

Acts 27

PAUL'S VOYAGE TO ROME

This great chapter is an immortal work of the inspired Luke, worthy in every way as one of the great narrations in all literature, giving, as Dummelow said, "The most detailed account of an ancient voyage which we possess, and is our principal source of knowledge of the ancient art of navigation." Even scholars inclined to be critical here confess that "Luke's whole account may be assumed to be accurate and entirely trustworthy."

The occasion of the voyage recounted here was the transfer of the apostle Paul to Rome, pursuant to his appeal to Caesar. The Lord had assured him that he would testify in Rome (Acts 23:11); and now that was to be accomplished. Paul did not come to Rome, however, in any manner that might have been anticipated by him, multiple providences having worked together in fulfilling the prophecy.

The machinations of the Jews, the avarice of Felix, the indecision of Festus, the prudence of Paul, and the Roman statute for the protection of its citizens, very strangely but very naturally combined to fulfill a promise of God made in answer to prayer.

Still other providences are visible throughout the voyage itself.

Regarding the issue of the voyage in the fulfillment of its purpose, Ramsay was doubtless correct in the affirmation that "The result of his trial before the supreme court of the empire was that he was acquitted, and a decisive verdict was thus pronounced in favor of the free teaching of the Christian faith." This was one of the key victories in the early propagation of Christianity. Later, the situation was to change; but this initial victory was decisive.

The intriguing story of this voyage and shipwreck is that of an eyewitness, its vividness, wealth of detail, and vocabulary making this certain. It may be demonstrated that the narrative is produced by one in possession of a medical vocabulary, unfamiliar with nautical terms, describing every maneuver of the whole voyage in such a manner as to require the conclusion that the narrator saw what he related. This is "almost universally recognized."

Boles has given an excellent outline of this chapter thus: (1) aboard the ship of Adramyttium (ah-drah-MIH-tee-uhm), Acts 27:1-5, (2) aboard the ship of Alexandria Acts 27:6-12, (3) the storm Acts 27:13-29, and (4) the shipwreck Acts 27:30-44.

We shall avoid presenting this chapter as a travelogue, interesting as that would be, and refrain from proving that Luke is accurate and his critics wrong on every point of geography and navigation that we find. Whole volumes are available on both subjects. This writer's experience with water transportation includes a day or two as the "crew" on J. Lewis Foster's *SNIPE*, two weeks aboard the battle carrier *USS MIDWAY (CVB 41)*, a week on the *USS WISCONSIN*, a channel crossing on the *DUKE OF YORK*, an overnight crossing of the Bay of Fundy on the *BLUE NOSE*, and two North Atlantic crossings on the *EMPRESS OF BRITAIN* (accompanied by "Sissy" on the latter three). Our "seamanship" is therefore insufficient to justify any other approach to this chapter. However, for the sheer delight of it, we shall depart from this rule two or three times.

One of the most interesting of the "we" sections in the book of Acts in which Luke is again claiming to be an eyewitness to the story of Paul's voyage and shipwreck as he and his companions sailed from Caesarea to Italy. This narrative has been called one of the most instructive documents to come down to us for the knowledge of ancient seamanship.

The voyage and ship wreck of St. Paul published by James Smith himself an experience Yachtsman who was well acquainted with that part of the Mediterranean over which Pauls' ship sails and who bears witness to the remarkable accuracy of Luke's Account of each stage of the voyage. Smith was able to fix, by the details given by Luke the exact spot on the coast of Malta where the shipwreck must have taken place.

Vs. 1-20: How powerless, or at least how feeble, man appears, and is, when contending with the mighty agencies of nature!

Men almost instinctively call at such times on Him who "holds the winds in His fist, and the waves in the hollow of His hand."

It is difficult to realize such a scene of terror in calmer days. It was in his relation with God that he found restfulness.

One of those merchant vessels, on which even generals and princes had to depend for transit, was now in the harbor of Caesarea, bound for Adramyttium, where it was expected that an opportunity would be found of exchanging for a vessel directly bound for Italy.

Acts 27:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto [one] named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

They delivered ... The antecedent of this pronoun is Festus and Agrippa and Bernice, indicating that Luke construed Agrippa's outspoken verdict of innocence as a contributing factor in Paul's being sent to Rome. Of course, Festus alone "delivered" Paul in the sense of issuing the necessary orders.

