

Paul had appealed to Caesar concerning his freedom, leaving Festus no choice but to send him to Rome. Paul's journey to Rome begins with a very eventful voyage by ship that ends with shipwreck on the island of Melita. However, God sovereignly preserves the lives of Paul and the other people on the ship so that Paul could be a witness for Jesus Christ in Rome (Acts 23:11, 27:24).

**Verses 1-13:** A Roman centurion named Julius is assigned to transport Paul and a number of other prisoners to Rome and so they board a ship. They set sail from Caesarea and, after a stopover at Sidon, they sail past Cyprus, keeping the island between them and the contrary winds. They change ships at Myra where the centurion found one that was sailing to Italy. However, their progress slowed to a crawl because of contrary winds and it took several days for them to reach a harbor called Fair Havens on the southern side of Crete. By this time it was so late in the year that sailing had become dangerous because of the seasonal weather patterns and Paul advised them that attempting to sail now would likely result in the loss of the ship, its cargo, and the lives of all on board. However, the centurion trusted the expertise of the ship's captain more than Paul's, and the captain had decided that since the harbor of Fair Havens was not suitable for wintering, it would be worth the risk to sail further west until they found a more suitable harbor for spending the winter. When a gentle south wind began blowing, they decided to take advantage of it and set sail once again.

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14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. 15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let *her* drive.

**“But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon”** – The gentle wind did not last long since it was soon replaced by a type of strong wind that Mediterranean sailors feared. This type had been given the name “Euroclydon,” although commentators point out that the best manuscripts give the name as “Euroquilo,” which is a compound word from Greek and Latin words combining to mean “northeast wind.” It seems that this particular wind was blowing in the opposite direction that the sailors on Paul's ship needed in order to reach their planned destination in Italy.

**“And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let *her* drive”** – Their forward progress was stopped and they could not maintain their course toward Italy in the face of the wind. Their only choice was to let the boat go where the wind and waves took them since it was pointless to attempt to steer a course.

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16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

**“And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat”** – The “boat” here apparently refers to a skiff or lifeboat that was towed behind the ship in cases of emergency. The partial shelter from the wind provided by the island of Clauda gave them the opportunity to haul their lifeboat aboard the ship and secure it. Even with the shelter offered by Clauda, it was a difficult task to bring the lifeboat onboard, requiring “much work” to “come by” it.

**“Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship”** – After the lifeboat had been “taken up” (hoisted onboard), the sailors used “helps” (ropes) to undergird the ship. This procedure is called frapping and was used by sailors of the day to prepare for rough seas. Ropes were wrapped around the hull and winched tight in order to help hold the ship together as it was battered by the wind and the waves.

**“and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, *strake* [to lower] sail [vessel; tackle; gear], and so were driven”** – After doing what they could to secure the lifeboat and the ship, their next concern was running aground on the sandbars on the African coast that was infamous for being a ship graveyard. Fearing that the wind would drive them into this area, they “strake sail” in hopes of avoiding it. Since the Greek word used for “strake” means “to lower” and the word used for “sail” can refer to any of the gear or tackle of a ship, commentators believe that the sailors lowered the sails and/or the anchor (likely both) to hopefully prevent the wind and waves from driving them into the area of the sandbars.

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18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next *day* they lightened the ship; 19 And the third *day* we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

On the following day (presumably the second day after “straking sail”) the violence of the wind and waves convinced the crew (“they”) that they should lighten the ship to enable it to ride the waves more easily. They apparently tossed the cargo overboard at this point since it was not necessary for their survival. By the third day they feared the ship was still too heavy and proceeded to also toss the tackle of the ship overboard. This likely included all but the most essential ropes, sails, anchors, etc. Notice the change in pronoun from “they” to “we.” Luke is also a passenger on the ship and apparently everyone onboard is recruited on the third day to help the crew further lighten the ship.

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20 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.

