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The Storm along the Shore of Crete
27: 12-26

Late 59 AD

The storm along the shore of Crete DIG: What things in verses 13-20 show how severe this storm was? Verse 27 indicates this situation lasted two weeks. How would you be feeling be the end of the first week? After being in Caesarea for at least two years, why might Paul need to hear the promise of 23:11 again repeated in verse 24?

REFLECT: What would a page from your ship's diary sound like? As a sailor on board, how would you feel about Paul's message in verses 21-26? When have you felt caught in a "Nor'easter," driven along by the wind? What happened? What did you learn from the situation? In terms of a weather report, how would you describe your life at present? Your life five years ago? The crew in charge of Paul's ship eventually started throwing some things overboard to lighten their load. Are you carrying an extra baggage you should probably be without? Think or someone you know who's enduring their own blinding storm right now. How could you encourage them with these insights from Paul life?



Now begins the dramatic story of **the storm** and shipwreck that vindicated **Paul's** evaluation of the situation (**to see link click Da – Paul Sails to Rome**). The

anticipated journey was quite short, a day's journey, a "three-hour-tour" if you will – and a gentle southerly breeze which arose deceived **them** into thinking that **they** could manage another forty nautical miles. As the ship left Fair Havens, Julius, the captain, and the navigator surely felt quite confident of their decision, but it wouldn't take long for them to see they had made a critical mistake.

The sailing of the ship: And because the open **harbor** at Fair Havens **was unsuitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to set out to sea from there – if somehow they might reach Phoenix, a** closed, protected **harbor of Crete facing northeast and southeast, and spend the winter there. When the south wind blew gently, supposing their decision to sail to Phoenix was a wise one, so they raised the anchor and started coasting along the shoreline by Crete (27:12-13).** Six miles to the west of Fair Havens, a peninsula known as Cape Matala jutted out. Around the cape, the shoreline then ran sharply northward as one sailed the thirty or so miles remaining to **Phoenix**. Since **they** were traveling close to shore, the trip should have not taken **Paul's ship** more than a few hours with the favorable south wind. But such was not to be.



The Northeaster: Crete is dotted with mountains, some of them towering 8,000 above **sea** level. Things started well, but as **they** rounded Cape Matala, **a violent wind** rushed down from the mountains, striking **the ship**. **But before long, a hurricane-force wind called "the Northeaster" swept down from the**

island. Paul and the crew were immediately in danger because once **they** were blown away from **Crete** into **the** open **sea**, the larger waves were impossible to deal with. **When the ship was caught and could not face into the wind** enough to **sail** toward **Phoenix, we gave way to it and were driven along (27:14-15;** and see **Bx – Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia: A closer look at the "us" or "we" passages and sea passages).** Ancient ships were not built to head into such **a violent wind**, so there was no way **the** Alexandrian **ship** could hold its course to **Phoenix**.

Helpless against **the wind, the ship** was carried some twenty-five nautical miles to **a small island called Cauda**, which offered some protection from **the storm**. For the first time **the sailors** were able to take measures to secure **the ship**. The first thing **they** did was to haul in the lifeboat, or **dinghy**. **Luke** noted that **we were barely able to get control of the dinghy,** probably because **it** had filled with water**.** Next, **when the crew had hoisted it up, they made use of ropes,** which passed under **the ship to undergird the ship** and prevent **it** from breaking up against the pounding of **the wind and the waves. Then, fearing they might run aground on the Greater Syrtis, they** also **let down the anchor,** which **they** hoped would act as a drag and help prevent **the ship** from drifting that far south. Nevertheless**, we were driven along (27:16-17). The Syrtis** were shallow sandbars off the North African coast, the dreaded graveyard of ships in the ancient world. Although **the Syrtis** were some 400 nautical miles to the south of **Cauda**, **the sailors** didn't know how far **the storm** might blow **the ship.**[615]

There was really little that **the** ancient **ship** could do to fight **the violent storm**, and **they** were probably taking on water. Surely, **they** had the mainsail down and allowed **the ship** to be driven along as it may. Having already taken all the available precautions above, **they**
then undertook the more serious measure of jettisoning **the cargo**. **But as we were violently battered by the storm, the next day they began throwing cargo overboard. Luke** didn't specify what was thrown from **the ship**. It was probably most of **the wheat**, though it later became clear later **(27:38)** that not all of **it** at that time **(27:18)**.