Sail into Italy ... has the same meaning today as then.

Certain other prisoners ... Ramsay believed these to have been:

Criminals, who were being taken to Rome to amuse by their death in the arena the idle populace, habituated to enjoy such cruel sights. Few people, like Paul, had the distinction of being remitted for trial before the highest court of the Empire.

Julius ... Invariably, these Roman officers are presented by the sacred authors in a favorable light.

Augustas' band ... This was the title of a cohort, just as "The Rainbow Division" is the title of a unit in the US Army. "Augustus" by this time had become a title of the emperor, and thus the meaning is similar to that of the "Queen's Lancers" in British terminology.

Acts 27:2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium (ah-drah-MIH-tee-uhm), we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; [one] Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

This was a tramp vessel making all ports along the coast of Asia Minor, that being the meaning of "Asia" as used by Luke. Paul and company had already traveled on a ship making this same run in the opposite direction Acts 20:6-21:1.

Aristarchus ... with us ... It is not certain if Aristarchus was a prisoner or not. De Welt thought he was; but the text in this place represents him apart from "other prisoners" in Acts 27:1. Paul's reference to Aristarchus as "my fellow-prisoner" Colossians 4:10 may refer to the fact that Aristarchus was "Paul's voluntary companion in Rome."

In Romans 16:7, Paul calls Andronicus (ann-DROHN-ih-kuhs) and Junius his "fellow-prisoners," though he was not then in prison himself; and in Philemon 1:1:23 he gives this epithet to Epaphras (EPP-ah-frihs) with the added words "in Christ Jesus" (my fellow-

prisoner in Christ Jesus), and does not give it to Aristarchus (ahr-iss-TAHR-kuhs) who is named in the same sentence."

Regarding the relationship between Paul, Luke and Aristarchus, the speculation of Ramsay to the effect that Paul had by inheritance, or some other providence, received a large sum of money about this time, cannot be set aside. It would appear that Luke attended Paul as his personal physician for a period of years, and that he and also Aristarchus attended Paul constantly. Such services were paid for, either by Luke and Aristarchus, or by Paul, or by the churches; and it would seem to be most likely that Paul was the paymaster. Earlier, Paul had worked with his hands as a tent-maker to support himself; but there is no mention of any such thing here, nor was it even possible. He was a prisoner.

Ramsay believed that Luke and Aristarchus carefully attended Paul, "even passing as slaves" in order to be constantly with him, arguing that the respect paid Paul by Junius would never have been given "to a penniless traveler without a servant, in either the first century or the nineteenth." As Bruce said, "Ramsay's argument merits respect due to his great knowledge of social history in the Roman Empire of the first century A.D."

We put to sea ... Here is resumed the "we narrative" which was broken off at Acts 21:18, indicating that Luke had been with Paul throughout his detention in Caesarea.

Although the port of embarkation is not specified, it was in all probability Caesarea.

Acts 27:3 And the next [day] we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave [him] liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

Courteously entreated Paul... The respect and deference to Paul are remarkable, as shown throughout the voyage.

His friends ... Paul was widely known among the Christians, as well as among the Jewish opposition; and this reference shows that nearly anywhere Paul might have stopped, there were Christians there to welcome and encourage him.

Acts 27:4-5 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia (sill-ISH-ah) and Pamphylia, we came to Myra (MI-rah), [a city] of Lycia.

The winds were contrary they made slow steady progress westward along the coast of Asia Minor ... The route to Rome lay in a westerly direction, but the winds coming from almost exactly the direction they wished to go forced them to sail northward. It was late August or early September, approaching the time when navigation of the Mediterranean would no longer have been safe for ancient sailing vessels. It was urgency from this consideration that probably influenced Julius to take passage with his company on a ship going only part of the way.

Myra ... was "important as one of the great harbors in the wheat trade between Egypt and Rome," and Julius' probable anticipation of finding a ship sailing directly to Rome was quickly fulfilled at Myra.

Acts 27:6-8 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. 7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus (NI-duhs), the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone (SAL-mone); 8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city [of] Lasea (lah-SEE-ah).

