

Bible Study
Acts 24-27
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24:1. **The high priest** himself **went down to Caesarea** as well as **some of the elders** of the Sanhedrin. They had hired an attorney (*rhētoros*, “a public speaker, orator,” used only here in the NT), **Tertullus**, who was to present the case **before** Felix.

24:2–4. The lawyer spent almost as much time on his introduction as he did on the specific charges against **Paul**. His description of **Felix** was obviously fawning flattery, for Felix was known for his violent use of repressive force and corrupt self-aggrandizement. Felix had been a slave, won his freedom, and curried favor with the imperial court. Tacitus, a Roman historian, bitingly summed up Felix’s character with the terse comment, “He exercised royal power with the mind of a slave.”

24:5–8. The accusations were three: (1) Paul was a worldwide **troublemaker, stirring up riots** everywhere. (2) **He was a leader of the Nazarene sect**. (3) He attempted **to desecrate the temple**.

The first charge had political overtones because Rome desired to maintain order throughout its empire.

The second charge was also concerned with the government because Tertullus made it appear that Christianity was divorced from the Jewish religion. Rome permitted Judaism as a *religio licita* (a legal religion), but it would not tolerate any new religions. By describing Christianity as a “sect” (*haireseōs*, “faction, party, school”; whence the Eng¹. “heresy”) of the Nazarenes, the attorney made Paul’s faith appear to be cultic and bizarre.

Desecrating the temple also had political overtones because the Romans had given the Jews permission to execute any Gentile who went inside the barrier of the temple (cf. 21:28). At this point Tertullus modified the original charge made in 21:28. There Paul was accused of bringing a Gentile (Trophimus the Ephesian) into the temple courts; here Paul is said to have attempted desecration. The truth was severely damaged in the clause **so we seized him**, the implication being they took

¹Eng. English

Paul to arrest him. (The ni²v marg³. gives some words that are added in vv. 6–8 in a few less-reliable Gr. mss⁴.)

24:9–10. After **the Jews** had agreed to the veracity of their prosecuting attorney's charges, **Paul** was given an opportunity to answer.

His introduction was much shorter and truthful. He implied Felix knew the situation in Judea well enough to make an accurate decision.

24:11. Paul gave several points in his own defense. First, he had not been in **Jerusalem** long enough to instigate a riot. In fact one of his purposes for being in Jerusalem was **to worship**, to observe the Feast of Pentecost (20:16). Another reason was developed in 24:17–18.

24:12–13. Second, even Paul's calumniators could **not** cite an instance when he instigated a riot in the city.

24:14–16. Third, he worshiped **the God of Israel** in full conformity **with the Law and ... the Prophets** (cf. 26:22; 28:23). (On the term "the Law and the Prophets" see Matt. 5:17.) Furthermore his faith was not in a **sect** but in Christianity, which was known as **the Way** (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:22). His **hope** in the **resurrection** (cf. 23:6; 26:6–7) was **the same** as that of his accusers (Paul assumed a number of them were Pharisees). By this Paul meant Christianity was an outgrowth of the Old Testament. Further, Paul **always** sought **to keep** his **conscience clear** (cf. 23:1). "Clear" translates *aproskopon* (lit., "not causing to stumble, or not offending"), used only two other times in the New Testament, both by Paul (1 Cor. 10:32; Phil. 1:10).

24:17. This is the only time in Acts Paul's goal of bringing an offering to Jerusalem from the Gentile churches is mentioned. Luke did not stress this because it was not a major factor in his argument. However, it was most important to Paul as is evidenced by his frequent allusions to it in his epistles (Rom. 15:25–28; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8:13–14; 9:12–13; Gal. 2:10).

What did Paul mean when he said he went **to Jerusalem ... to present offerings**? Perhaps he meant he "entered the temple to present offerings" (cf. Acts 24:18). But more probably he meant he offered thank offerings for God's blessings on his ministry.

24:18. Again Paul affirmed that he was not the instigator of a **disturbance** (cf. v. 12); his accusers were!

