

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

ACTS 27:9-28:31

Snorkeling and smorgasbords, deck chairs and dance floors, swimming pools and shopping sprees - a cruise is suppose to be great fun. Did you know that the year before the Pandemic, 2019, 30 million people, **a record number**, took their vacation on a cruise ship?

And now that restrictions are being lifted, people are back at it - there's a pent-up demand to take a cruise.

Apparently, the old cliché, "**Cruises are for the overfed and almost dead**" is no longer the case. Lots of vacationers are cruising... And one of the most popular destinations has always been the Mediterranean. A "*Mediterranean Cruise*" sounds particularly glamorous.

Yet after today's study you might have a different opinion! In Acts 27 Paul sets sail on a Mediterranean *Cruise* - but the passengers are singing the *blues*!

At the outset of his ministry God told Paul he would preach to "**gentiles and kings**" - and the Emperor Nero was both. It was inevitable that *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles* would witness to *Nero, ruler of the Gentiles*.

But how do you arrange a meeting between an obscure rabbi like Paul, and the head of the empire? Paul was unable to even afford passage to Rome.

But again God's providence worked to accomplish His purposes. When the Apostle Paul got tired of being a political football, he appealed his case to the Caesar.

As a Roman citizen *Paul had that right* - and the Roman governor *Festus had to foot the bill*. In Acts 27 Paul embarks on an all-expenses-paid Mediterranean Cruise, courtesy of the Caesar Nero's own Treasury!

Last week, we covered the first eight verses. Paul boarded a ship with a few friends and a Roman centurion escort. He and Julius made it to Myra on the Turkish coast where they caught a long-hauler sailing for Italy. The cargo ship made it to the island of Crete.

They docked in the port of Fair Havens on the southern coast. And we pick up the story in verse 9, "Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over..."

After mid-September Mediterranean sailing was dangerous. After mid-November it was impossible. "*The fast*" to which Luke refers was Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement. That means it's mid-to-late October.

"Paul advised them, saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives." Paul wasn't a sailor by trade, but he was a seasoned traveler. This wasn't his first cruise. In 2 Corinthians 11, when he lists his trials, he writes, "Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep..." The guy had experienced his share of *nautical nightmares*.

Paul has no desire to spend another night as shark bait. Sergeant Julius should've listened to Paul...

But verse 11, “Nevertheless the centurion was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship than by the things spoken by Paul.” Once again, “*siding with the experts*” gets people into trouble.

“And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.” It wasn’t just the harbor...

The sailors didn't want to be stuck in Fair Havens for the whole winter. Fair Havens was a tiny village, with nothing to do. Whereas in Phoenix *you could take in a Suns game!* There was nightlife - bars, revelry, women. *Lust* tainted their *logic*. They weren’t thinking rationally.

The crew members take a vote and the majority said, “**sail for Phoenix.**” Always be leery of the majority. *God’s will* often conflicts with the *majority opinion*. At times following God requires us to go against the grain.

Verse 13, “When the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their desire, putting out to sea, they sailed close by Crete.” Notice the phrase, “*the south wind blew softly*” - but the easy path isn’t always God’s path. We often think just because a door swings opens, or our circumstances become more compliant, God must be in it - not necessarily. Proverbs 14:12 tells us, “**There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.**”

Here we learn there’re **four ways we can miss out on God’s will...** First, **get impatient.** We’ve got to get to

Phoenix. Let's push it... **Second, take a vote.** Side with the majority instead of seek the Lord... **Third, test the wind.** Let your circumstances instead of principles dictate your decisions. Opt for the path of least resistance... And fourth, **let your lusts take over.** The sailors wanted to make Phoenix for the wrong reasons.

This is what causes us to miss out on God's will.

That's why to stay in the center of His will **be patient**, be willing to wait... **rely on God's wisdom** even if it's unpopular with your friends... **base your decisions on conviction** not on what's convenient... And **walk in the Spirit**, seek satisfaction from God...