It was increasingly a tedious passage. The wind, west or north-west, compelled them, after leaving Cnidus, to take the less desirable eastern side of Crete and then along its southern shore as far as an anchorage which is still called Fair Havens. For the moment they were in safety: and now that season had set in which sailors knew to involve, in those seas, especial danger.

A NEW SHIP; BUT THE SAME OLD PROBLEM

With difficulty the Gospel always moves forward.

Like many things that occur in every life, a different ship did not solve the problem, which was not the ship, but the wind. Many a marriage partner has tried "a new ship" with the same results. Many an employee has changed to "a new company" with no better luck!

Ship of Alexandria ... This was a great vessel for those times, carrying a cargo of wheat and 276 passengers and crew, estimated by Boles as a vessel of "ten or eleven tons." Josephus tells of one such ship on which he took passage, that carried 600 passengers. Josephus' ship, like Paul's, sank! As De Welt noted, wheat is always a dangerous cargo, due to the possibility of shifting; and he went on to relate how in very recent days, he narrowly escaped shipwreck "between the Dardanelles and Malta," due to the shifting of a cargo of wheat in rough weather.

The plan was to sail north of Crete, the great island lying south of Greece and a little east; but the wind would not permit it, so they sailed southward around the eastern extremity of that island with the intention of creeping along just off its southern shore, with the island on their right instead of their left.

Fair Havens ... Here they took "a breather" from the contrary winds and held a conference on the advisability of continuing the voyage at that time of the year. This place is now called Kalolomonía (kah-lo-lo-

MO-nee-ah). "It lies about halfway along the southern coast of Crete, near Lasea, the ruins of which have been identified."

Acts 27:9-10 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished [them], 10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

It is altogether possible that Paul was invited to give his opinion; and so we reject the notion that "this prisoner was out of place" in making such remarks. Paul was a man of wide experience, having already suffered shipwreck three times 2 Corinthians 11:25; and the respect in which Julius held Paul makes it nearly certain that Paul's opinion had been asked.

The foolishness of wise men leads to hopeless abandon.

The Fast was now already past ... is a reference to the Jewish Day of Atonement, usually occurring about the time of the autumnal equinox, about October 1. The Mediterranean was not safe for ancient vessels after September 15 until about March 15.

I perceive ... These words suggest that Paul was not speaking in this instance from any inspiration and that he was only giving a personal opinion based upon experience. Even at that, it came frightfully close to being the exact prophecy of what happened, being wrong only in this, that no lives were lost.

Acts 27:11-12 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. 12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice (FEN-niss), [and there] to winter; [which is] an haven of Crete, and lieth toward, in seaman's terms, the west, north west.

The centurion ... appears in this passage as being in full command of the vessel, his authority being the Roman government even greater than that of the ship's owner and the captain. This was probably due to the vessel's being a government chartered carrier in the wheat trade supplying the imperial city with grain. The captain and the owner gave the green light to proceed to Phoenix, a much more comfortable place to spend the winter; and, despite the fact of a general appeal for the opinion of the passengers, Paul's voice seems to have been about the only one raised against it.

The more part ... indicates that many participated in the discussions of whether or not to proceed. There comes into evidence here the fact that where the convenience of people is concerned, almost any danger will be risked by some in order to attain some more desirable or comfortable situation. The sailors, if wintered at Fair Havens, in all probability would have spent a sober and chaste sojourn, there having been very little chance of anything else!

Added to the desire to find what most of them considered a more "suitable place" to winter was the fact that Phoenix was only a few short hours away, lying northward around the great Cape Matala (mah-TAH-lah), which with the westerly winds could have been reached quickly enough, and which with a good south wind they could have reached in less than a day. Sure enough, they got the south wind!

Lieth toward ... the west and north west ... The Greek words here are "down the southwest wind and down the northwest wind"; and scholars do not know what Luke meant by this. If it applies to the layout of the harbor, either expression could be correct, depending upon the viewpoint, whether that of one at sea or one in the city itself. We simply do not know.

Acts 27:13-14 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained [their] purpose, loosing [thence], they sailed close by Crete. 14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon (yur-o-CLI-don).

Luke only reported what happened, but what happened here is much like an allegory of what happens in the lives of many who, being tempted into some wrong move by enticing opportunities, find at last in the end devastation and shipwreck. Like the boxer who feints with the right, then blasts with the left, life often tempts with the soft and beautiful winds of temptation, only to overwhelm the unwary with the storms of destruction. "The south wind blew softly ... the tempestuous Euroclydon (yur-o-CLI-don) beat down upon them!"