²NIV New International Version

³marg. margin, marginal reading

⁴mss. manuscripts

24:19–21. Finally, Paul said his genuine accusers were not present, the **Jews from the province of Asia** who made the original false allegations and incited the riot in the temple (cf. 21:27). Since **the Sanhedrin** had not found him guilty (23:1–9), Tertullus' speech did not really contain any legitimate charges.

24:22. How **Felix** knew about Christianity can only be surmised. Probably he heard about it from Drusilla, his wife, who was a daughter of Herod Agrippa I and a sister of Herod Agrippa II. Because she was a Jewess (v. 24) she would know about **the Way**. Besides this, Felix could scarcely have ruled in Judea for several years without learning something about the faith of the early church.

Rather than make a decision which would have been unfavorable to the religious authorities he **adjourned the proceedings**. He said, **When Lysias the commander comes ... I will decide your case**. Whether Claudius Lysias (cf. 23:25–30) ever came to Caesarea or not was beside the point; the case had been postponed indefinitely.

24:23. Felix, evidently aware of Paul's innocence, granted him a limited amount of **freedom** as a prisoner under the guardianship of **the centurion**. Later another centurion gave Paul similar freedom in Sidon (27:3).

24:24–26. **Felix** must have taken a brief trip **with his wife, Drusilla**. When they returned, Felix **sent for Paul** who **spoke about faith in Christ Jesus**. **Felix** was brought under conviction when **Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come**. Well he should, for his marriage to Drusilla was his third and he had to break up another marriage to secure her. His regime was marked by injustices that contrasted with the righteousness of God. And he was a man grossly lacking in self-control.

The duplicity and greed of Felix is seen in his desire to be bribed by **Paul**.

24:27. To placate **the Jews**, Felix **left Paul in prison** even though he knew Paul was innocent. **Felix** eventually lost his position because he was cruelly intemperate in putting down a Jewish and Gentile conflict in Caesarea.

b. Paul's defense before Festus (25:1–12).

25:1. This section (vv. 1–12) is crucial because in it Paul appealed to Caesar. It sets the direction for the remainder of the book and also shows how the apostle reached Rome.

Little is known of Porcius **Festus**, Roman procurator of Judea, a.d. 58–62, but what history discloses is favorable. His desire to rule well is attested by his going to Jerusalem **three days after arriving in the province**. No doubt he had heard of the volatile nature of that city!

25:2–3. One item heavy on the minds of the religious authorities was a trial for **Paul**. They knew their case was so weak that the only way they could rid themselves of him was by **ambush** while he was being **transferred** from Caesarea **to Jerusalem**.

25:4–5. Evidently **Festus** felt their request was unreasonable so he promised to reopen the case in **Caesarea**. Paul was already there and Festus was returning **there**.

25:6–7. The scene of previous trials repeated itself. Luke added, however, that the **charges** were **many** and **serious**.

25:8–9. After **Paul** briefly and categorically denied the allegations against him, **Festus** asked the prisoner if he would be **willing to go ... to Jerusalem** for another **trial**. Festus had changed his mind on this (cf. vv. 4–5), apparently feeling this would be a suitable compromise to placate **the Jews**. Also he was realizing he did not know how to handle this kind of religious case (v. 20).

25:10. **Paul** would have nothing to do with this switch for several reasons: (1) The journey from Caesarea to Jerusalem would be most dangerous. The 40 Jews who two years before (cf. 24:27) had taken an oath to murder Paul (23:13–14) would probably have gotten out of their oath somehow by then, but they would still want to kill Paul. (2) The possibility of a fair trial in Jerusalem was remote. (3) He had already languished as a prisoner in Caesarea for some two years.

The charges brought against Paul were civil (they said he had done **wrong to the Jews**); therefore the present **court** where Festus represented Caesar, was the proper one.

