



# Gleanings from Acts 27

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# The Blessings of Shipwreck

*Royce Ellis*

# Incredible Voyage



Sometimes we find our lives tossed about like the ship in Acts 27. We stand in need of undergirding, adjustments and have to cast off excessive weight and baggage that is weighing us down. We may find ourselves wandering to and fro in the waves, with no direction in our lives, in darkness and unsure of outcomes. We pray hardest during those periods and yet it seems in the midst of the storm, our prayers go unanswered.

**Setting the Scene.** You recall from the previous chapters, Paul had been accused of the Jews, tried and found innocent, yet he had previously appealed to Caesar, his right as a Roman born citizen. That was not something that could be withdrawn, so he was placed under guard and sent to Rome. Acts 27 starts with the beginning of that journey.



The details of this voyage are incredible. The physician Luke\* had time to record many of the finer points. He told of the ports, the directions, the landings, the time of year, the seas, the ships' names, the passenger count, the directions of the wind, (and in one case, the name of the wind); the seemingly pointless fact they were aboard a ship with dual rudders; the names of Paul's guard (Julius), the depth of the ocean near where they would break up; the two seas coming together and on and on.

*\*Luke is universally acknowledged as the pen behind the book of Acts, and his journeys with Paul are recorded therein. In Acts 27, he uses the term 'we' and by his detailed descriptions, we know Luke is on the ship.*

Paul perceived that the trip would not be a good idea and that harm could come to the voyage. While not a direct revelation from God, dream, or vision, he had a sense of doom he expressed to those in charge of the journey.

Paul's warnings are not heeded.

*Act 27:10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*

Paul has gained the trust and confidence of his keeper guard and at one point is let off the ship to attend services with friends in Sidon. But unable to convince them of the impending danger, the ship, slow and listless with little guiding wind finally gets underway. From almost stalled at sea to damaging winds, the journey takes a terrifying turn. At one point, Luke records, the ship required much help – *undergirding with lashes and ropes to hold together the hull.*

Paul fate was as unknown as the others, men, resigned to shipwreck and death, until a visit from the angel of the Lord. Let's look at that for a moment. Paul could have been given a "sense" of safety, an intuition like before, or he could have been given a dream – he's had those before – or a vision. Paul's been praying since the departure for a safe journey. We know that by Paul's history and don't have to be told. But now, Paul get's a personal messenger – an angel of the Lord, for reassurance. Why the sense of importance? Paul's the only one who saw the angel – so it's not like it was necessary for the faith and belief of the others.

This wind seems unnatural. I've believe weather is God's revealed will. The Lord causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. We hear of tornadoes destroying entire neighborhoods but sparing one believer in the midst. I've adjusted my thinking on this matter to say that *generally*, weather is the revealed will, but sometimes, the currents that control the patterns of weather are reacting to their environment, and on occasion, Satan can create havoc in weather by disturbing those patterns. Here's the verse that caused me to recant my long standing position on weather:

*Mar 4:39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.*

Perhaps Satan was trying to kill the disciples. I don't think the wind here was from the Lord – because if Jesus rebuked the wind, that would have put Him and his father at cross purposes. Impossible. The next chapter details a legion of demons Christ cast out of the wild Gadarean - perhaps Satan was trying to prevent that confrontation.

Paul calls Satan the prince of the power of the air in Ephesians 2:2, meaning he has a dominion in which he operates. Remember in Daniel where one of Satan's minions is called the prince of the Kingdom of Persia?

*Dan 10:20 Then said he, Knowest thou wherefore I come unto thee? and now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia: and when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come.*

**Back in Acts:** It seems logical to conclude that Satan is working hard to sink this ship. Luke records the tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. That's the natural wind cycle, but the enemy is stirring it up.

## Why are prayers not instantly answered?

### The Angel Arrives Two Weeks Before Actual Deliverance

Even after the angel appeared with good news – the ship continued to be tossed about. God had heard the prayers of Paul and had answered them positively. But, the ship still rolled and was fraught with danger.

At what point do we consider that Paul's prayers for safe voyage were answered?

Paul must appear before Caesar. And the safety of every man is guaranteed by the Lord.

### Sudden Calm?

We would expect after the angel's visit that the seas would calm, the sun would shine and soft steady winds would carry these men to Italy on downy pillows of ease. Yet for a total of 14 days, many under tormenting rains, strong winds and roaring seas, the ship continued to be cast about.

Have you ever prayed and felt your prayer was not answered? The storm just kept coming – but in reality, when you look back, God had probably already resolved your issue – it needed only time for the circumstantial events to fall into place.

