

Paul's travels from 27:1-28:14 are charted on the map below.

27:1 When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius.

27:2 And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica.

27:3 The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care.

27:4 From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary.

27:5 When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.

27:6 There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.

Luke was himself present throughout Paul's journey from Jerusalem to Rome.

Paul was in Caesarea where he was under house arrest, waiting to be sent to Rome to appear before Caesar. Once Governor Festus decided Paul would be sent to Rome, Paul, Aristarchus, and Luke sailed from Caesarea up to Sidon, then west along the southern coast of Pamphylia (27:5) to the north of the island of Cyprus (27:4) in order to be protected from westerly winds. When they then arrived at Myra they boarded a ship headed for Italy (27:5, 6). The ship was carrying a cargo of grain (26:38) and had come from Alexandria, Egypt, Rome's main granary. There were also close to 300 people on board (27:37). Some were the crew and travelers; others included merchants, slaves, soldiers, and prisoners. By the time Paul reaches Rome he would have traveled 3,500 miles by sea (Stott, 390).

27:7 When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone;

27:8 and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

27:9 When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them,

27:10 and said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."

27:11 But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul.

27:12 Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

From Myra they sailed between the mainland and the island of Rhodes because the wind opposed them. They anchored in Cnidus, located at the southwest tip of Asia Minor (27:7). Next, they went to the island of Crete, and rounding Cape Salmone they hugged Crete's south coast until they reached Fair Havens

(27:8). The weather was so severe that they concluded it was unsafe to sail further, and they would need to postpone their journey to Rome until winter was over. However, Fair Havens was not a good place to stay; though it gave immediate shelter from the northwest gales, it was open from other directions. Thus, contrary to Paul's warning that the voyage would result in great damage and loss of cargo, the ship, and also their lives, it was decided by the majority to press on and face the immediate risk for the sake of the more permanent advantages (Ellicott). The centurion was also persuaded by the ship's captain to depart, so they set sail for Phoenix, about 40 miles west (27:12).

27:13 When a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete, close inshore.

27:14 But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo;

27:15 and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along.

27:16 Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship's boat under control.

27:17 After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along.

27:18 The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo;

27:19 and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands.

27:20 Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

A gentle southerly breeze deceived them into thinking that they could manage another 40 miles to Phoenix (27:13), but the breeze quickly turned into a hurricane force northeasterly wind that swept them away from the safety of the shoreline of Crete into open sea.

Realizing the seriousness of the situation, they immediately began to implement survival measures to secure the ship. The first thing they did was to seek the temporary wind block of a small island called Clauda (23 miles from Fair Havens) to hoist the ship's lifeboat (which was being towed) aboard (27:16-17a); this was no easy task as it was probably swamped with water. Next, they ran supporting cables around the ship to help hold the planks of the hull together as it was being battered by waves (27:17). Thirdly, because they feared that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they lowered the sea anchor to act as a brake as they drifted [this may mean that they lowered the main sail somewhat to gain more control] (27:17). The fact that they were concerned with sandbars and shoals off the coast of North Africa (which was 400 miles from where they began) is indicative of the speed in which they were drifting. These shoals were a ship graveyard and the terror of all Mediterranean sailors (Ellicott, Jos. Wars, ii. 16, § 4). On the next day, they began to jettison cargo to lighten the load (27:18). The following day they threw as much of the ship's tackle overboard as they could afford (27:19). Then finally, after many days (12 days) in the raging storm with neither sun nor stars to guide them, the occupants on the ship began to lose hope and despair. This provided Paul the opportunity to encourage them.

27:21 *When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss.*

27:22 *"Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship.*

27:23 *"For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me,*

27:24 *saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.'*

27:25 *"Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.*

27:26 *"But we must run aground on a certain island."*

Paul reminds them that they should have taken his advice (27:21), giving them reason to consider what he had to say next. First, he told those onboard not to lose heart because only the ship, but none of the people, would be lost. The previous night an angel who belongs to the God in whom Paul believed and served had stood before him and told him of their future, and Paul was convinced that God's promise could not be thwarted.