25:11. **The charges** were serious enough to demand a **death** penalty. If the accusations were **true**, Paul said, he was willing **to die**. He interpreted Festus' suggestion that he go to Jerusalem (v. 9) as tantamount to delivering Paul over to the **Jews**, even though the trial would be conducted by Festus.

25:12. There is some debate as to whether **Festus** was legally bound to remand the case **to Caesar** (Nero, who reigned from a.d. 54–68), or if he could have chosen to handle the case himself. If Festus had decided to hear the case and made a negative decision, Paul could still have appealed to Caesar. But Festus probably had no alternative but to transfer the case to Rome. So **after** he **had conferred with his council**, he announced that in view of Paul's appeal, he must **go to Caesar**.

c. *Paul's defense before Agrippa II (25:13–26:32).*

25:13. The **King Agrippa** referred to here was Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I (12:1) and a great-grandson of Herod the Great (Matt. 2:1). (See the chart on the

Herods at Luke 1:5.) At this time he was a young man of about 30 years of age and the ruler of territories northeast of Palestine with the title of King. Because he was a friend of the Roman imperial family he was awarded the privilege of appointing the Jewish high priest and also had been made the custodian of the temple treasury. His background made him eminently qualified to hear Paul; he was well acquainted with the Jews' religion (cf. Acts 25:26–27).

Agrippa II and his sister **Bernice**, came to **Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus**. Though Bernice had a tendency to support the Jews she lived a profligate life. She had an incestuous relationship with Agrippa, her brother.

25:14–21. **Festus** reviewed his dealings with **Paul's case** which had been **left** to him by **Felix**. Festus frankly confessed he was incapable of handling the case (v. 20). In particular he did not understand Paul's insistence on the resurrection of Christ (v. 19).

25:22. The rehearsal of the situation had its desired effect on **Agrippa**. The Herodian family was useful to Rome for its knowledge of Jewish affairs and Agrippa's insights would be helpful **to Festus**.

25:23–24. The petty King **Agrippa and** his sister **Bernice** used this occasion to display their position, clothes, and ceremony. Luke undoubtedly was contrasting the lowly prisoner **Paul** in the audience room with Agrippa and Bernice and **the high-ranking officers and the leading men of the city**. Because five cohorts (each cohort had a thousand soldiers) were stationed at Caesarea, five high-ranking officers were there (*chiliarchoi*, lit., "commanders of a thousand"; cf. 21:31).

Festus told **Agrippa** that the Jews urged that Paul should die.

25:25–27. The statement in verse 25 is significant because it shows that Festus, like Felix before him, **found Paul had done nothing deserving of death** (cf. 23:9, 29; 26:31).

It would look bad for Festus **to send** Paul to Caesar with no clear **charges against him**. Festus believed that **Agrippa**, with his knowledge of Jewish customs and laws, could help Festus **write** out some charges that would be specific enough for Caesar Nero to consider.

Two interesting terms for Roman royalty are found in this chapter, the first of which is *Sebastos* meaning "revered" or "august" and used in the New Testament only in 25:21, 25; 27:1. In chapter 25 it is translated "Emperor" and in 27:1 it is rendered "Imperial."

The other term is *kyrios* meaning "lord." In 25:26 "the lord" is translated **His Majesty**. Both Augustus and Tiberius refused this title for themselves because they felt it exalted them too highly; however, by the time Paul made his appeal to

Caesar, Nero was on the throne and “lord” was used much more commonly of the Caesar. Though Nero did accept the title of “lord,” he had not yet gone to the excesses that characterized his reign later. At this juncture Nero was reputed to be a fair-minded ruler.

26:1. **Paul** had already made **his defense** to Festus (25:6–12), so now the apostle directed his address to **Agrippa**. Furthermore, the purpose of this speech was for Agrippa’s information.

The motioning of the **hand** was evidently after the manner of orators of that time. This speech has a number of parts: (1) complimentary remarks (26:2–3), (2) Paul’s early life in Judaism (vv. 4–8), (3) his zeal in opposing Christianity (vv. 9–11), (4) his conversion and commission (vv. 12–18), (5) his ministry (vv. 19–23), (6) his verbal jousts with Festus and Agrippa (vv. 24–29).