Close by Crete ... indicates that the south wind was a little too good becoming a storm; they had difficulty keeping their distance from the shore. Many a temptation carries this quality of being just a little too close from on disaster to another! This very south wind was related to the storm that wrecked them.

Acts 27:15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let [her] drive.

And when the ship was caught ... Alas, some situations must be guarded against before they occur, not after they have developed; and so it was here. They had already passed the point of no return to the Fair Havens they had just left. Many wayward souls have discovered that some decisions admit of no correction. They like the ship are "caught."

Let [her] drive... The ship and all on board were now at the mercy of the winds and waves

Acts 27:16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat:

We had much work to come by the boat... has reference to the dinghy which they had trailed along behind the vessel, anticipatory to landing in Phoenix. They were so sure they had obtained their purpose, that they had not even taken the trouble to hoist it aboard before sailing. It was now waterlogged, but it might be needed; and so they labored with great difficulty to bring it aboard and secure it.

We ... Some of the passengers, including Luke, had been required to aid in bringing the dinghy aboard, the ship's sailors alone not being able to do it.

Acts 27:17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

Undergirding the ship ... Luke's medical word "bandaging" the ship describes accurately what they did. In modern times this is called "frapping" a vessel, referring to the passing of cables around the exterior of the hull to give it greater strength and keep it from breaking up during a storm. All ancient sailing vessels carried supplies for such a purpose. Howson, as quoted by Hervey, tells how "The ship ALBION was frapped with iron chains after the battle of Navarino."

The quicksands ... The Syrtis (SIR-tiss). These were the great African quicksands. "The greater and lesser `Syrtis' were on the north coast of Africa, one west of Cyrene, the other near Carthage."

They strake sail (lowered the gear) ... Most commentators suppose that this refers to lowering sails and spars; but it is possible that the mast also was lowered. Susan and Michael Katzev, writing of the recovery of a ship of that same vintage from the sea off Cyprus in 1969, detailed the construction of the mast, observing that:

The mast step allowed the mast to pivot backward for easy lowering. When upright, small wedges locked the mast's heel in position.

In all probability, the mast also was lowered to prevent top-heaviness.

Acts 27:18-19 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next [day] they lightened the ship; 19 And the third [day] we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

All thought of profit had vanished. It was a survival situation, and everything that could be spared was cast overboard. Even some of the precious cargo went into the sea; but it appears from Acts 27:38 that some of it was retained at this stage.

Acts 27:20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on [us], all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Howson said anyone “who has ever been in a leaking ship, in a long, continuous gale, can know what is suffered under such circumstances. The strain, both of mind and body, and the incessant demand for the labor of all the crew, the terror of the passengers, the hopeless bailing out of the bilges, the driving of the storm, the effect of the cold and wet, make a scene of extraordinary confusion, anxiety and fatigue.”

Despair seems to have enveloped all on board. The ship, driven mercilessly before the savage Northeaster (the meaning of Euroclydon (yur-o-CLI-don)), had only two prospects, that of being driven onto the coast of Africa, or of being shattered upon some island in the Mediterranean.

Acts 27:21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

He reminds them of their disregard of his warning, which might make them listen now and he gives them a solemn assurance in the name of his God that there'll be no loss of life.

Acts 27:22-26 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of [any man's] life among you, but of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26. God hath given thee all them that sail with thee

Man's foolishness is God's opportunity. It is the Gospel's business to save man in distress not to find fault for them getting in such a mess. Paul reminds of his former advice in order to clench their attention. He then proceeds to furnish faith, inspire hope and promise safety.

There are a number of similarities in this narrative to what is said in Jonah. In that storm, the sailors threw the ship's wares overboard Jonah 1:5, and Jonah confessed that he feared God Jonah 1:9.

Paul's mention of what he had predicted was not in a spiteful attitude of "I told you so," but was for the purpose of inducing a more ready belief of what he was about to say.

"the angel of God, whose I am ... Here it was reaffirmed by the Lord's angel that Paul would stand before Caesar; and the message of cheer which Paul here delivered was significant, not his opinion, but as a clear word from the Almighty. The whole episode was calculated to inspire faith in Paul's word among the ship's passengers and crew.

