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Paul Sails to Rome
27: 1-11

Late 59 AD

Paul Sails to Rome DIG: As Paul sets sail for Rome (see the map on **Cz – Paul's Journey to Rome**)**, what points of interest can you locate along the way from Paul's diary? From verses 1-3 and 43, what do you know about the centurion in charge? How does his concern for Paul indicate how Paul used his time while imprisoned in Caesarea? If you were the ship's owner or navigator, how would you react to Paul's warning about the 50-mile trip they wanted to make in verse 10? Would you have responded any differently than Julius did to Paul's concern? Why? Why not?**

REFLECT: When have you sailed off on a voyage where you were unprepared? What did you learn? How have you been about to help others from making the same mistakes that you did? Perhaps you're dealing with an issue right now where you can't get others to cooperate or agree with your advice and suggestions. How does this have you feeling? How have you responded? How have you been harmed by another person's errors, whether deliberate or accidental? What has this done to your relationship? How are you handling your anger or regret?

From the perspective of **Luke's** purposes as a historian and theologian, one is somewhat at a loss to explain the detailed treatment of this voyage. It does little to advance knowledge of the spread of the gospel. There are still theological points to be made and will be noted. The greater part of the story, however, doesn't focus on theology, but rather concentrates on the voyage itself. **Luke** relates in delightful detail the threat of the storm and the narrow escape from death at sea.

But that is exactly through this extensive presentation of the story itself that the full theological impact is conveyed. **Luke** was at **his** literary best in this account, building up suspense in **his** dramatic portrayal of the violence of the storm, and the description of the sailors, the abandonment of all hope. At each point, however,

when the situation seemed most desperate, there came a word of encouragement from **Paul** – **his God** would not abandon them . . . **take heart, eat, be of good cheer**. Then the final deliverance came. All were **saved**. **Paul's God** had indeed not abandoned them to the anger of the seas. One cannot miss the emphasis on the divine providence of **God**, and it is precisely through the detailed telling of the story that the lesson has it greatest impact. It is "narrative theology" at its best.[607]

The journey from Caesarea to Crete: When it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they handed Paul and some other prisoners over to a centurion named Julius, one of the ten **centurions of the Augustan Cohort (27:1; to see link click Bx – Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia: A closer look at the "us" or "we" passages and sea passages).** Evidently **Luke** stayed in Caesarea the whole time that **Paul** was detained there and would then accompany **him** to **Rome**. This is why **he** could offer such detail when writing the book of **Acts**. **He** may have also written the gospel of **Luke** while **he** was there for two years. **He** would have had easy access to Jerusalem to gather all the information **he** needed. There were two ships involved between the start of the journey and the shipwreck (see **Dc – The Shipwreck at Malta**), and this was the first.



Since all vessels were cargo ships in the ancient world, travelers seeking passage were in the habit of going down to the waterfront and searching until they found a ship scheduled to sail in the direction they wished to take. **So we boarded a ship from Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia (27:2a).** In all likelihood the vessel was privately owned, and passage was available to any who could pay. Sailing schedules were not only determined by favorable **winds** but also according to superstitions that plagued **Roman** soldiers. The **Roman** religious calendar prohibited sailing on ill-omened days such as August 24th, October 5th, and November 8th, the end of the month also being generally regarded as a dangerous time to be on the water. Having tentatively set a date, the

ship's officers would offer a pre-sailing sacrifice. If all the initial omens proved "positive," sailing could still be delayed by such petty omens as a sneeze on boarding, a crow or magpie croaking in the rigging, or dreams. While the weather lasted, for example, no traveler was permitted to cut his hair or nails, although if it turned bad, nail clippings and locks of hair tossed into the sea as an appeasement offering. Blasphemy was completely forbidden, even if written in a letter carried abroad, and the body of anyone who died at sea was immediately thrown overboard, death on board constituting the worst possible omen.[608]

Adramyttium, its homeport, was located on the northwest coast of **Asia** Minor, south of Troas. **Julius** was probably hoping to find a larger **ship** bound for **Rome** as it stopped at **the ports along the coast back to Adramyttium**. From **Asia** Minor, **they** would have little trouble finding passage to Italy. **And we set out to sea – accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica (27:2b). Aristarchus** was with **Paul** in **Ephesus (19:29)**, accompanied **him** with the collection from the Gentile congregations to **Yerushalayim (20:4)**, and went with **Paul** all the way to **Rome (Colossians 4:10)**. It was likely that **Aristarchus** paid **his** way as a passenger, and **Luke** was on board as **the ship's** doctor.