26:2–3. Paul was sincere in these compliments because he knew **Agrippa** was indeed **well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies**, in addition to being a practicing Jew.

In contrast with Tertullus who promised a brief speech before Felix (24:4), Paul implied his defense might be more lengthy. This is the climax of all Paul’s defenses recorded in Acts (cf. 22:1–21; 23:1–8; 24:10–21; 25:6–11).

26:4–8. In summary, Paul asserted that from his early **life** he **lived ... according to** and for the **hope** of Israel (vv. 6–7; cf. 23:6; 24:15; 28:20). (On his living in **Jerusalem**, see 22:3.) He stated that this hope involved the resurrection from **the dead**. This is why Christ quoted Moses (Ex. 3:6) to defend the doctrine of the Resurrection (Matt. 22:32). Because Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, people must be resurrected in order to receive the promise God made to them. Likewise the promises made to the Jews demand they be resurrected in the coming Messianic Age.

Paul’s reference to the **12 tribes** of Israel shows the error of British-Israelism with its “10 lost tribes of Israel” (cf. Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:30; James 1:1; Rev. 7:4–8; 21:12).

26:9–11. Besides being committed to Judaism, Paul had also been fanatic in his opposition to Christianity (cf. 8:3; 9:2; 22:4–5, 19). His casting votes **against** imprisoned Christians does not necessarily mean Paul was a member of the Sanhedrin. It may simply mean he agreed with the Sanhedrin’s action (cf. 8:1; 22:20).

When Paul apprehended Christians he **tried to force them to blaspheme**, that is, to recant their belief in Jesus.

26:12–18. As Paul recounted his conversion (cf. 9:1–19; 22:1–21) he once again told of the **light ... brighter than the noonday sun** (22:6). For the first time the reader is informed that the language of the heavenly **voice** was **Aramaic**, though it was implied because the spelling of Saul's name in 9:4 and 22:7 was Aramaic. Some believe that the statement, **It is hard for you to kick against the goads**, means Paul had guilt feelings and was violating his conscience in persecuting believers in Christ. However, Paul wrote later that in spite of his blaspheming, violence, and persecution of the church he was shown mercy because he was acting in ignorance and unbelief (1 Tim. 1:13). Kicking the goads evidently referred to the futility of his persecuting the church.

The statement of Paul's commission (Acts 26:18) closely resembled the work of the Messiah, predicted in Isaiah 35:5; 42:7, 16; 61:1. As a representative of the Lord **Jesus** Christ, Paul did figuratively what the Lord Jesus will someday do on earth literally. Spiritually Paul had led many **from the darkness** of sin (John 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 4:18; 5:8; Col. 1:13) **to light** in Christ (John 12:36; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:12; 1 Thes. 5:5). This salvation releases from Satan's **power** (John 8:44; Heb. 2:14) and gives **forgiveness of sins** (Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; 13:38; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14) and a spiritual inheritance (Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:12) with **those who are sanctified**, that is, those who are positionally set apart to God by His redeeming work (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 10:10; 13:12).

26:19–23. Paul's statement in verse 20 is something of a problem. He said he had **preached to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea**. But Paul wrote the Galatians he was unknown in the churches of Judea (Gal. 1:22). Many have felt that there was an early textual corruption and that the Greek text should read, "To those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem, and throughout every country, both to Jews and Gentiles." Admittedly the present Greek text is rough (it changes from the dative case to the accusative), but this textual emendation is extremely speculative and unnecessary.

Probably Paul first summarized his ministry to the Jews and then described his work among **Gentiles**. He affirmed much the same in Acts 26:17–18. In other words Paul's statement here is not to be taken in strict chronological sequence but as a general overview of his ministry. First, he preached to Jews and then to Gentiles, in conformity with 1:8. Both groups needed to **repent and turn to God**. Frequently in Acts the apostles spoke of repentance (2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 8:22; 11:18; 13:24; 17:30; 19:4; 20:21).