27:27 *But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors began to surmise that they were approaching some land.*

27:28 *They took soundings and found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found it to be fifteen fathoms.*

27:29 *Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.*

27:30 *But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the ship's boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow,*

27:31 *Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved."*

27:32 *Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it fall away.*

On the fourteenth night since the ship had been drifting at sea, at about midnight, the sailors sensed that land was near; perhaps they could hear the waves breaking on the shore or noticed a difference in the currents and water surface as it became shallower. They immediately started to take soundings; this would involve lowering a weighted rope into the water and measuring it once it hit bottom. Their first sounding was at 20 fathoms (one fathom is the length an outstretched arm, or 1.85 meters or about 6'; so the first sounding was about 120 feet deep). Their second reading was 15 fathoms (90 feet). When it was clear that they were drifting into shallow waters, the sailors made an attempt to escape by pretending that they were going to drop more anchors; instead, they launched the lifeboat (27:29-30). Paul somehow knew what was happening and proclaimed to everyone that unless these men remained in the ship, the people could not be saved (27:31). So the soldiers cut the lifeboat free and let it drift away so no one could escape (27:32).

27:33 *Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing.*

27:34 *"Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish."*

27:35 *Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat.*

27:36 *All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food.*

27:37 *All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons.*

27:38 *When they had eaten enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.*

As dawn was about to break, Paul encouraged everyone to eat since it was the fourteenth day of the storm, and they had been doing little to take care of their own physical needs.

Paul gave thanks for the food, and began to eat. After everyone had eaten as much as they wanted, the rest of the wheat was jettisoned (27:38).

Within these few verses we see the balance of human action and the work of God. Paul believed that God would keep His promises; nevertheless, he insisted that the sailors not be allowed to escape if they were to survive. He also knew that they must eat to live. Although Paul trusted in God, his spirituality was combined with common sense.

27:39 *When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could.*

27:40 *And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach.*

27:41 *But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves.*

27:42 *The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape;*

27:43 *but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,*

27:44 *and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.*

Morning had dawned, and even though the sailors did not recognize the island they could see a bay with a beach (Bock, 740). Traditionally, people believe that they landed on the northeast coast of Malta, at a place now named St. Paul's Bay. Of course, over time beaches and sandbars have changed their contours and St. Paul's Bay no longer has a sandy beach; nevertheless, this is still the most likely spot.

The sailors cut off the anchors and hoisted the sail to run the vessel aground. However, the boat hit the reef and the prow stuck fast. The waves pounded the stern and began to break the boat apart.

The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners for they knew that if prisoners escaped under their guard, they themselves were liable to be punished. The centurion intervened and ordered them to stop and told everyone to jump overboard, using the aid of the planks or pieces of wreckage to float ashore.

God's promise and purposes came to pass and everyone reached the shore safely (27:44).

28:1 When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta.

28:2 The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.

28:3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand.

28:4 When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live."

28:5 However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.

28:6 But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and began to say that he was a god.

Once they reached the shoreline, they found out that they had landed on Malta. The people who lived there were extremely kind and began to build a fire to warm those who had been soaked by the sea and rain and were also suffering from the cold. Paul also helped in gathering sticks. It was then that a viper came out of the wood and bit him. According to verse 3 it had fastened itself to his hand, and in verse 4 it says that it was hanging from his hand, emphasizing that Paul had truly been bitten and others could testify of it. The Islanders immediately jumped to the conclusion that Paul must be a murderer who had escaped from the sea but was pursued by their god who brought swift justice. But as they watched, Paul shook the viper into the fire and suffered no ill effects from the bite. The fickle Islanders then believed that Paul must be a god himself.

28:7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days.

28:8 And it happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery; and Paul went in to see him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him.

28:9 After this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured.

28:10 They also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied us with all we needed.

The land near the beach belonged to a prominent citizen named Publius who opened his home to Paul and some others for three days. While they were there they discovered that Publius' father was sick with fever and dysentery. Some modern scholars identify the sickness as "Malta fever" which was common in Malta and other Mediterranean islands. In 1887, the microorganism which causes the sickness was traced to the milk in Maltese goats. Although modern medicine has discovered a vaccine, without any medical help the fever could last for 2 to 3 months or even for years. Paul, however, healed the man instantly.