The next day we put out to sea, making port **the next at Sidon,** seventy nautical miles to the north**.** That would have only taken one day for **the ship** and *her* crew. It may have related to commercial factors, the port city of **Sidon** being a

major grain importer. In just one day at sea, **Paul** won the friendship of the centurion **Julius. He treating Paul kindly, let him** leave the ship and **go to his** believing **friends at Sidon to receive care (27:3).** The **kindness Paul** received reflected both **his** status as an uncondemned man awaiting an appeal before Caesar, and **his** evident godly character, giving **him** favor before others. In addition, **Julius** seems like **he** was naturally kind by nature, and, no doubt, **Paul** had already made a favorable impression on **him**. Beside **the crew**, all **the others** on board were condemned **prisoners (28:42)** being sent to **Rome** to die in the arena.[609]

From **Sidon** the direct route to **Myra** was to the west the island of **Cyprus**. But **setting out to sea from there, we** were compelled to **sail under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were against us.** In contrast to the trip from **Caesarea** to **Sidon** – which was only 70 nautical miles – the voyage from **Sidon** to **Myra**, was a stretch of **open sea** in excess of nautical 400 miles. Having hugged the shelter of **Cyprus** as long as possible, **the ship** then forced its way into **open** waters between **Cyprus** and **Asia Minor**, moving **along the coast** past **Cilicia and Pamphylia** with the help of night breezes and westerly sea current**.** Then **Luke** commented that **we came down to Myra,** a port city of **Lysia (27:4-5).** The length of the voyage was probably around 15 days.

They likely docked at Andriace, which was the chief port for **ships** that supplied the **Roman** Empire with **Egyptian** grain, and especially for those **ships** that traveled between **Alexandria**, Egypt and **Rome**. Being part of the **Roman** Empire, **Egypt** was her main source of grain. So these private **ships** received special consideration from the **Roman** government in view of the importance of that lifeline.[610] **There the centurion found a** second **ship from Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board (27:6).** The fact that **Luke** specifically mentions that **the ship** was carrying **wheat (27:38)**, confirms that **she** was an **Egyptian** grain carrier on **her** way to **Rome**. This was the larger **ship** that **Julius** was looking for. Because of its practical and political significance as a commodity in the ancient world, grain is frequently compared in importance to present-day oil.

Since **Egyptian ships** carrying **grain** tended to travel in fleets to gain both safety and navigational advantages, the fact that **the ship** sailed off alone was very dangerous. Rudderless, they were steered with two huge paddles on each side of the stern. Power depended on a single gigantic square sail made of heavy **Egyptian** linen or animal hides stitched together. They were not designed for sailing against

the wind – which was exactly what the sailors faced on their ill-fated voyage.[611] However, the promise of lucrative returns offset the hazards to a significant degree. Profits were high in order to offset the expense of building and maintaining ships the size demanded by the government and could carry between 2,500 and 3,500 tons of wheat.[612]

However, **the Alexandrian ship** soon found its course for **Italy** somewhat difficult. The voyage continued, but with lack of progress because it appeared that **they** were sailing into **the wind**. **Luke** relates that **with difficulty we made it to Cnidus,** 130 nautical miles away**.** But when **we** left **Cnidus**, **we** left the shelter of the mainland. **As the wind did not allow us to go further** west across the lower end of the Aegean Sea, **it** forced **us** due south towards **Crete**. Already the voyage was somewhat off course because the normal route from **Myra** would have taken **the ship** past **Crete**, along its northern coast. However, **the winds** were so great that **we** were forced to round Cape **Salone** and hug **Crete's** southern coast. That made **sailing slow for a number of days. Coasting** again **with difficulty, we** came **to a place** ironically **called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea (27:7-8)**. There, weary from fighting the weather, the weary travelers entered the bay. It is an open bay, a poor harbor in bad weather, but it would protect **them** for a while from **the winds they** were facing. The trip from **Alexandria** to **Rome** normally took 10 to 13 days, but adverse conditions could slow the trip to as much as 45 days.[613]

The warning of the storm: Since considerable time had passed at Crete waiting for a change in **the winds, the voyage was already dangerous because the Fast of Yom-Kippur** on October the fifth that year **had already passed (27:9a).** Shipping became increasingly **dangerous** after mid-September and was rarely engaged in after mid-October because of the likelihood of storms. **Yom-Kipper** can occur between September 14 and October 14. So **they** had already entered into that dangerous season for sailing.