"God hath given thee all them that sail with thee ..." reveals that Paul had been praying for the lives of all on board, and not merely for himself alone, and that God had answered his prayers by granting that

the entire company should not lose their lives. This is a truly magnificent glimpse of the character and spiritual life of the great apostle.

26. God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” This meant they would be shipwrecked on an island and not be cast upon the coast of Africa.

Before leaving this record of Paul's reassurance of those aboard the ship of Alexandria, it should be noted that many times wicked people are benefited marvelously by the mere fact of being in the company of the righteous. The sailors of this ship were selfish, and the soldiers cruel, but their lives were saved because of Paul. Likewise the prisoners would most certainly have been slaughtered except for the centurion's desire to spare Paul.

Acts 27:27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria (AUH-dree-ah), about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

The fourteenth night ... of tossing was now come when some sound of approaching shore struck upon the practiced ear of the sailors.

Driven up and down... Some commentators have accused Luke of error here; but any person who has ever been in a hurricane knows that winds come from opposite directions, depending upon the location of the eye of the storm, and the waves certainly go up and down. The sea of Adria is the Mediterranean Sea.

Drew near to some country ... They may have surmised this from the sound of breakers crashing on a distant shore. Their surmise was quickly confirmed by the soundings mentioned in the next verse.

Acts 27:28 And sounded, and found [it] twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found [it] fifteen fathoms.

Fathoms ... This measurement was about six feet; thus the water's depth was decreasing from 120 feet to 90 feet rather quickly. Howson tells us that the British Admiralty charts provide accurate soundings off Malta and most other places in the Mediterranean; and that the water depth is the same now as then.

WHY PEOPLE HUNT FOR MISTAKES IN ACTS

The reason why men are so anxious to find mistakes in the Bible lies in their secret hope that a mistake, in some infinitesimal area like the depth of the water off Malta, would also give them grounds for their hope that Luke was wrong when he recorded that they shall not escape cf:

Acts 17:31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by [that] man whom he hath ordained; [whereof] he hath given assurance unto all [men], in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Acts 27:29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

They cast four anchors ... and wished for the day... This paraphrase of the last clause suggests many a time in life when there is hardly anything to do except to cast anchor and wait for day, filling the hours with prayer, even as Paul did. The moment of truth was about to come to those tortured, bone-tired occupants of the doomed ship. It was a moment to try the hearts of men; and, from what happened immediately, some miserably failed the test.

Acts 27:30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

Flee out of the ship ... This the sailors would have done, leaving all on board to perish; for without them, the passengers could not have beached the ship. In this sad moment of fear and apprehension, they forgot the high and unselfish code of the seas, cravenly thinking to save their own lives, no matter what happened to others.

The impulse of self-preservation is so strong that it often defeats its own self. Buck Jones was playing in a nightclub that caught on fire. Because the doors opened in instead of swinging out, everyone trying to save themselves, there was a heap of crushed, burnt corpses at the door ... testifying to a spirit of selfishness in the heart of men at a time of great terror and jeopardy, thus, the Buck Jones Law requiring doors of businesses to open out.

Under colour ... They seemed to know that if their purpose was discovered, they would not have been allowed to do such a thing, hence their pretending to be putting out anchors at the bow of the vessel.

Acts 27:31-32 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

The unbelief of the sailors is seen in their refusal to accept Paul's assurance that no lives would be lost; but, by this time, the centurion and the soldiers had far too much respect for Paul's words to ignore the warning given here. They promptly cut the ropes, setting the dinghy free in the raging sea.

A glimpse of the working of Providence is seen in this episode. Although Paul had been assured by an "angel of God" that no lives

would be lost, he nevertheless, did not understand such a promise as releasing him from the necessity of due caution and prudence to be exercised by himself. God requires of all men that they themselves should do everything possible to reach desired ends, understanding that the providence of the Father begins where the ability of men leaves off.

Acts 27:33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought [them] all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

Fourteenth day ... This would have been reckoned from the onset of the storm shortly after sailing from Fair Havens in Crete.

Having taken nothing ... has reference to having had no "meal" in the usual sense. What eating they had done was by a mouthful here and there as chance afforded. As Milligan said, "All such expressions are, of course, hyperbole."

