

Exploring Acts

The Continuing Ministry of Jesus Christ Through the Holy Spirit

Lesson 21

Day One: The Sovereignty of God

“For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us” (2 Corinthians 1:20). Jesus strengthened Paul on the night He stood with him in prison with the promise that Paul would bear witness for Him at Rome (Acts 23:11). The lesson for the student: when God makes a promise, it is backed up by His own sovereignty and faithfulness!

In Acts 27, Luke captures the imagination of his readers while at the same time revealing to them how God can work through the life of one man to bring deliverance to many. Remember, Luke wrote to Theophilus, a Greek, and the Greeks loved the Mediterranean Sea. They reveled in stories contained in their ancient literature of adventurous sea voyages full of danger, drama, and desperation. Here Luke writes an eyewitness account of one such voyage—this time ending in deliverance with Paul as the hero. This time it would be Paul himself who would bring encouragement and hope to an entire ship’s register of men, assuring them that God would not abandon them in their hour of need.

Read Acts 27:1–44.

Open your Bible and lesson each day by beginning with a word of prayer. Come to your time of study expectant to receive something from the Lord.

Memory verse: Philippians 1:6 Write out the verse; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

... Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

The opening verses of Acts 27 reveal that Luke accompanied Paul across the Mediterranean, while the expedition was commanded by Julius, a centurion of the Italian Regiment. They sailed from Adramyttian, a port located on the northwest region of modern Turkey considered a part of Asia.

1. Who else accompanied them? v. 2
 - a. What else do we know about this man, who was a part of the missionary team? See Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24.
2. The word *kindly* (v. 3) is the one from which we derive the word philanthropy. What did Julius allow Paul to do once they had reached their first stop in Sidon?

From there weather conditions forced them to sail closer to shore so they did not have to sail directly into the fierce winds. The trip to Myra covered some four hundred miles and could have taken up to fifteen days to complete. There Julius found a Roman ship bound for Italy and put his party on board. But the ship was no match for the weather and with great difficulty it reached Fair Havens. Up to this point, Luke gave great geographical detail; now he mentions the time reference of the “Fast,” referring to the Day of Atonement sometime toward the end of September or beginning of October; making it a challenge to cross the open sea and arrive at their final destination before winter.

3. What did Paul, a seasoned traveler, perceive by this point in the journey? Vv. 9–10
4. Choosing to pass on Paul’s advice, what was the consensus of majority, which included the centurion Julius and the owner of the ship who was also onboard? Vv. 11–12

The helmsman (pilot) of the ship along with the owner, opted to move on because the harbor where they were anchored would not be suitable to protect them from the strong northeast winds. Take a moment to look at your map to see where the vessel was and the distance they would need to travel to reach Phoenix. Had things gone as planned, the gentle south wind would have eased them toward the shore of Crete to Phoenix, where they could have wintered. But before they knew it, a *northeaster*—a wind of hurricane proportions came down upon them, causing conditions to change very drastically.

5. Personal: Recall a time when everything seemed to be smooth sailing and suddenly conditions worsened, forcing an immediate decision. Where did you turn; on whom did you rely for direction? What did you learn?

Day Two:

In the Tempest

Read Acts 27:13–26 for review.

It was not long before the “soft wind” they needed became the “strong wind” they feared. The word *tempestuous* (v. 14) gives us the word “typhoon.” The sailors referred to it as a Euroclydon. As the storm grew more fierce, the crew onboard did all they could to keep the ship afloat.

1. Using Vv. 15–20, briefly describe some of the measures the crew took for three days to save the ship.

2. When and why did they give up hope? v. 20

3. Paul stood in the midst of them to offer words of encouragement. What did he say? Vv. 21–22

4. How did Paul speak of his relationship with God and what God promised him? Vv. 23–24

Circumstances were bad, and Paul admonished the centurion, the helmsman and the owner of the vessel for ignoring his warning. They would all soon realize that God had spared all their lives for Paul’s sake.

5. Think about it: Initially these men had looked to favorable circumstances to govern their decisions. As a Christian, how could this kind of thinking cause you a similar shipwreck?

6. Ultimately, it was not Paul’s warning but God’s Word that they would listen to. According to 2 Corinthians 5:7, what should we use as our compass in life? Explain why you think this truth is necessary in guiding the believer?

Day Three:

Stay in the Boat!

Read Acts 27:27–44 for review.

At midnight on the fourteenth day these battered sailors sensed that land was near. They remembered Paul's words about running aground and, checking the waters depth, dropped four anchors and prayed for daylight to come (Vv. 26–29).