Apparently the sailors and **Julius** had a meeting to plan their course of action, where **Paul**, an experienced traveler, was allowed to speak. **He kept on warning them, telling them, "Men, I can see that the voyage is about to end in disaster and great loss – not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives" (27:9b-10)** In fact, **he** had been **shipwrecked three times** and had been adrift overnight on wreckage **(Second Corinthians 11:25)**. **But his** advice was overruled and **the centurion was persuaded more by the owner and the**

captain of the ship than by what was said by Paul, which **they** would later regret **(27:11).**

In You, ADONAI, have I taken refuge. Let me never be ashamed. Deliver me and rescue me in Your justice. Turn Your ear to me and save me. Be to me a sheltering rock where I may always go. Give the command to save me – for You are my rock and my fortress. My God, rescue me out of the hand of the wicked, out of the grasp of an evil ruthless man. For You are my hope, ADONAI my Lord – my trust from my youth. From my birth I have leaned on You. You took me out of my mother's womb. My praise has always been about You. I am like an ominous sign to many, but You are my strong refuge. My mouth is filled with Your praise and with Your glory all day (Psalm 71:1-8).

A closer look at Paul's perils, travels and travails in antiquity: One could hardly find a better description of the perils of travel in antiquity than one finds in **Second Corinthians 11:23-29. Paul** speaks of danger from bandits, from rivers; of being shipwrecked three times, being adrift in the sea for a night and a day; of having sleepless nights, going hungry and thirsty, being cold and even on occasion also naked; of experiencing anxiety, and this doesn't even include the difficulties **Paul** faced because of determined opposition to **his** ministry by both Jews and Gentiles.

From **Paul's** list of perils one might come to the conclusion that it was a very dark time to be on the road. However, it can be argued that the several centuries after **Messiah's** death were untroubled days for a traveler. He could make his way from the shores of the Euphrates to the border between England and Scotland without crossing a foreign frontier, always within the bounds of **Roman** authority. A purse full of **Roman** coins was the only kind of cash he had to carry; they were accepted or could be changed everywhere. He could sail through any waters without fear of pirates, thanks to the Emperor's patrol squadrons. A planned network of good roads gave him access to all major centers, and the routes were policed well enough for him to ride them with relatively little fear of bandits. He needed only two languages: Greek would take him from Mesopotamia to Yugoslavia, and Latin from Yugoslavia to Britain. Wherever he went, he was under the protective umbrella of a well-organized, efficient legal system. If he was a **Roman** citizen and got into trouble, he could, as **Paul** did, insist upon trial in **Rome**. This is somewhat optimistic, but it is near the truth to explain why so many believers and unbelievers did so much traveling at that time.

In some parts of the Empire travel on land could be undertaken year-around, or almost so, but travel on sea was limited to the sailing season. The prime time was between May twenty-seventh and September fourteenth, but troops and others who had a necessity or were adventurous might sail in March, April, October, or even November. The sea was very changeable from March 10th to May 26th and from September 14th to November 11th, but still sailable. The winter storms made the seas extremely dangerous for sailing in December, January, or February.

There were no passenger ships as we know them today. One had to pay an exit tax to leave a country and book passage on a merchant ship, and while the big ones would venture out into the sea, such as the one **Paul** sailed on from Patara to Tyre **(21:1-3)**, the smaller ones tended to hug the coastline and pull into port each night. On a big vessel, and with prevailing winds, passage from **Rome** to Corinth took about five days at least, and Alexandria was ten days from **Rome**. Most travelers on large ships simply booked passage as deck passengers, sleeping out in the open or under a small tent. They would travel with bags that would contain not only clothes, but also cooking utensils, food, bathing items, and sometimes bedding as well. Sometimes a very large vessel might hold up to six hundred passengers or slaves, but this was out of the ordinary.

In general, ships never left on a fixed schedule, but according to **the winds** and weather, which meant that if one wished to go on such a ship, one needed to stay near the port, where one could hear the ship's captain signal departure. Also sailors, like many others in the **Roman** world, were a superstitious lot, and there were certain days (for example August 24th, October 5th, November 8th, religious holidays, and in general at the end of the month when it was thought unwise to sail. Most ship captains or owners would make a sacrifice before sailing, and if the omens were ill, sailing would be delayed. Some of the above explains why it was that on the one hand **Paul** was so anxious to sail from Caesarea. One had to go while the going was good, and one could never be sure of making a passage by a certain date unless one made allowance for some of the delaying factors mentioned above.[614]