Verse 14, **"But not long after, a tempestuous head wind arose, called Euroclydon..."** We get our English word **"typhoon"** from the Greek word translated **"tempestuous."** The sailors named these winds after the direction of their origin. **"Euroclydon"** means **"the northeasterner."** This storm had arose suddenly...

"So when the ship was caught, and could not head into the wind, we let her drive." Phoenix was a mere 45 miles up the coast of Crete. But the winds shifted. Soft southern winds turn into a violent northeasterner.

Huge swells were slamming against the wooden hull.

If they fought the storm and held course the boat would break apart. Their only option was to sail with the wind - stop resisting and try to ride out the storm.

Verse 16, **"And running under the shelter of an island called Clauda, we secured the skiff with difficulty."** Up to this point

they were dragging a lifeboat. They didn't want to lose the dinghy, so they tied it to the main ship.

“When they had taken it on board, they used cables to undergird the ship...” As the waves slapped against the hull they could hear the timbers creak and crack. They strung ropes under the boat in hopes of stabilizing its frame and keeping it from breaking apart.

“And fearing lest they should run aground on the Syrtis Sands, they struck sail and so were driven.”

The more they fought the northeastern winds the further south they were pushed. The sailors feared “*the Syrtis Sands*” - quick sands off the coast of North Africa. The area was known as, “*The Ships Graveyard*” In riding out the storm the seaman lowered the ship's sails and drifted, becoming vulnerable to the sands.

Verse 18, “And because we were exceedingly tempest-tossed, the next day they lightened the ship. On the third day we threw the ship's tackle overboard with our own hands.” The more weight the ship carried the more momentum in the wrong direction it created, so they started ditching cargo to lighten their load.

“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.”

This was before the age of electronic navigation or even a compass. Ancient mariners plotted their course by the stars. But it had been weeks since they'd seen a break in the clouds. They had no clue as to where they were, or how far

they'd drifted. These salty seaman were terrified and hopeless. The experts had given up.

Everyone had given up **except Paul**, verse 21, “But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss.” Paul jumps out on deck and shouts, “Hey, I told you so!” *Just what everybody likes to hear!*

I'm sure they would've thrown him overboard if it wasn't for what he said next... “And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve.”

And I love this terminology! “*The God to whom I belong...*” Be confident of where you belong, and you can't be bullied or become someone else's pawn.

The angel told Paul, “saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Evidently, Paul had asked God to save the passengers and crew.

Paul concludes, “Therefore 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.”

In a crisis, real leadership rises to the surface. Everyone else had *given up*, but Paul *steps up!* He issues the challenge, “*Take heart... for I believe God...*”

Verse 27, “Now when the fourteenth night had come, as we were driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea...”

They had been lost at sea for two weeks!

Today, the Adriatic Sea speaks of the ocean between Italy and Eastern Europe. In Paul's day, it referred to much more. It included the eastern Mediterranean.

And "about midnight the sailors sensed that they were drawing near some land." *Could it be they heard the ocean breakers slapping against the shoreline?*

"And they took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and when they had gone a little farther, they took soundings again and found it to be fifteen fathoms." These "soundings" were lead anchors they were dropping and timing to see how long it took them to hit bottom. They knew the water was shallowing out.

A fathom equals six feet. Here they go from 120 feet of ocean to 90 feet of ocean in short order. They're moving toward a rocky shore at a pretty fast clip.

Verse 29, "Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for day to come." This was a terrifying. It's pitch black. No one can see. It's like driving with no headlights. You're know you're going to crash, but you don't know when, so in desperation the sailors drop four anchors off the stern, and pray for the sunrise!

Verse 30, "And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the

ship, you cannot be saved.” You had to stay put to be saved.

Only those who stayed onboard survived. Jump ship, try to save yourself, and you ended up drowning...

This is like our salvation. Only those who remain “in Christ,” who stay onboard and keep believing. Only the people who keep on trusting in Jesus end up saved. Fail to abide - jump ship - *and you’ll drown.*

“Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the skiff and let it fall off. And as day was about to dawn, Paul implored them all to take food, saying, “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.” The crew will burn some serious calories fighting the surf. They received God’s *promise*, now they need some *protein*.

