



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Missiology

Lesson 14 – Paul’s Journey to Rome

The physician Luke (the author of the book of Acts) accompanied Paul on his journey from Caesarea to Rome, together with a believer named **“Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica”** (Acts 27:2). Paul and other prisoners were put into the hands of a centurion named Julius, who had the responsibility of delivering them safely to Caesar in Rome. But it was not going to be easy. First they went by ship from Caesarea to Sidon. There **“Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care”** (Acts 27:3). It seems that by this time there were Christians in Sidon who knew Paul.

The next stop on their voyage was Myra, a city of Lycia, on the southern coast of what is now the country of Turkey. **“There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing to Italy, and he put us on board”** (Acts 27:6). Contrary winds had slowed them down before this, and now again the wind did not favor them. They finally reached the island of Crete and **“came to place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea”** (Acts 27:8). Even though Paul was only a prisoner, he had spent many days sailing on the Mediterranean Sea, so he gave Julius and the sailors his advice: **“Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives”** (Acts 27:10). Instead of listening to Paul, however, **“the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship”** (Acts 27:11). They should have stayed in Fair Havens, but instead they tried to reach Phoenix, another harbor on the island of Crete, where they hoped to spend the winter before continuing their voyage.

This decision proved to be a foolish mistake, for as they were on their way to Phoenix, **“a tempestuous head wind arose”** (Acts 27:14), and they were driven out to sea. They took the smaller skiff on board, and they used cables to undergird the ship, so that it would not fall apart. The storm increased in intensity, and they threw the ship’s tackle overboard to lighten the ship. Day after day the storm continued, and the ship’s passengers feared the worst. Luke reports: **“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”** (Acts 27:20).

But Paul had God’s promise that he would get to Rome. And now God repeated his promise. He sent an angel to Paul at night, and this angel said to Paul: **“Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you”** (Acts 27:24). Earlier Paul had warned them that if they ventured out of Fair Havens, they would lose both cargo and passengers. But now after this word from God through His angel, Paul was able to assure Julius, the entire crew, as well as all the passengers on the ship: **“I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the**

ship” (Acts 27:22). “Take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island” (Acts 27:25-26).

For fourteen days they had been driven to and fro by the wind in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. Finally it seemed that they were nearing land. But the sailors did not trust the angelic message delivered to Paul. They figured that now was the time for them to get to land safely and let the rest of them die at sea. So they let down the skiff into the sea and hoped to sail safely to land in the skiff. Paul again had something to say, even though he was only a prisoner. **“Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’ Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off” (Acts 27:31-32).** Now the sailors were unable to escape.

By now it seemed that the centurion and all the rest looked to the prisoner Paul for leadership and direction. Paul was happy to take this role. He said to them all: **“Today is the fourteenth day you have waited and continued without food, and eaten nothing. 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” (Acts 27:33-34).** **“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. Then they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves. And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea” (Acts 27:35-38).** Paul did not hide his faith in God; he openly thanked God for the food that they were given. What a tremendous witness it is for Christ and the truth when Christians can be bold and confident of God’s presence and protection, even though everyone else is without hope and without courage!

The passengers were still in grave danger. They had come close to land, but the storm was still raging. **“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” (Acts 27:41).** Earlier the sailors had not believed the message given to Paul and they had tried to escape. Now it was the soldiers who were determined to save their own lives without consideration of the lives of the prisoners they were guarding. **“The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape” (Acts 27:42).** But Julius did not want the prisoner Paul to die, and so he **“commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land” (Acts 27:43-44).** God had kept his promise to Paul that all 276 passengers would survive, including all the sailors, all the soldiers, and all the prisoners.

The island on which they landed was Malta. The storm had driven them westward, and they were much closer to Rome than before. But it was not sailing weather, and their ship had been destroyed. How would the natives of Malta treat them? As a witness of all these events, Luke must have been happy to report: **“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.” (Acts 28:2). The natives of Malta were not believers in Christ, and yet by God’s providence they were kind to their visitors. Missionaries in dangerous situations often receive unexpected help from unbelieving strangers, who have their own reasons (guided by God providence) to give needed support and sustenance. God knows how to take care of His own children.