Acts 27:34 Wherefore I pray you to take [some] meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

Note the natural leadership of a man like Paul, who by the sheer weight of his moral authority and courage rises to the place of command in the hour of life's great emergencies. We may believe that one of the purposes of Luke in relating all the details of this great maritime disaster lies in what took place here. It is the prisoner Paul who rallied all on board, compelled them to eat, emphatically assured them that they would not die, and, a moment later, solemnly gave thanks before them all! This is a great example of moral courage, authority and intestinal fortitude ... guts in plain English, as we would say. The centurion saw this; and a bit later when the soldiers would have killed the prisoners, he too exhibited a similar courage by denying their request.

Acts 27:35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken [it], he began to eat. **36** Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took [some] meat. **37** And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

The solemnity and overpowering wonder of that priceless moment in Paul's life were so awesomely beautiful that the words Luke used to describe it take on something of the sanctity associated with the Lord's Supper; although, of course, this was only a case of ordinary eating in most extraordinary circumstances.

Gave thanks to God ... This thanks was not merely for the food, but for the promise that all should live. What an impression must have been etched forever into the minds of those who saw this prince among men, pausing in such circumstances to offer praise and thanksgiving to the Father in heaven!

It is the extreme emergency that calls forth the true leader. A friend of Coffman, "Pfc. Hicklin A. Harrel, Jr., was a member of a military detail in World War II sent on an excursion into enemy territory. All of the officers were killed, but Private Harrel rallied the company, discharged their assignment, and returned; whereupon he was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the United States Army, receiving the new rank on the field of battle."

Acts 27:38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

The purpose of throwing out the balance of the cargo was to reduce the ship's draught in order to make it possible to sail it closer to the shore.

Acts 27:39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

Here the necessity of the sailors continuing with the ship was apparent to all. Without their skilled hands, all would have been lost.

Acts 27:40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed [themselves] unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

Loosed the rudder bands ... The English Revised Version (1885) properly translated the term "rudders" here, contrasting with "the rudder" bands as in KJV. This was a statement once branded as one of Luke's mistakes, as it was alleged that "every fool knows a ship has only one rudder"; but here, as in all similar instances, Luke's absolute accuracy has been proved. Mention has already been made of the ancient ship raised from the depths of the Mediterranean off the coast of Cyprus, by means of funds provided by Oberlin College, and which is dated about 300 B.C. It is of a vintage like ships still plying the seas in Luke's day. cf: Acts 27:17.

Got one? See the picture in the National Geographic Magazine, Nov., 1974, page 622. It depicts a ship with dual steering oars to keep the ship on course. Though more efficient than a single rudder, the exposed oars were more vulnerable to damage.

All such comments should be revised in the light of the above depicted certainty that ancient vessels had more than one rudder, proving again the remarkable accuracy of the sacred author Luke.

Acts 27:41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

Where two seas met ... This was a barely submerged shoal, the sands of which had been piled together by water action on both sides. It was invisible; therefore they plowed the ship into it, with the result given in this verse. Fortunately, or providentially, this was near enough to the beach that all the passengers and crew could make it to land.

Acts 27:42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

This was the old Roman code, that the custodian of a prisoner should answer with his life for any who escaped; and the present emergency suggested to the soldiers that it would be better to kill the prisoners than to risk any of them getting away. Their heartless suggestion shows how little they regarded the providence of God which had allowed them to escape death ...

Acts 27:43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from [their] purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast [themselves] first [into the sea], and get to land:

Kept them from their purpose ... Only a command from the centurion was sufficient to do this, and he promptly gave it. The actual danger of prisoners escaping was genuine; and, accordingly, he commanded the soldiers who could swim to go overboard at once, thus getting to land first, and thereby being able to keep sharp watch on all of the prisoners

Acts 27:44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on [broken pieces] of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

The journey to Rome was thus interrupted by a disastrous shipwreck, Paul's fourth; but Luke would at once (in the next chapter) recount

the resumption of the trip, reporting what happened during the delay on the island of Malta. In it all the "finger of God" is clearly visible.

Sources: KJV Bible, theWord.com, Burton Coffman, BW Johnson, Adam Clark, FF Bruce, McKnight and JW McGarvey, George Fauli Commentaries, Wikipedia, and World Conquest.