28:11 At the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead.

28:12 After we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days.

28:13 From there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli.

28:14 There we found some brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome.

28:15 And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

These shipwrecked men spent three months of winter on the island, perhaps from mid-November to mid-February (Stott, 396). By then, seas were becoming easier to navigate again. Thus, Paul and the others boarded their third ship, an Alexandrian vessel, which had wintered in one of Malta's safe harbors.

From this point on, Paul's trip to Rome is outlined in four stages. First, they sailed from Malta in a northeasterly direction to Syracuse, the capital of Sicily where they stayed for three days (28:12). They then sailed further north to Rhegium (28:13). On the next day, the ship caught a southerly wind which allowed them to make good progress to Puteoli. They stayed there for a week with some Christian brothers and sisters, probably waiting while Julius was receiving final instructions regarding the prisoners.

The fourth phase of the journey was by land, not by sea. From Puteoli they could walk a few miles and then meet the Appian Way, one of the earliest and strategically most important roads of the empire, which led straight to Rome.

Christians in Rome had heard that Paul was coming and sent people out to meet him and his party. Some of them traveled with Paul's group for 30 miles or more. It must have been thrilling for Paul to meet the brothers and sisters from Rome to whom he had written his greatest treatise on Christian doctrine years before.



28:16 When we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

28:17 After three days Paul called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they came together, he began saying to them, "Brethren, though I had 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.

28:18 "And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death.

28:19 "But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar, not that I had any accusation against my nation.

28:20 "For this reason, therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel."

28:21 They said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you.

28:22 "But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere."

28:23 When they had set a day for Paul, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God and trying to

persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening.

Once Paul had arrived in Rome, he was allowed to stay by himself under guard. Although Paul was in the capital of the Gentile world, he first brought the gospel to the Jews. He had written to the Romans and had told them that the gospel is for the Jews first and also to the Greek (Ro. 1:16), and he followed this in practice wherever he went.

In speaking to the Jews he emphasized three points. First, he had done nothing against the Jewish people (28:17a). Secondly, although he had been arrested by the Romans he desired to be set free since he had done nothing deserving death (28:17b). Thirdly, it was because the Jews had refused to let him go that he appealed to Caesar, although he had nothing against his own people (28:19).

Surprisingly, the Jewish leaders responded to Paul by telling him that they had received no word about him from Judea, and that they wanted to hear what he believed because they knew that Christians had been spoken against everywhere (28:22).

On an appointed day, Jews assembled at his lodging in large numbers, and all day long, from morning till evening, Paul proclaimed to them the gospel. He focused on the testimony and character of God's coming kingdom and how the king of the kingdom had come in power. Secondly, he unfolded how the Old Testament Scriptures had spoken about Jesus.

28:24 Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.

28:25 And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,

28:26 saying, 'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND; AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;

28:27 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL, AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR, AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES; OTHERWISE THEY MIGHT SEE WITH THEIR EYES, AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS, AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN, AND I WOULD HEAL THEM."

28:28 "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

Paul's message split the audience into two groups as it had done so many times before. Some were convinced by his reasoning and others remained skeptical. Paul quoted to them from Isaiah 6:9–10 that speaks of the fact that people would hear and not comprehend because their hearts were hard, their ears were deaf, and their eyes were closed. Because the Jews had deliberately rejected the gospel of God's salvation, Paul declares that salvation would go to the Gentiles. This is the fourth time that Paul turned to the Gentiles, because of Jewish opposition to the gospel (see 13:46; 18:6; 19:8–9).

28:29 When he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.

28:30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters and was welcoming all who came to him,

28:31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

In the last verses, Luke writes that all who came to see Paul were welcome. Although military surveillance continued, Paul was able to preach the gospel without hindrance. For two whole years Paul stayed in his own rented accommodation while visitors came to hear from him the gospel.