Carrying **grain** raised serious safety hazards on board wooden **ships**, requiring dry storage in order to prevent infestation, rotting, or fermentation. When wet, **grain** can swell to double its normal size, and a full load is capable of splitting the plates even of a modern ship. Likewise, because grain "breathes" – taking in oxygen and giving off heat, carbon monoxide, and moisture – it acts as something "alive" and

mobile. If not stored in sacks or bins, it not only “flows” in rough **seas** but also exerts a vertical pressure – nearly 240 pounds when piled up to a height of six feet, for example. In rough **seas**, its movement can produce a sudden lateral pressure up to 160 pounds per square foot on the hull, creating a real threat of breaking through the wood, or even capsizing **the ship**.[616]



On the third day, they threw out the ship’s gear (miscellaneous equipment not crucial to sailing **the ship**) **with their own hands. With the ship** now lightened, there was nothing left but to roll with the punches of **the wind and the waves. The storm** raged on. **Luke** noted: **Neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm pressing on us.** Without **the stars** and **sun**, **they** had no way of knowing where **they** were – no **gear**, no **sun**, no **stars**, no **hope**. Humanly speaking, there appeared to be no chance of survival. **They** were clearly lost at **sea**. Despair set in. **All hope of being saved was vanishing (27:19-20).**[617]

So far in **Acts, Luke** had depicted **Paul** as **the apostle to the Gentiles**, the pioneer of the **Three Missionary Journeys**, the prisoner, and the defendant. Now, however, **he** portrays **him** in a different light. **He** is no longer an honored **apostle**, but an ordinary **man** among men, a lonely believer (apart from **Luke himself** and **Aristarchus**) among **273 (27:37)** unbelievers, who were either soldiers, prisoners, merchants or crew members. Surely, **Paul** was the most experienced traveler on board that ship. All total, **Paul** sailed eleven voyages and at least 3,500 nautical miles on the Mediterranean before **he** set sail for **Rome**. However, it was more than **his** experience at **sea** that made **Paul** stand out as a leader on board **ship**. It was **his** unshakable faith and character.[618]

Paul’s message of hope: **The storm** was at its height. All sense of direction was lost. Morale was at its lowest ebb. It was at this dark moment that **Paul’s** leadership

skills shone most brightly. No one had the stomach for food, as **the ship** lurched in **the waves**. **As they had long been without food** (**they** had **wheat** on board, but **they** were probably too busy trying to keep **the ship** together to eat)**.** At this dramatic point, **Paul** came and **stood up in their midst** to offer a reassuring word, saying: **Men, you should have listened to me and not sailed from Crete, to avoid this disaster and loss. He** had been right *then*, so **his** words *now* should be taken with more confidence. **Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you – but only of the ship (27:21-22).**

Paul began the voyage as a prisoner, but **he** ended up as the captain. Paul took over the situation when it was obvious that nobody knew what to do. A crisis does not make a person; a crisis shows what a person is made of, and it tends to bring true leadership to light. **Paul** gently rebuking **the centurion**, **the navigator** and **the captain** for ignoring **his** warning. Soon **they** would discover that **ADONAI** had spared all of **them** only because of **Paul**.[619]

At this point **Paul's** prediction changed radically from **his** former warning. Then **he** spoke of loss both of **ship** and life **(27:10)**. Now **he** spoke only of **salvation** (Greek: *sozo*). Since **their** failure to hear **his** words of warning led to **their** current catastrophe, **they** should not fail to **listen** to **his** message of **salvation; they** must keep up **their** courage and not give in to despair: **For this very night, there came to me an angel of *the* God** (in contrast to **their** pagan gods) **to whom I belong and whom I serve** (Greek: *latreuo*)**,** said: **Do not fear, Paul. You must stand before Caesar; and indeed, God has granted** (Greek: *charizomai*, meaning *to exercise grace*) **you all who are sailing with you. So take heart, men, for I believe** (Greek: *pisteuo*, meaning *to believe* or *have faith in*) **God that it will be exactly as I have been told (27:23-25). Paul** didn't lose any time communicating the gospel.

Take note of what **Paul** said: **I believe God. He** didn't say: **I believe** *in* **God.** Every demon in hell agrees with the existence of **God**. **Paul** declared **his** total confidence in **God's** promise. **Paul believed God** when there was nothing else to **believe**. **He** couldn't believe the sailors, **the ship**, the sails, the wind, the centurion, human ingenuity or anything else – only **God** and **God** alone. This was not a fair-weather **faith**; **he** believed **God** in the midst of **the storm**, when circumstances were at their worst. **His** terrible situation was real, but **God** was more real to **Paul** than the dreadful circumstances.[620]

The salvation from **the storm** was due to the providence of **God** and **His** preservation of **the apostle** for the witness **before Caesar**. **Paul**, in effect, **served** as **the salvation** of **the** other **273 men** on board. **His service** (Greek: *latreuo*) of **God** indicates **his** own faithfulness to **the Protector**, and on that basis of **he** called upon **his listeners** for **courage** to put **their** own **belief** and **faith** in **his God**.[621] This also marks a dramatic turning point in the account of **the storm**; **it** had reached its fullest fury. Despair had turned to **hope**. The focus was no longer on sinking but **salvation**. Still, **their** rescue was in the future. **Paul** encouraged **them to take heart, but** warned **them, "We must run aground on some** unknown **island** before final deliverance **(27:26).** This prophecy by **Paul** was fulfilled in **27:41**.[622]

The sailors on board with **Paul** took steps to deal with **the storm** that enveloped **their ship**. In **their** actions I see practical behaviors we can also apply in our lives for surviving our personal **storms**. Although the points I am about to make might not apply to a literal ship on an angry **sea**, they will be helpful in **the storms** we encounter when someone close to us exercises poor judgment.