Furthermore, Paul asserted, his message was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies (26:22; cf. 24:14; 28:23), concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Frequently in Acts, the apostles also spoke of Christ's resurrection.

26:24–29. **Festus**, with his Greek outlook, thought the doctrine of the Resurrection was impossible (cf. 17:32; 23:6–7), so he **interrupted** Paul, though the apostle had already made his primary points. Festus said that Paul was **out of his mind**, that his education was **driving** him **insane**.

But **Paul** clearly asserted his sanity and then turned once again to **Agrippa**. **None of this**—that is, Christ's death and resurrection and the beginning of the church—could have **escaped** Agrippa's attention. He was well-schooled in Judaism, and Christianity was no esoteric secret society.

Finally Paul pressed the issue with a forthright question, **King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?** (cf. 26:22) **I know you do** (cf. Paul's witness to Felix, 24:24). Now **Agrippa** was in a corner. If he accepted the prophets he would be forced to admit Christ Jesus fulfilled them. His only escape was to parry the question with an interrogative of his own.

The NI⁵V translation of 26:28 catches the spirit of Agrippa's question well. It was probably a joking rebuttal of Paul.

Paul took his response seriously, for he loved people for the Lord's sake. Even if it took a **long** time to win Agrippa to Christ, Paul was willing to take the time. He replied that he prayed that Agrippa and **all who were listening to him would become** like him (i.e., a Christian), **except for these chains**. (This is the first mention of chains on Paul since 22:29.) So Paul's defense came to a conclusion. 26:30–32. Already others had said Paul was innocent: Pharisees (23:9); Claudius Lysias, the commander in Jerusalem (23:29); and Governor **Festus** (25:25). Now **Agrippa**, a man of power, well-trained in Judaism and sympathetic with Jews, stated, **This man could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar**.

4. the captivity at rome (chaps. 27–28).

a. *The sea journey (chap. 27).*

Why did Luke go into such lengthy detail about the voyage from Caesarea to Rome? There is no easy answer. (1) It may simply be a device to emphasize Paul's journey to and his arrival at Rome. As the Gospel writers stressed the Lord's final approach to Jerusalem and His last days there to heighten the impact of His death and resurrection, so Luke climaxed his Luke-Acts work with the proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom to Gentiles in the Roman capital.

⁵NIV New International Version

- (2) Luke may have used the example of great ancient epics of his day which commonly employed the theme of a storm and shipwreck. This would parallel the modern use of a chase scene in a movie or television drama. The problem with this view is a simple one. How does this contribute to Luke's purpose in writing? Simply following the example of ancient epics would not really add to the book.
- (3) Possibly the writer desired to show a parallel with Jonah and his storm (Jonah 1:4–15). After Jonah lived through the storm by miraculous means he preached to a large Gentile capital city. The comparison with Paul is obvious.
- (4) The purpose of this account is to show God's sovereign protection and direction in Paul's ministry. It was God's will for the apostle to minister the gospel in Rome.
- (5) It was Luke's intention to show Paul's leadership and thereby to underscore the fact that God's program had become primarily Gentile and therefore Paul was God's man of the hour. In the account Paul certainly does come off as the one who is in control even in the spheres of ocean travel and shipwreck.
- (6) Some think the story is something of an allegory. In the Old Testament the sea was portrayed as an enemy; so here it figures opposition to the spread of the gospel. In spite of all antagonism the good news of the kingdom will survive and will ultimately reach its predetermined goal. But this is so allegorical it is a highly improbable view.

The answer to the question of Luke's great emphasis on the journey to Rome may be a combination of answers 1, 3, 4, and 5, though it is difficult to be dogmatic.

27:1. Who and how many **other prisoners** accompanied **Paul** to Rome is an unanswered question. Nor is the reader informed as to why the others were being taken to the capital city.