No one on the island knew who Paul was, but something happened very soon after they landed that called attention to Paul and his God. We read: **“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. 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.’ But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 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”** (Acts 27:3-6). Did not Jesus say to His disciples: **“These signs will follow those who believe; ... they will take up serpents and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them”** (Mark 16:17-18)?

They soon learned from Paul’s own lips and from his actions that he was not a god, but that he was a messenger of the true God. A wealthy landowner named Publius took care of the shipwreck victims for several days. When his father **“lay sick of a fever and dysentery, Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed. They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary”** (Acts 27:8-10). As always, wherever he was, Paul remained an apostle of the Lord Jesus who proclaimed Jesus’ name and did wonders in His name, as the Lord directed him. No doubt many of the Maltese natives came to know Jesus during Paul’s stay there. Luke and Aristarchus were also there to give testimony concerning the Savior of the world.

When the winter months were over, Julius found another ship to take his prisoners to Rome. Luke says that they went from Syracuse to Rhegium to Puteoli. The Gospel had spread already to Puteoli, and there were Christians there. Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus stayed with them for a week before going on to Rome. Somehow the news reached the Christians in Rome that Paul and his associates were on their way. Luke reports: **“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”** (Acts 28:15). God’s promise to Paul that he would preach the Gospel in Rome was about to be fulfilled.

In Rome at last, Paul was delivered to the captain of the guard, who permitted Paul **“to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him”** (Acts 28:16). This permitted Paul to talk to the individual soldiers who guarded him. Later Paul wrote to his Christian friends in Philippi: **“I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned**

out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ” (Philippians 1:12-13). Paul used this opportunity to proclaim the Good News of Christ to the soldiers guarding him. When he concluded his letter to the Philippians, he wrote: **“All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar’s household”** (Philippians 4:22).

Since Paul could receive visitors while he was awaiting his hearing before Caesar, he soon succeeded in contacting the sizable Jewish community in Rome. He explained to them why he was a prisoner in Rome: **“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, who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to death. But, when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar”** (Acts 28:17-19). These Roman Jews were willing to listen to what Paul had to say. They said: **“We desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere”** (Acts 28:22). Christianity was thought of as a Jewish sect. Even today Christians are spoken against everywhere.

A day was set for the Jews in Rome to meet with Paul in his house, and they met all day long. Paul **“explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets”** (Acts 28:23). What a wonderful Bible class that must have been! Paul attempted to prove to them from their own Old Testament Scriptures that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, the Son of David, that God had promised. **“And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. ... They did not agree among themselves”** (Acts 28:24-25). Paul warned them not to harden themselves against the Gospel of Christ, as had happened so often in Israelite history. His final word to them was this: **“Let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it”** (Acts 28:28). Then **“the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves”** (Acts 28:29).

Paul lived like this as a prisoner in Rome for two years; he received many visitors and carried out the work of a missionary without leaving his house. He **“received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him”** (Acts 28: 30-31). This is how Luke’s book of Acts comes to an end. The book began with the apostles preaching the Gospel in Jerusalem, the center of the Jewish world. It ends with the preaching of the Gospel in Rome, the center of the Gentile world.

Questions

1. Why did Paul think a voyage to Rome would mean disaster?
2. Why did they not take Paul's advice concerning the voyage?
3. What happened on their way to the harbor at Phoenix?
4. What are some facts that show that the storm at sea was very dangerous?
5. What assurance did God give Paul during the storm?
6. How did the action of the sailors and then the soldiers endanger Paul's life?
7. How did all 276 passengers get to shore?
8. What made the natives of Malta think that Paul was a god?
9. What special powers did God give Paul on the island of Malta?
10. How was Paul encouraged as he got closer to Rome?
11. What were Paul's living conditions as a prisoner in Rome?
12. What was the outcome of Paul's day-long Bible study with the Jews?
13. How was Paul able to spread the Gospel of Christ as a prisoner?
14. Why is "From Jerusalem to Rome" a fitting heading for the book of Acts?
15. How does God protect missionaries on their travels today?