1. In an effort to save themselves, recap how the sailors attempted an escape.

2. When Paul perceived what was happening how did he take the leadership role? What did he say? v. 31
 - a. What action did he encourage them all to take? Vv. 33–34

Paul had already told the men about his God, now in the midst of this mostly pagan group, he audibly offered up a prayer of thanksgiving as well as deliverance to the sovereign Lord of all Creation. The sailors may not have understood the significance of that prayer but it reminded Paul and the believers onboard that in the breaking of bread and giving thanks, Jesus is present. Luke specifically mentions that all two hundred seventy-six men on board ate food and were *all* encouraged. And when once they all had eaten, they lightened the load of the ship by throwing out the remaining grain into the sea. When daylight broke they cast off the anchors and ran the ship aground but the violence of the waves continued to break the ship apart.

3. There remained yet one more threat to Paul's life; what was it? How did the centurion intervene? What was the final outcome of the story?

Luke makes the point that no matter what difficulties we may face in life, God's sovereignty governs every detail! The safe deliverance of all the men came about only by listening to God's Word and obeying His directions through His servant Paul. The apostle throughout the crisis presented the example of abiding, remaining, knowing that his Lord was with him.

Deeper Discoveries ~

Whatever kind of storm life may present you—and there will be many—our boats are small and the turbulence of our circumstances will become like that Mediterranean Sea: violent at times, dark and dangerous. Remember that it is safer to stay in the boat with Jesus than attempt to weather the storm without Him! Learn to practice the presence of Jesus in your storm. Spend some time with Isaiah 30:15 (ESV). “For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, ‘In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’ But you were unwilling.” Consider what lessons it reveals and how you can apply it.

In returning and rest you shall be saved _____

In quietness and in trust shall be your strength _____

But you were unwilling _____

How can you apply its truth today?

Day Four: God's Word: Anchors in the Storms of Life

At times our journey toward home—our eternal home—will be fraught with events and expected circumstances that will disappoint us and cause us to face obstacles from which we, like Paul, are unable to free ourselves. We are promised the certainty of hardship and peril, but also the assurance of a safe refuge in God and reaching the shore. Be prepared, dear believer, for whatever the voyage will bring; let nothing shake your faith, for even the roughest passage will have a blessed end.

The journey for Paul and everyone onboard the ship had not progressed far before they faced a drastic change in the weather—they were completely at the mercy of the storm. Was the crew concerned about the cargo? No, in fact they repeatedly lightened the load to save the ship. Priorities change as we realize the need to abandon what is unnecessary in order to save what is precious—life!

1. When facing crisis situations, what should we believers be willing to throw overboard to lighten the load? What should we steadfastly keep as our main focus?

a. Philippians 3:8 _____

b. Hebrews 12:1–2a _____

You will face times when you incur loss; but as you do, remember the Lord has promised never to leave you nor forsake you. If you are willing to give up what you cannot keep—the things of this world, then you will gain what you cannot lose—your salvation.

2. Personal: If you seem to be holding onto the broken pieces of your life right now, there are anchors in the Word of God for you to hold fast—meaning hang onto firmly, tightly. Note them below . . .

a. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 _____

b. Titus 1:9 _____

c. Hebrews 4:14–16 _____

d. Hebrews 3:6 _____

3. Personal: The sureness of your faith depends on the strength of your anchor. *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast . . .* (Hebrews 6:19a) How will holding firmly to the above anchors help you to weather the storms in your life?

“And so it was that they all escaped safely to land” (v. 44). This is the fulfillment of what God had earlier promised through Paul in verse 24. The vessel was shipwrecked and the cargo abandoned, but all of the men reached the shore—not one was lost! Some were strong enough to swim, some floated on planks and broken pieces of the ship, but they all made it safely.

Whatever it is you need today, hang onto your hope: **Hold On** with **Patient Expectation!** God is at work in the midst of your circumstances to bring you to your destination—your safe haven. Trust Him to get you there.

Day Five: Selah . . . Pause and Ponder the Week in Review

This section of the lesson is intended to be an at-a-glance, user-friendly recap of what you've learned this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark what stands out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share in your discussion group.

1. What is your take-away-truth? How are you working to make it a part of your daily walk?

2. Write out this week's verse from memory.

3. What does this week's verse reveal to you?

4. Personal: Write a prayer thanking God that He has promised to bring you and your journey to completion in Him.

Prayer Time: Write down the people in your group to keep in prayer this next week.