In the dark, they know they are nearing land because they are *sounding the depth*. (Acts 27:27-28) A huge lead plummet is let down by rope until it becomes slack and by the spaced knots measure their depth. They find themselves at 120 feet and a few moments later, at 90 feet. Good news and bad news – they are closing on land, but they can't see it in the storm's darkness. And they are approaching shallow water fast.

In response, they cast four anchors out of the stern (or the rear) of the ship to hold them from crashing into the rocks.



## How did they know there were rocks in the dark storm?

**The sounding tool.** – A lead weight dropped into the water with knots in the rope to determine depth aided in their understanding of their position in the dark sea. The lead plummet would be coated in grease or animal fat and lowered. They wanted to see sand on it when it was retrieved. If the tool came back clean, it meant rocks lay between them and the sand and presented great danger.



Men began to lower the smaller boats – hoping to escape the danger and Paul turns to his guard Julius – instead of the to the Master of the Ship and the Commandeer who had the authority and says “*Except these abide in the ship...*”



## Except These Abide in the Ship

Here's a lesson worthy of closer examination. A few verses back Paul says God has guaranteed the safety of all involved. If that's true, what does it matter whether these men get into the boats or not? Luke gives us the exact number of souls on board and he also records not the loss of a single one. Why does Paul care?

A reasonable person could look at this situation and say God has declared that all will be safe, everyone survives, and God's will cannot be overthrown. So does it matter if they abide in the ship or not? We might need some understanding on God's decreed will and God's permissive will. God's statement doesn't always point us to the final result. Here's an example worthy of more study:

## David Seeks Answers from the Lord



*1Sa 23:9 And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.*

*1Sa 23:10 Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake.*

*1Sa 23:11 Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down.*

*1Sa 23:12 Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up.*

David asks two specific questions and the Lord answers them both honestly. Will Saul come down and get me – Yes. Will the people of the city deliver me into the hand of Saul for my certain death? Yes.

## Private Interpretation Leads to Bad Doctrine

We have an enemy in our ranks that takes license with our liberty in Christ. They have taken a doctrine that we love and cherish and have added their own interpretation to it.

*“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” 2Pe 1:20*

Men have taken the doctrine of predestination far beyond the limits of Holy Scripture. They have adopted the term to encompass the Absolute Predestination of all things. The scripture tell us the final destination of all things? They're going to burn up.

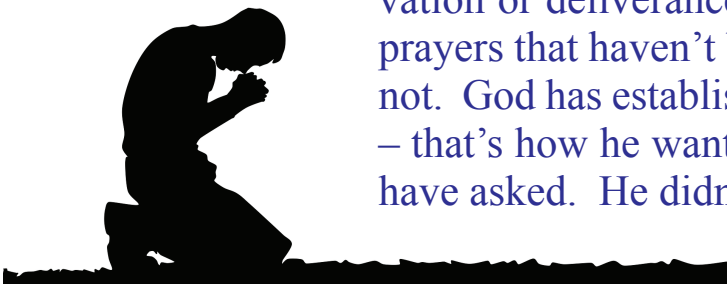
**Pre-destination pertains only to people.** In particular, God's people. It was never intended to be applied to things or events.

## Doctrines Found in the Unsafe Ditches

Here's something to consider regarding salvation and rightly dividing the truth. If you depart from the doctrines of grace, there are only two options for the believer – and they are both into a ditch off either side of the straight and narrow. One ditch is home to fatalism, the absolute predestination of all things which accuses God of being the author of sin. The other is universalism, insisting that God must save each and every one of Adam's race. You will end up forced by your knowledge of the doctrines of grace and the things you have learned to accept one or the other positions and increasing degrees of error.

This verse in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel should also teach us that the absolute predestination of all things is fallacy and heresy. There are *ifs* implied in the verses listed. Will Saul take David when he comes to Keilah? He will. Will the people turn him over if he stays? Yes indeed. Here are some things that could come to pass if David stalls, disobeys, doesn't think, or is careless. **God has not decreed that these things and potential harm come to David.** David is locked by circumstances. God doesn't say stay or go; David has free will and must make a choice respective of his situation. And note, David isn't relying on the promise he's going to be King of Israel someday and staying put looking for God's miraculous hand to intervene.

Something else here: David asked two questions. God answered those two questions. God didn't offer temporal salvation or deliverance. You won't find God answering a lot of prayers that haven't been made. You have not because you ask not. God has established prayer as a method of communication – that's how he wants you to talk to him – daily. David could have asked. He didn't.