They had endured several days of stormy skies and there was no evidence of when it would end. Sailors used the sun and stars to navigate, but since they had not been able to see these celestial objects in several days, they had no idea where they were or what direction they were pointed. Earlier they had feared falling into the quicksands (v. 17) and now they had no idea how close they were to this or any other hazards of the sea. They lost all hope that they would survive this voyage seeing that they were hopelessly lost and there was no sign of when the storm would end.

21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

**“But after long abstinence [fasting] Paul stood forth in the midst of them”** – This abstinence from food was not any form of religious fasting. Apparently no one on the ship had eaten for several days because of the urgency of the situation or, as many commentators believe, because of intense seasickness from the severe tossing on the waves. However, Paul comes forward at this time because he has something to report.

**“and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss”** – Paul’s intent is not to say “I told you so” but he is making a case as to why they should believe what he is about to say. They should have listened to him before and so they should listen to him now.

22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of *any man’s* life among you, but of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

**“And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of *any man’s* life among you, but of the ship”** – They had given up hope that they would survive (v. 20) but Paul now encourages them with the news that even though the ship will be lost, no one would lose their life.

**“For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve”** – Paul knows they will all survive because of the message that God had sent to him that night by an angel and now he is passing that message on to the rest of the people on the ship. “This night” suggests that it had not been long since Paul had received this message from God. The expression “whose I am and whom I serve” demonstrates the close relationship that Paul has with God and that the message can be trusted.

**“Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar”** – Paul did not have to fear that he was going to die in the middle of the sea because God had already ordained that Paul was going to Rome (Acts 23:11) and that promise is repeated here, with the added detail that Paul would stand before Caesar himself. Circumstances can never stand in the way of God’s sovereign plan.

**“and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee”** – Apparently Paul had been praying for everyone on board the ship and God was answering that prayer by including all of them under the umbrella of safety that He had given Paul.

25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

Paul repeats his encouragement from v. 22. Paul’s reason for cheer might have been easily dismissed by these unbelieving sailors and soldiers as just talk or wishful thinking, but he emphasizes the fact that his information came from God, Who is incapable of lying. Paul is confident that what God has said will come to pass but it seems that the others do not cheer up until later (v. 36).

**Verses 26-32:** Paul added one other detail to what God had said must happen: it would be necessary for them to run aground on an island. On the fourteenth night since the storm began the sailors became aware that they were nearing land (perhaps they heard waves crashing against the seashore) and tested the depth of the water. Realizing that they were entering shallow water, they dropped anchor to prevent wrecking the ship on any rocks that might be offshore and waited for daylight. However, some of the sailors attempted to abandon the ship and their passengers by pretending to drop the anchors but lowering and boarding the lifeboat instead. Paul warned the centurion that their survival was dependent on these sailors remaining in the ship so the centurion had his soldiers cut the ropes holding the lifeboat and let it fall into the water, preventing any further escape attempts.

33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought *them* all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I pray you to take *some* meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

Paul urges everyone on the ship to eat because none of them had eaten for fourteen days. He reminded them that they needed to eat for their strength and health and that no harm was going to come to them.

35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken *it*, he began to eat. 36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took *some* meat.

Paul thanked God (the One that had promised that everyone would survive) for the food they were about to eat in full view of the rest of the ship. When he began to eat in front of them, their hunger and the improving situation prompted them to begin to eat and become encouraged.

37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

Assuming that the centurion had brought his full complement of soldiers (100 men), then he, his soldiers and Paul would account for 102 of the 276 souls on board. Apparently Luke was also on board, as well as Aristarchus, as fellow Christian of Paul’s (v. 2). The remaining 172 people were apparently sailors, other prisoners (v. 1), and other passengers. Luke apparently wants us to see the number of people impacted by the events on the ship as well as how many God preserved.

**Verses 38-44:** After eating they cast the remaining cargo (wheat) into the sea in order to lighten the ship further. By the light of day the sailors were able to see a spot where they believed they could safely run the ship aground, but during the attempt the ship got stuck further offshore than they hoped. The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to prevent them from escaping but the centurion prevented them in order to protect Paul. Everyone was able to make it to shore either by swimming or hanging onto floating debris.