LESSON 26: PAUL IN PRISON, PART 5 (ACTS 27:1-44)

After being a prisoner in Caesarea and presenting his defense before Governor Felix and Governor Festus, Paul appealed to Caesar. King Agrippa helped Governor Festus know how to address the emperor concerning the case. Now, Paul would be sent to Rome.

PAUL IS SENT AWAY TO ROME (ACTS 27:1-8)

27:1-5. Arrangements had been made, and Paul began his trip to stand before Caesar in Rome. Notice that Luke and Aristarchus were with him (perhaps paying to board the ships). Other prisoners were also making the trip (e.g. to appeal to Caesar or be executed before an audience). A centurion named Julius was in charge. Note that there is great nautical accuracy that is displayed throughout the record of this voyage. First, they boarded a ship from Adramyttium (a coastal city in Mysia, in northeast Asia) that was likely heading to its home port. They traveled on this ship to Sidon (70 miles north of Caesarea). There, the centurion treated Paul with kindness and allowed him to go to his friends and be cared for by them. From there, they sailed past the island of Cyprus (in the Mediterranean Sea), using it as a shelter from the wind. They sailed through the open sea and along the coasts of Cilicia and Pamphylia until arriving at Myra (a chief port city) in Lycia (a province south of Asia Minor).

27:6-8. They then found a ship from Alexandria (Egypt, carrying wheat; v. 38) that was heading to Italy and arranged to board it. The trip at this time of the year (v. 9) was slow and difficult due to strong northwesterly winds. They traveled toward Cnidus (southwestern tip of Asia, about 170 miles from Myra). Due to the wind, they had to reroute their trip and travel south to use the island of Crete as a shelter, approaching the island off Salmone (a cape on the eastern side of Crete). They then sailed along the south side of the island with great difficulty until they reached the harbor at Fair Havens near Lasea (about halfway on the island).

PAUL'S WARNING (ACTS 27:9-12)

27:9-12. It had already been a long and difficult journey. The Day of Atonement (end of September or early October) had passed, indicating it was now a difficult time for sailing the Mediterranean. Paul advised and warned that continuing the voyage would result in great loss of the cargo, the ship, and their lives. Regardless, the commander took the advice of those in charge of the ship, and they pressed on. Since the harbor at Fair Havens was exposed to the Sea, it was unsuitable to spend the winter there. Perhaps they even put it to a vote of those onboard (v. 21), and it was determined they would try to make it to the harbor at Phoenix on the western side of Crete for winter (that would provide shelter from the weather).

TROUBLE AT SEA (ACTS 27:13-38)

27:13-20. As a gentle south wind blew, they believed they had found the right opportunity and sailed along Crete toward Phoenix. However, in a short time, a fierce wind out of the northeast (called the "Euraquilo") caught the ship, and they were unable to direct the ship in that way. Rather than fight the wind to their destruction, they let the wind drive the ship (in a southwesterly direction, away from their destination). They were driven about 23 miles southwest to the small island of Cauda. As they used the island as a shelter from the wind, they took the skiff (a small boat usually towed behind a larger vessel) onboard with great difficulty so it would not be destroyed. Those onboard also used this opportunity to undergird the ship with cables to reinforce it and give it greater protection. They were afraid of being taken to the Syrtis (a dangerous area north of Africa that sailors avoided) and took additional measures (perhaps to slow their drifting). The following days (likely now passed the shelter of Cauda), they tried to lighten the ship by throwing the cargo (except the grain, v. 38) and equipment overboard. Neither the sun nor the stars were visible for days, and the storm continued. Hope was vanishing.

27:21-26. Those onboard had not eaten for a long time (perhaps due to despair, anxiety, shortage of food, seasickness, etc.). Paul, however, stood up and spoke to them. He said that if they followed his advice and stayed in Crete (vv. 9-12), they would not be in this predicament to suffer the damage and loss they had experienced. Yet, he encouraged them by saying an angel of the God he belonged to and served stood by him the previous night and revealed they would lose the ship, but no lives! It was revealed that it was necessary for Paul to appear before Caesar, and he should not be afraid (Acts 23:11). But, God also graciously gave Paul (perhaps in response to his prayers) all those onboard to be saved (physically). Paul then urged them all to have courage because he believed it would go the way God said! However, they

would still suffer great difficulty (i.e., the ship would run aground).

27:27-32. On the 14th night since the storm began, they were drifting and being driven by the wind in the Adriatic Sea (encompassing the central part of the Mediterranean Sea). About midnight, the sailors thought they were getting closer to land and took soundings to measure the depth of the water. The soundings went from about 120 feet deep to 90 feet deep. Afraid of running aground, they dropped four anchors from the back of the ship and prayed for daylight to come. Some of the sailors also tried to escape using the skiff. But Paul informed the centurion that the others would not be saved if they escaped, and the soldiers cut the ropes of the skiff and let it fall away.

27:33-38. It had been 14 days since they had eaten a meal. Paul encouraged them shortly before daylight to eat, as they would need their strength. Still, Paul assured them they would all survive. After this, Paul gave thanks to God for the food in their presence and ate. The others (all 276 onboard) were encouraged and ate. After eating, they lightened the ship (so it would ride higher in shallow water) further by even throwing the grain overboard.

PAUL IS SHIPWRECKED (ACTS 27:39-44)

27:39-44. When daylight came, they spotted land with a bay and a beach (though they did not recognize it) and tried to run the ship aground. They cut anchors, loosed the ropes of the rudders so it could be steered, and raised the sail so the ship could head for the beach. However, they struck a sandbar (or a place where two seas meet) and the ship did not make it to shore. The ship was stuck and getting torn apart by the waves. The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners so they could not escape. However, the centurion kept this from happening because he wanted to save Paul. Instead, he ordered that those who could swim jump overboard and get to land. The rest were to use the planks and debris from the ship to float on. Thus, everyone made it safely to shore.

CONCLUSION

God promised that Paul and the others would be safe, but had not promised it would be easy. Now, God had providentially driven the ship to this island and preserved the lives of everyone on board. Still, Paul had not yet arrived in Rome, and the journey was not complete.

DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONS

What arrangements were made for Paul to be taken to Rome?

What were the sailing conditions like?

What did Paul warn about continuing their journey in Crete?

How did people respond to Paul's advice?

What trouble did Paul and the others experience at sea?

How did Paul demonstrate faith amid shipwreck?

What ultimately happened to the ship, the cargo, and the people on board?

How did God provide for Paul and those on board?

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