## Asked Prayers are Answered More Often than Unasked Prayers.

We make choices, but circumstances often interfere with progress. Let me state that differently. David is our secondary, but necessary subject, and later in life, David is going to see Bathsheba, commit adultery with her, and murder because of her. When he comes to see his sin, he repents, begs for and receives forgiveness, but the consequences of his circumstance override his situation. He lost a child in the matter, but God forgave him. He never committed adultery or murdered again, but he was subject to a long period of war during his reign.

**Reaping and sowing.** This one law of God and nature would help so many lives if God's children understood it. If we realized daily how our decisions impact our lives - *-Gal 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.* -- What a difference it would make in our coming years.



### Meanwhile, back on the ship...

The passengers and sailors are reaping their decision to disregard Paul's warning to stay in a safe harbor. But Paul, who would have taken his own advice, is **reaping the consequences of their actions as well.** Here's the answer to the battle cry of every teenager on the planet: *My choices don't impact anyone else!*

So when God says all these in the ship will be alive at the end – Paul relays that message: *stay in the ship.* We can hear his logic convincing the passengers: “I'm not getting into the boats; you ought to stay out of the boats. God's promise was to me, so I have some authority in the decision process.”



*Act 27:21 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. :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. :25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. :26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.*



## Pre-Determined Safety?

So now our question becomes, “Was the safety of all those on the ship absolutely pre-determined?” No. At any time, one could have ignored Paul’s admonishment to be of good cheer and jumped overboard, but the foreknowledge of God foretold the safety of them all *provided* they followed sound and reasonable steps.

**Stay in the ship.** It’s important. The soldiers under command of Julius cut the smaller boats away, now trusting Paul. They had no evidence of Paul’s sure knowledge of safety, but did recall his sense of foreboding that it was a bad idea to leave Fair Harbor, and now, his word an angel had told him of their fate. Suddenly, Paul is one to be trusted above the experienced sailors.

**Stay in the ship.** We hear that all the time as an analogy about salvation being temporal, and not always eternal in scripture. We say the church is a type of ship and we enjoy a salvation by staying in the ship. It’s a good lesson – but now let’s examine the intended meaning of this verse for what it actually says:

*Act 27:30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, :31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.*



## Who is Saved in Abiding in the Ship? Not Who You Think...

Paul doesn't say except we abide in the ship, we can't be saved. He says *except THESE abide in the ship, YE cannot be saved*. He's talking to the Centurion and the soldiers. He knows that if the sailors depart (and it's clear from the verse before they are trying to sneak off the ship) the Centurion is likely to lose charge of his command and perhaps some of his prisoners as these boats being lowered begin to fill up with deserters. And Paul realized the shipmen, wanting off this now barely floating disaster, would be needed to get the crippled ship ashore.



## The Final Push to Land and Safety

*Act 27:40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.*

I'm a stickler for words in scripture so I want to look at this carefully. Having eaten their last meal at sea and discarded the wheat overboard, it sounds as if the goal is to make the ship as light as possible. A lighter ship has a better chance of skipping the rocks and being carried to shore where it will break apart on a sandbar. I don't think they are pulling these heavy anchors back onto the ship, because they had previously dumped as much weight as they could, but are taking in the slack so they could cut them loose. This ship is beyond saving. You'll recall in verse 17 they had to lash or undergird the ship – tying ropes and nets around the hull to hold it together. This is no longer a seaworthy vessel.



*Act 27:37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.*

*Act 27:38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.*

*Act 27:39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.*

*Act 27:40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.*

*Act 27:41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.*

*Act 27:42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.*

*Act 27:43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:*

*Act 27:44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.*

**But the centurion, willing to save Paul...** *Pro 18:24 A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.*

So paraphrasing to get the clear sense of what's taking place: They ate what they could for the daunting task ahead, then lightened the ship by tossing the wheat overboard. At daylight, they cut the four anchors, committed themselves to the sea, loosened the bands on the rudders, hoisted the main sail and headed for land, attempting to ground the ship in a sandbar.

Even their final landing was harsh.

By these means, did all 276 survive alive and end up on Malta.

In all of Europe, to this day, the highest concentration of Christians exists on the island of Malta. Nearly 98 percent of all on the island classify themselves as Christians. And they will tell you there is a bay there; they call the Bay of Saint Paul, where the shipwreck took place.



But it's probably not the one named after Paul, but rather one about 5 miles away, in the Bay of Saint Thomas, where the biblical description fits better, and where, in the 1960's, divers looking for something else, brought up 4 anchors from a depth of 90 feet, and dated them back to Roman times.

They exist today in the museum on the island.



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