“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.”

Notice, practically speaking the crew now has a new captain. *Prisoner Paul* has become *Captain Paul*.

“And in all we were 276 persons on the ship. So when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship and threw out the wheat into the sea.” They were in for a rough landing, so they threw the cargo overboard.

“When it was day, they did not recognize the land; but they observed a bay with a beach, onto which they planned to run the ship if possible.” The plan was to gain a head of steam and run the ship on to the beach.

“And they let go the anchors and left them in the sea, meanwhile loosing the rudder ropes; and they hoisted the mainsail to the wind and made for shore.

But striking a place where two seas met (in other words, a sandbar), they ran the ship aground; and the prow (which was the point of the bow) stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves.” The bow stuck into the sand, while the surf demolished the rest of the ship.

Verse 42, “And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape.” In Roman law if a prisoner escaped, the soldier guarding him completed his sentence. Thus, these soldiers were going to kill the prisoners to save their skin. “But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose...” Julius rescued Paul.

“And (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.”

Just as God promised Paul, everyone who stayed with the ship made it safely to shore. And ironically, it was the ship’s broken boards and timbers, that acted as life rafts to enable the crew to make it to the shore...

And this is why it's always crucial to stay with the boat. Don't jump ship. Don't give up on God, or bail out on His will. Stay exactly where God has called you! **The safest place to be is in the center of God's will.**

Even if it's a turbulent situation - even if a relationship is breaking apart - even if your life seems to be drowning - **stay in the will of God!** And it's the lessons you learn - even the pain you endure - that becomes the thing that saves you from future troubles.

It's the lessons learned and the humility gained from our shattered dreams that save us to start over.

Chapter 28, **“Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta.”** The island of Malta is 58 miles south of Sicily. Recall their original destination was the Cretan port of Phoenix - 45 miles west of Fair Havens. This was a trip that should've taken less than a day. Instead they were at sea two weeks and traveled 645 miles. **Talk about a detour!**

And this is what happens when we follow the wrong voices. Satan's plan for us is always presented as a shortcut, but it ends up a long, hard, costly voyage.

Once a professional race car driver was hired to drive a 15 block section of Colorado Springs. The driver was careful to observe all the speed limits and traffic laws. His time was 9 minutes, 35.1 seconds.

After the driver had finished, he was allowed to drive the same 15 block course again, but this time as fast and reckless as possible. With police permission he drove at

illegal speeds and broke 52 traffic violations. Yet the results were surprising, the professional racer could shave only 3.9 seconds off his previous time.

We assume laws are in place to slow us down. But in reality we lose very little time doing the right thing. Even the few seconds you lose are worth it when you consider the safety and protection of obedience.

If you think God's rules are getting in your way, or slowing you down, or cramping your style - you're deceived. In the long run God's way makes life easier, not harder. *Just ask the crew members on Paul's ship!*

“And 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.”

In mid-October night-time temps on Malta are in the low 50s, and that doesn't include the ocean breeze. It gets chilly. It was an act of hospitality that the islanders welcomed the water-soaked survivors with a roaring fire. *But notice who's gathering firewood? Verse 3, “But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks...”*

The Apostle Paul was a servant first. The author of 14 of the 27 NT books was not above collecting sticks!

“And (when he) laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand.”

When a poisonous viper hibernates the snake's body stiffens. Paul picked up the snake inadvertently in a pile of sticks. But when the snake got close to the fire, it woke up, and the viper took a bite out of Paul.

The venom was obviously deadly. Thus, the locals expected Paul to keel over. We're told in verse 4, "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." The Maltese worshipped a goddess named "Justice." Here they assume she's finally caught up to Paul, and rewarded him with the fate he'd escaped from the sea, but deserved all along.