The **centurion ... Julius, who** is a primary character in this account, **belonged to the Imperial Regiment**, an honorary title given to certain troops. "Imperial" translates *Sebastēs*, meaning "revered" (cf. comments on 25:25). A "centurion" commanded 100 soldiers (cf. 10:1; 21:32 ["officers" in ni^{6v}]; 22:25–26; 23:17, 23; 24:23).

Use of the pronoun **we** indicates Luke accompanied Paul on this journey.

27:2–3. **Adramyttium**, the home base of the **ship**, was east-southeast of Troas in northwest Asia Minor. Evidently the ship was making its last journey to its base before the stormy winter sailing season set in. Apparently the centurion wanted to find a ship bound for Rome along the way or to get to the Egnatian Road and use it to transport the prisoners.

⁶NIV New International Version

Aristarchus evidently accompanied Paul to be his helper. Aristarchus stayed with Paul during his Roman incarceration (Col. 4:10; Phile. 24).

Interestingly **Paul** had **friends** in **Sidon**, the ship's first port of call after leaving Caesarea. The **kindness** of this centurion is mindful of another centurion's kindness (Acts 24:23).

27:4–8. The information in these verses points up the difficulty of sailing from east to west in the Mediterranean Sea. **The** prevailing **winds** blew from the west so the ships would sail to the east **of Cyprus** and proceed with **difficulty** along the southwest coast of Asia Minor and to the east **of Crete**. When Paul sailed in the opposite direction, the ship took a more direct route (21:1–3).

In **Myra**, a port city on the south coast of Asia Minor, **the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy**. This was a grain ship (27:38) large enough to carry 276 passengers (v. 37). Egypt was Rome's breadbasket. The grain ships would commonly sail north to Asia Minor and then make their way west across the Mediterranean using the islands for as much protection as they could obtain from them.

Paul's journey on this second ship took him from Myra toward the island of **Cnidus** and then southwest to the south side of Crete, **to a place called Fair Havens**. The Cretans were known for their laziness and depravity (Titus 1:12). Later Paul wrote to Titus to appoint elders for that island's churches (Titus 1:5).

27:9–12. **The Fast** referred to here was probably the Day of Atonement which occurred in late September to early October. After that time of year the unsettled weather patterns over the Mediterranean Sea made sailing hazardous. In those days sea traffic ceased by early November.

Paul was perhaps included in the ship's council because of his experiences in travel (cf. 2 Cor. 11:25, "three times I was shipwrecked") and his natural leadership. Contrary to Paul's advice **the majority** (Acts 27:11) **decided** it best to **sail on** to a more commodious **harbor** and to **winter there**. The authority rested ultimately in the hands of **the centurion** because grain ships were considered to be in government service. So they sailed along the southern coast of **Crete**. They hoped **to reach** the harbor of **Phoenix**.

27:13–17. Once caught by a sudden **Northeaster**, a **hurricane-like wind**, they could not remain in the protection **of Crete** and **were driven** helplessly into the open sea. **Cauda**, a **small island** 25 miles south of Crete, provided a brief respite from the teeth of the wind. While they were south of the island they hauled in **the lifeboat** which was normally pulled in tow but now was probably full of water.

What is meant by **they passed ropes under the ship itself to hold it together** is not positively clear. It probably means the sailors encircled the boat with ropes so that the beams would not separate and leak more water from the pressure of the sea and storm.

The sandbars of Syrtis were located off Libya of North Africa. The Greek word translated **sea anchor** is *skeuos* and literally means “vessel” or “equipment,” so it could refer to any gear. Probably, however, it was an anchor.

27:18–26. **The storm** raged on; so **the next day they** threw **the cargo overboard** and the **day** after that **the ship’s tackle**. So awesome was **the storm** that after **many days**, they **gave up all hope of** getting out of the situation alive.