Once again, in chapters 27 and 28, a similar lesson is learned that has been learned before. God works all things in conformity to the purpose of His will. There is no plan, no storm, nor anything else in creation that can succeed against God. Paul arrived in Rome as God had promised.

In the end, Paul's witness to the gospel grows. In Acts 27:24, an angel told Paul that he must appear before Caesar. In 2 Timothy 4:17, Paul mentions that he was delivered "from the lion's mouth", which is surely a reference to his release by Nero. We can assume that God's promise was fulfilled, and Paul even bore testimony of the living Christ before Caesar himself.

Paul spent nearly 5 years in prison: two years in Caesarea, two years under house arrest in Rome, and about six months of travel from Caesarea to Rome. Although this would drive many into depression, we are struck with the fact that his prison letters "breathe an atmosphere of joy, peace, patience and contentment, because he believed in the sovereignty of God" (Stott, 403).

Paul was not unproductive even when he was arrested, for during those years the church received his four prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) as a blessing from God to generations of believers. One cannot help but notice how rich in substance those four letters are; there is no doubt that the depth of what was written was in part due to Paul's imprisonment.

Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians set forth "more powerfully than anywhere else the supreme, sovereign, undisputed and unrivaled lordship of Jesus Christ. The person and work of Christ are given cosmic proportions, for God created all things through Christ and has reconciled all things through Christ. The fullness of the Godhead, which dwelt in Christ, had also worked through him. Christ is the agent of all God's work of creation and redemption. In addition, having humbled himself to the cross, God has highly exalted him. All three prison letters say so. God has given him the name or rank above all others. All things have been put under his feet. It is God's will that in everything he might have the supremacy. Was it not through his very confinement that his eyes were opened to see the victory of Christ and the fullness of life, power, and freedom which is given to those who belong to Christ? Paul's perspective was adjusted, his horizon extended, his vision clarified and his witness enriched by his prison experience" (Stott, 404).

From all the attention given to Paul's trip to Rome it is clear that Luke intends for us to marvel over Paul's arrival in spite of the great difficulties and circumstances he faced. Humanly speaking, Paul wouldn't have been able to overcome such odds. The Jews had repeatedly wanted to kill him, he was subjected to endless trials, imprisoned, faced raging storms, was threatened with soldiers who wanted to kill the prisoners, and bitten by a poisonous snake. But by the grace of God, Paul survived it all.

Furthermore, "his ministry was authenticated by his sufferings. Nothing proves the sincerity of our beliefs like our willingness to suffer for them. So Paul had to suffer, and be seen to suffer, for the gospel he was preaching. It was not only in Isaiah that the servant who brings light to the nations must suffer, that the vocations to service and to suffering are intertwined, that the witness and the martyr are one, and that the seed which multiplies is the seed which dies. It is also that Paul was suffering for 'his gospel,' for the 'mystery' revealed to him that Jews and Gentiles were equal members of the body of Christ. That is why he could write all of 'my severance for you', and could describe himself as Christ's prisoner 'for the sake of you Gentiles'. Paul's arrest, imprisonment and trials were all due to his uncompromising espousal of the Gentile cause. It was because of his witness to the Gentiles that the Jews rose up in such fury against him. Paul paid dearly for his loyalty to the freeness and universality of the gospel. But his appeals to the churches to live a life worthy of the gospel were all the more authentic because he was himself a prisoner on account of the gospel. He was ready to die for it; they must live to adorn it" (Stott, 404-405).

According to verse 30, Paul expected to be released after two years and the Pastoral Epistles supply evidence that he was, for he resumed his travel for about two more years before being rearrested, re-tried, condemned and executed in 64 A.D. By the end he could write that he had finished the race, fought the good fight, and kept the faith. Now the next generation must step into his shoes and continue to work.

"Luke's description of Paul preaching with boldness and without hindrance symbolizes a wide open door, through which we in our day have to pass. The Acts of the Apostles have long ago finished. But the acts of the followers of Jesus will continue until the end of the world, and their words will spread to the ends of the earth" (Stott, 405).