

At the culmination of his story, Luke gives us a thrilling account of Paul's voyage to Rome. Apparently, Luke himself experienced every moment of the harrowing voyage. Here we have a straightforward detailed eyewitness account- "*Luke was there!*", as Paul made his way "*on to Rome*". Let me highlight that about three years earlier, Paul had written to the Roman Church in preparation for his visit. At that time, Paul had no idea that he would fulfill his ambition to see Rome as a prisoner. One remarkable aspect of this sea voyage was how the prisoner Paul emerged as a leader in this time of huge crisis.

The Jews were not known for their "*seagoing*"; for the Jews the sea was a monster. Yes, the One God had made it as He had made everything else, but the sea was seen as a dark force, a power and a place from which dark powers might emerge. Paul knew what awaited him on the long voyage to get to Rome from one of its farthest outposts. Much of the past few years were lived in that middle range, knowing the sea was still potentially a great enemy, while believing that all enemies had been defeated by Jesus the Messiah.

Paul starts his final part of the journey that is to fulfill God's promises to him. Note in Acts 27:3, Julius gave leave to Paul to go to his friends to be cared for and to prepare for the difficult journey ahead. In Acts 27:9 mention is made of the "*Fast*" (Day of Atonement) which was on October 5th 59AD, the likely year of the journey. It was well known that sailing in these times was starting to get dangerous in the Eastern Mediterranean in mid-September, and normally stopped altogether by mid-November. Ships would make for land and estimate for a long stay in port before the seas were safe again.

In the graphic description of the shipwreck, it is thrilling to see God's hand in it all. What is outstanding about the shipwreck incident, is Paul's wonderful faith in God's promise. Paul tells the ship's company to cheer up, Paul's vision (Acts 27:23-25.) is the turning point of the story. Look carefully again at vv.24-25. Your circumstances might look grim, everything might seem to be going wrong. But let the cry of your heart echo Paul's words "*I have faith in God*". We have the shipwreck on the coast of Malta and all on board are saved, Threats to his life, storms, persecution, the sea and the snake have done their worst and are overcome. The powers of evil cannot stop Paul, he arrives in Rome a little dishevelled but the gospel which he brings is flourishing and nobody can stop it.

Look at 28:16 "*and so we come to Rome*"; despite all the difficulties the Lord was with them and fulfilled His word and they made it. Just realise He is the same God today; He has His word for you, and He will see that His word is fulfilled. In the whole book of Acts, we are asked to watch as the story unfolds, to see this story as it was placed over onto the cross. Not as just another example of suffering and vindication but as a sign of the way the unique event of Jesus' death is applied in the mission of the church to the world. In this world of today as it yearns for its "*new creation*".

Two years of ministry awaited Paul in Rome, during which he preached quite openly. Though he was under arrest he was unhindered, Nero was on the throne, but God was in complete control. What a wonderful picture has been the "*Book of Acts*", a picture of the risen glorified Christ who turns our sorrows into joy and our losses into victory, it's the perpetual paradox of the Cross – a message for all who abandon this world and follow wholeheartedly after Him.

1) As you have set about answering God's call and doing His will, what difficulties and obstacles have gotten in the way?

2) Acts 27:1-12; how was Paul assisted along the way?

Share how God has provided you with friends to strengthen you in times of crisis?

3) Acts 27:13-26; how did Paul try and comfort men?

What was Paul's relationship to God?

Can we have the same confidence of this relationship? If so, how?

4) In Acts 27:24; 3X- God tells Paul to have courage and not be afraid (18:9-10; 23:11). In each case what is the task for which God is protecting Paul?

How did God fulfill His promise? What did God use to protect Paul?

5) Acts 27:27-44; what did Paul do to encourage those on board?

What result did Paul's attitude have on others?

6) What lesson is there for us in this?

7) Acts 28:1-10; by what means did God show His power? Did Paul preach to these people?

What ways can we demonstrate the power of God without preaching?

8) How did God provide the needs of Paul's team? How has God done that for you?

9) Acts 28:11-31; as Paul was nearing Rome what did he do?

What was his status?

What does Paul mean "*it is because of the hope of Israel that I am wearing these chains*"?

What did Paul share with the people? Their response?

10) Are you convinced there is only one path to Salvation?

In what ways do you think vv.30-31 form a fitting ending to the "*Book of Acts*"?

How has Luke woven in themes and images of death, rescue, false interrogation and the breaking of bread into this episode? Can you see a similarity to Jesus of the Gospels?

As you think back over the entire "*Book of Acts*" what events and themes stand out for you?