"But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm." I love what Paul does with the poisonous viper - *he just shakes it off!... shakes it off!*

If this had happened to one of us a tourniquet would've been applied, and we would've been rushed to the hospital. You would've expected Julius to act like John Wayne pull out his knife, cut across the bite marks, and suck out the venom. *Show some true grit!*

But Paul just shakes the snake off into the fire and carries on! Rather than focus on the wound, he just shakes off the cause of it and carries on serving.

And this is a huge lesson for anyone who serves the Lord. *You're giving to others in practical ways - when out of nowhere the old serpent, Satan, slithers along and sinks his poisoned fangs into your arm. Often our attempts to do good can come back to bite us!*

It's ironic, that we can get hurt even in the midst of serving the Lord. It's a servant's occupational hazard.

And understand why Satan attacks... If he can get you to focus on yourself - **your hurt, your wound** - he can distract your service. This is why the best way to handle a hurt is to just shake it off. If you take the time to nurse it, or fixate on it, you play into Satan's hands.

Just shake it off and keep serving. God protected Paul and God will protect you. The bite won't be as bad as you think. **God will neutralize the poison if you refuse to pamper the pain.** Just keep on serving Him!

“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.”

Here's a legitimate fulfillment of Mark 16:17-18.

Jesus had predicted, "These signs will follow those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them." And notice the line, *“They will take up serpents; and it will by no means hurt them.”*

We've all heard about snake handlers in Appalachia who literally pick up poisonous snakes to test the veracity of this verse. But rather than test God's faithfulness - or their faith - they actually test God's patience. Such acts take this verse out of context.

I don't believe, God ever intended for believers to go out looking for cotton-mouths and copperheads.

God knew as the Church marched into the remotest parts of the world to fulfill the Great Commission, snakes and other dangers would be lurking. Here, God is promising missionaries supernatural protection.

David Brainerd was a missionary to the Delaware Indians - who made contact with him, long before he made contact with them. One day a group of warriors slipped up quietly to Brainerd's tent. Armed with knives and tomahawks their mission was to kill the stranger.

But when they peered into the tent they were stunned by what they saw. David Brainerd was on his knees in prayer, and just behind him was a poisonous rattlesnake coiled and ready to strike. The missionary was oblivious to the snake. And as he continued praying, the snake lowered its head and slithered off.

The Indians were so amazed they returned to camp with news of the miracle they had witnessed.

When Brainerd and the Indians finally made contact he received a warm welcome. He never understood why he was so well received until years later he was told about what the warriors had seen in his tent. It had convinced them in advance he was God's messenger.

Well here, when the men from Malta witness Paul's encounter with the viper, they go even further with their conclusions. They assume Paul must be divine - a god.

And just as he did earlier in Lystra, Paul quickly set the record straight. He was nothing divine. He used the occasion to witness of the truth and grace of Jesus.

Verse 7, “In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days.” Remember, there were 276 passengers and crew on the ship, and not a single person lost their life. Here Publius feeds and entertains the survivors for three full days. He must’ve been a very wealthy man.

“And it happened that the father of Publius 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.”

On the surface this ordeal at sea had been a detour, but God turned it into a vital stop on Paul’s itinerary. The Gospel came to Malta as a result of a *storm* and a *shipwreck*. And whenever you get knocked off course, remember it could be God rerouting you for His glory.

Verse 11, “After three months we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.” Ancient ships were identified by carvings in the bow.

In Greek mythology the “*Twin Brothers*” were the two sons of Jupiter: Castor and Pollox. They protected distressed sailors. But Paul and his crew knew better.

They had learned firsthand it only takes one Son to save drowning sailors - God's only Son, Jesus Christ!

“And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled round and reached Rhegium. And after one day the south wind blew; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, and were invited to stay with them seven days. And so we went toward Rome.” From Malta to Syracuse was 80 miles - from Syracuse to Rhegium was 70 miles - from Rhegium to Puteoli, the port of Naples, was 180 miles.

And it's interesting, that Paul found Christians in the small Italian city of Puteoli. It just goes to prove how fast the Gospel was spreading across the empire.

The ship docked in Puteoli, and Paul traveled overland the remaining 125 miles along the famous Appian Way - the road from the coast to Rome... And it was on this road that a delegation of Roman Christians came out to welcome their distinguished guest.