First: Don't pull up the anchor (27:13). The ship's masters were ill advised to attempt to sail, but they decided to do so anyway. **Jesus Christ** is our **anchor behind the veil, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Bc – We Have This Hope as an Anchor for the Soul**). When gentle breezes blow in our lives and all seems calm and peaceful, we often become less attentive to **Him**. We're not as aware of our need for **the One** who secures our lives and holds us steady . . . until **the storms** begin to rage. Don't let a few calm breezes give you a false sense of security in yourself or your surroundings. Stay **anchored** to **Yeshua Messiah** in gentile times also.

Second: Don't give way to the storm (17:15). Peril caused by another person's poor judgment can often cause feelings of immense helplessness. Don't give way to **the storm**. Give way to **the Master** of **the seas**.

Third: Do throw some cargo overboard (27:18). As **the storm** worsened, the crew began to jettison **cargo** to keep the ship afloat. Raging **storms** have ways of identifying some old stuff we're still hanging on to. When we're upset over someone's poor judgment, we have a tendency to drag up memories of other times we've been wronged as well. **Storms** complicate life enough. Ask **God** to simplify and clarify a few things in your life by helping you throw some old **cargo overboard**.

Fourth: Do throw the ship's gear overboard (27:19). After jettisoning **the cargo**, the crew still needed to further lighten the ship. **The gear** on board included ropes, pulleys, spars, masts, and planks. They were man-made provisions needed to master **the storm**. **Storms** are seldom pleasant, but they can serve an important purpose. They help us to see the man-made solutions we're substituting in place of depending on and getting to know **God**.

Fifth: Never give up the ship (27:20). Luke uses the word **we** when identifying those who gave up **hope**. This is a man who wrote one of the gospels! How could **he** lose **hope**? The text reminds us that anyone can lose hope when a **storm** rages. But **the psalmist** offers us a lifesaver in our raging **storms, "Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him"** (**Psalm 62:5 NIV).** The word **hope** in this psalm is the Hebrew word *tikvah*, which literally means *a cord, as an attachment.* The psalmist contrasted the disappointment he often experienced in mankind with the security he found in his faithful **God**. We're all holding on to a rope of some kind for security, but if anyone but **God** is on the other end, we're hanging on by a thread! Hang on to **Christ** for dear life when the waves break harshly against you. **He** will be your security no matter what **the storm** may destroy. Only **He** can keep you from becoming bitter. Only **He** can rebuild what gale-force winds tear apart. **He** is our **blessed hope, our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua (Titus 2:13).**

Sixth: Listen for God to speak (27:24). Listen to **the Master** of **the seas** when **storms** rage. **He** will not be silent. Just when the passengers and crew had lost **hope**, **Paul** stood to testify. **He** told **them, "For this very night, there came to me an angel of God to whom I belong and whom I serve. He** said: **Do not fear, Paul. You must stand before Caesar; and indeed, God has granted [grace] you all who are sailing with you. God** won't send **an angel** from heaven to speak audibly to you, but **He** may send a fellow believer, a neighbor, a messianic rabbi, a pastor, relative, spouse, or a friend. You can also hear **Him** speak through **His** Word anytime you are willing to open the Bible and receive.

Job also suffered for reasons outside of **his** control, in ways we will never experience. **His faith** (Greek: *pisteuo*, meaning *belief* or *trust*) in **God** never wavered, but **Job** had questions. The place in which **God** spoke to **Job** is very applicable to us today. **Job 40:6** tells us that **ADONAI answered Job from the whirlwind. God** will speak to you also – straight to your heart. Sometimes others can make decisions that are devastating to our lives. I cannot promise you everything will be OK. It may be, it may not be. But I promise you based on the

faithfulness of **God** that *you* can be OK. Just don't pull up the anchor. And never let go of the rope.[623]

Lord,** there are times when **terrors** seem to **overtake me like a flood,** when **the storm winds** seem ready **to sweep me away at night (Job 27:20).** But I know that **You** have **made darkness Your hiding place, Your sukkah is all around You – dark waters, thick clouds. You reach down from on high and took hold of me; You drew me out of mighty waters (Psalm 18:12** and **17).