love. We do not cheat our bosses, looking for opportunities to slack off or be lazy. When we are on the clock we are working at full capacity. We do the same at home. We work as unto the Lord. He is our boss. We also have real integrity. This means we can be trusted.

Christians who are living the Christian life—overcoming sin and refusing to participate in evil or addictive practices—will stand out in this world. Their relationships will be far more beautiful and drama-free. They will treat everyone as a person made in the very image of God. A true Christian's reputation will bring honor to their God.

As Christians are elevated in their social and work spheres because of their character, Christ will also be honored.

Questions to Ask During the Study

Section 1 Read Acts 27:1-12

1. Paul is in a new situation. He is a prisoner accused of a capital crime. Have you ever been in a new situation where you didn't know anyone or how to perform appropriately?
2. How did you adapt to this new environment?

Section 2 Read Acts 27:13-26

1. How do you think Paul feels about the safety of this mission?
2. What can Paul look to that will keep him focused and calm in the midst of the storm? What can we look to when we experience very difficult times?
3. What information does the angel of God give to Paul? How does this help him and the crew? How would you feel if an angel came to you tonight with a message?
4. How have the feelings the centurion had about Paul changed? What evidence do we have that their relationship is different?

Section 3 Read Acts 27:27-44

1. In what two ways does Paul help save the lives of the people on the ship?
2. Think of a group you are a part of. Are you in high esteem or low esteem in this group? Are you doing anything that might hurt your reputation in this group (acting immature or selfish or being rude or irritating to others)?
3. What can we do to become the people who honor Christ?