“And from there, 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.” The Romans had not only heard of Paul, but they received a letter from him - a brilliant theological treatise. We'll study it next, Paul's letter to the Romans.

Verse 16, “Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.” Paul was spared the dungeon, and put under house arrest. He was allowed visitors and provisions. His only restriction was a 24 hour guard. That meant every six hours a

new soldier replaced the former. There were four shifts per day.

This helps us understand Philippians 1:12. Paul writes of his internment in Rome, "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... that my chains are in Christ." *Guess, what Paul talked about with the guards each time they swapped shifts?*

He preached the Gospel. Imagine, being chained to the Apostle Paul for six hours a day. Either you'd *got saved* or *went crazy*. You definitely heard the truth. Paul turned an inconvenience into an opportunity.

I love how Paul signs off to the Philippians. In 4:22 he says, "All the saints greet you, but especially those who are of Caesar's household." Apparently, many of the Emperor's own guard were led to Christ by Paul!

"And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together." This was always his strategy. He preached to Jews first, then to Gentiles.

"So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, 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, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation.

For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” Then they said to him, “We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere.”

There were probably letters sent by the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem that falsely accused Paul, but God made sure they were lost in the shipwreck. God wanted the Jews in Rome to hear the Gospel with an open mind.

Verse 23, “So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.” *Don't you wish we had the CD!* All day long, from morning to evening, Paul opens the Scripture and showed how the OT prophesied of Jesus the Messiah.

“And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, ‘*Go to this people and say:..*’” And Paul quotes Isaiah 6:9-10...

“Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes

and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.” The Hebrew prophet Isaiah had bemoaned the hard-heartedness of his people. And what was true of the Jews then: was true now.

But this exposure of their stubbornness, wasn't what broke up the party. What the Jews couldn't stomach was his words in verse 28, *“Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!”* And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.” The Jews were upset over God's willingness to offer salvation to Gentiles. The Jews in Rome couldn't accept that God's love was big enough for all people! **His grace is for every race.**

“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and 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.” And not only did he confidently preach the Gospel. During those two years, Paul wrote four letters. Today, we call them *the prison epistles* - **Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.**

Eventually Paul was tried before Nero and released. We don't have the transcript of the trial, but you know Paul shared the Gospel. Nero's rejection of Paul's message could've been the turning point in his life.

It was about that time in history that Nero went nuts. The emperor went mad. Nero became vicious and angry - *and guess how he vented his frustrations?*

He started killing Christians. He threw believers to the lions. He dipped them in wax and burned them as candles to light his lewd parties. When fire ravaged the capitol city, Nero blamed the disaster on the Christians. As legend has it, Nero fiddled while Rome burned.

During the five years following Paul's release he continued to preach the Gospel, and wrote letters to Titus and Timothy. It's possibly he traveled to Spain.

Eventually, Paul was re-arrested by Nero, and thrown into Rome's maritime dungeon. It was there he wrote his second and final letter to Timothy. Tradition tells us in 67 AD Paul was beheaded for Jesus' sake.

Through the centuries people have criticized Luke for ending the life of Paul so abruptly. But Luke wasn't writing, a "**Life and Times of Paul.**" The theme of Acts is the spread of the Gospel. It began on the edge of the empire in a far-away province called Judea. And in less than 30 years it had traveled all the way to the capitol.

At the heart of the empire, under the Caesar's own roof, Christianity's chief spokesman, had spread the good news of Jesus to Rome's citizens and officials.

Remember, just before He ascended, Jesus told His disciples, "**You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you: and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**" By Acts 28 the first Christians had fulfilled that mission. But the command is renewable. It's been said,

"Every generation of Christians is responsible for their own generation of heathen."

Thus, the question should be asked, are *we taking the Gospel to our world? Our friends, our neighbors, even to the ends our earth.* And like the first Christians we won't get far without the power of the Holy Spirit.

In a sense the book of Acts doesn't end in Chapter 28. It's still being written today... *by you and by me!*