

Thoughts on Acts Twenty-Seven

Acts the Twenty-Seventh chapter is full of nautical terms and geography, which attests to the validity of Luke's account. The first-person plural pronouns imply that Luke had joined Paul, but there is no mention of when. Also, Aristarchus of Thessalonica was one of the Gentile converts that had accompanied Paul with the relief offering to Jerusalem and probably remained with Paul during their entire stay in Caesarea (Acts 19:20), (Colossians 4:10). This chapter also gives us a better understanding of Paul's character and ability to assume a commanding presence when the situation demanded it. People sometimes believed that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) was a weakness of some kind, but there is no weakness in the man taking charge of the ship, its crew, other passengers, and even his Roman guards. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul's manner of speech and conduct helped them all get safely across the sea.

With or without specific charges against Paul, Festus finally decided to send him to Rome. Festus placed Paul and a handful of other prisoners in the custody of a Roman centurion named Julius. Julius belonged to the Imperial Regiment, one of the cohorts of auxiliary troops that enjoyed special honor from the emperor. The freedom given to Paul, allowing him to visit friends at ports along the way, shows the Centurion's respect for Paul. It might have been because Paul was an uncharged Roman citizen or because Julius knew he could trust Paul. It was as though Julius was taking Paul to visit Nero rather than a prisoner being transported to Rome. However, sailing in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea during that season was not wise. Luke writes, *"When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, and said to them, 'Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives'"* (Acts 27:9-10). These events took place during the time of year we know as September.

Paul was very familiar with travel, including travel by sea. Several years before this journey, he had written to the Corinthians about his experiences. *"Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren"* (2 Corinthians 11:25-26). Roman historians record that the sea would be treacherous from mid-September to mid-November. After mid-November, the winter sea became worse, and signs went up at the Ports saying, "The Sea is Closed." This was issued as a warning but was not enforced. The responsible people ignored not only Paul's warning but the typical seasonal times and warnings from the adverse winds. The name of the wind which came up is the source of our word typhoon, a strong wind blowing at hurricane force. Only the Spirit, guiding Paul about the necessary conduct of crew and passengers, prevented loss of life.

The storm blew them so far off course that seasoned sailors of the Mediterranean did not recognize the island they approached after the storm died. They were so battered by the storm that they were determined to go ashore anyway. *"When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could"* (Acts 27:39). They were so anxious to reach shore they removed all restraints, like the anchors and rudder that stretched below the bow of the ship, and allowed the wind to drive them forward. But the ship struck the reef and stuck fast. The waves then began to tear the ship apart (Acts 27:40-41).

When soldiers could not guard their prisoners, it was common practice to kill them to prevent them from escaping. In this case, however, the Centurion had a Roman citizen destined to go to Emperor Nero, and he would not allow the prisoners to be harmed. The ship's evacuation proceeded just as Paul had foretold. None of the people on board were lost, but all escaped to shore safely (Acts 27:44).

Luke began this letter to Theophilus by stating that Jesus had *"given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen"* (Acts 1:2). There were many times when at first, it appeared that completing those orders to preach to all the world would be impossible. With each advance, there seemed to be persecution or circumstance to stop further progress. In all that happened to Paul, we can see the providence of God as we remember Jesus' words: *"For he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake"* (Acts 9:15-16). Chapter 28 concludes Luke's narrative and describes Paul's first stay in Rome.