The passengers and probably also the crew **had gone ... without food** for a number of days. Perhaps the storm had destroyed much of the supplies; some evidently were seasick; and perhaps many were too discouraged to eat (cf. v. 33). After **Paul** reminded them of the **advice** he gave earlier at **Crete** (cf. v. 10), he encouraged them with a message from **God**. This was not the first time a vision had lifted Paul’s spirits (cf. 18:9–10; 23:11); in fact, in the Jerusalem vision (23:11) God promised Paul not only safety there but ultimately a safe journey to Rome. Here too God (through **an angel**) promised that Paul would **stand trial before Caesar**. Twice Paul urged his shipmates (all 275 of them; cf. 27:37) to **keep up their courage** (vv. 22, 25). The verb “to keep up one’s courage” (*euthymeō*) is used only three times in the New Testament—twice here and in James 5:13 (“to be happy”). The verb has the idea of having good feelings or being in good spirits. Even as a prisoner Paul did not hesitate to make known his **faith in God**.

27:27–32. **The Adriatic Sea** was a term used in New Testament times of the sea not only between Italy and Greece but also south of Italy and Sicily to Malta. After two weeks in the storm **the sailors** finally **sensed they were** coming to some **land**. The water was becoming shallower (from **120 feet** to **90 feet**). Their **soundings** were made by throwing into the water a line with lead on it (*bolisantes*, “took soundings,” is lit., “heaving the lead”) and thereby judging the water’s depth. As they came into even shallower water **they dropped four anchors**. **Paul** warned **the centurion** that **the sailors** attempting **to escape** needed to **stay with the ship** (cf. v. 24). **The soldiers cut ... the lifeboat** loose which meant that all aboard could only depend on the Lord God for deliverance.

27:33–35. Because of Paul’s confidence in the Lord to keep them all safe (v. 24), he encouraged them **to eat** (vv. 33–34). **He** then **took some bread**, unashamedly thanked **God** for it, and **broke it and** started eating. Though this sounds like an observance of the Lord’s Table, it probably was not. Most of those 276 people

were not Christians. Rather it was a public testimony by Paul of his faith in the God and Father of the Lord Jesus as well as a practical expedient of eating in order to muster strength for the ordeal ahead.

27:36. Two problems were mentioned in verse 33—the people had “gone without food” for a fortnight and also had “been in constant suspense.” But now **they were all encouraged** (lit., “they became of good spirits,” *euthymoi*; cf. vv. 22, 25) **and ate some food themselves**—solving the two problems in verse 33.

27:37–38. This grain **ship** not only carried cargo but also had **276** passengers and crew members. The number of prisoners (v. 42) is not stated. This was not an excessively large ship, for Josephus wrote about a ship which he boarded to Italy which carried 600 passengers.

27:39–40. Seeing **a bay with a sandy beach** at dawn, **they decided to try running the ship aground**. They cut away **the anchors and rudders ... hoisted the foresail**, and headed **for the beach**. The word “rudders” (*ῥῆδῆες*) literally describes the blades of oars and refers to paddle rudders extending from the sides of the ship. These were tied while the ship was at anchor.

27:41. **The ship struck a sandbar** which the sailors had not seen. Because of the beating of the waves, the back of the ship **was broken to pieces** while **the bow** was **stuck** in the sand.

27:42–44. Because **soldiers** were accountable with their own lives for any prisoners who escaped (cf. 12:19; 16:27) they **planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping**. For the soldiers this was simply a matter of self-preservation.

The centurion, however, **wanted to spare Paul’s life**. He saw the value and trustworthiness of this prisoner and so forestalled the soldiers’ **plan**. Obviously God was sovereignly at work to spare Paul for ministry at Rome and to guarantee the fulfillment of his prediction (v. 24). In the cold rain (28:2) the passengers (soldiers and prisoners) and crewmen **who could swim** were urged **to swim ashore**, while **the rest** held onto the ship’s debris.

As Paul had predicted, the ship was lost (27:22), they ran aground on an island (v. 26), and no one perished (v. 22).⁷

⁷ Stanley D. Toussaint, “[Acts.](#)” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 421–429.