

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

by

Frank E. Allen

Copyright @ 1931

CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

THE PRISONER CAPTAIN (Paul's Voyage and shipwreck) (Acts 27:1-44)

OUTLINE

Key verse - 23, 24

Paul placed in care of Julius, a centurion - visited friends at Sidon - transferred to another ship at Myra - contrary winds drove them to Crete - storm off coast of Crete drove them out to sea - terrible storm kept up for fourteen days - sailors lost hope - they heard breakers in the night - anchored till morning - Paul cheered and directed the crew - the ship grounded - all escape without loss of life.

1. God controls all the forces of nature.
2. God expects men to use means to carry out His plan.
3. Those who honor Him God will honor.
4. God gives divine protection to His own.
5. The true servant of God recognizes God's providence in the common things of life.
6. God knows the end from the beginning.
7. The life of a godly man is precious in the sight of God.

It was evidently the latter part of the summer when Festus had completed arrangements to send Paul to Rome. He was committed, with certain other prisoners, to the care of a centurion named Julius who was in charge of a band of Roman soldiers. The first ship in which they sailed was bound for the north-east part of the Aegean Sea, to a place called Adramyttium. Two of Paul's friends were with him, Luke, the writer of this narrative, and Aristarchus of Thessalonica. It seems to have taken about two months to complete the voyage.

FIRST PART OF THE VOYAGE

When the ship made the first stop at Sidon we have evidence that Paul had already won the confidence of the centurion, for he "**Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself**" (Acts 27:2).

The ship did not take the direct course toward the coast of proconsular Asia, as the commander had probably intended; but as the wind was contrary it sailed to the north-east of Cyprus and northward to the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia. There they would probably be aided by the land breezes and would be able to make headway slowly toward the port of Myra.

TRANSFERRED TO ANOTHER SHIP

At Myra, Julius found another ship, which had come from Alexandria and was sailing for Italy. He transferred his prisoners and soldiers to it. It was not unusual that a ship of Alexandria should be found in the harbor at Myra. Sir William Ramsay says: "Myra was one of the great harbors of the Egyptian service. It is, therefore, unnecessary and incorrect to say, as is often done, that the Alexandrian ship had blown out of its course. The ship was on its regular and ordinary course, and had quite probably been making a specially good run, for in the autumn there was always risk of the wind shifting round towards the north, and with the wind N.W. the Alexandrian ships could only fetch the Syrian coast . . . The steady westerly breezes which prevented ships from make the direct run from Sidon, were favorable for the direct run from Alexandria" (*Saint Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*, p. 319). They sailed slowly westward about one hundred miles, in the face of adverse winds, almost to Cnidus; but as the wind was so strongly against them they turned southward toward the island of Crete. They sailed around Cape Salmone, at the eastern point of the island, and anchored at a place then known, and still known, as Fair Havens. It is a harbor at the south-central portion of the island.

PAUL URGED THEM TO REMAIN

Winter was now drawing on and sailing was dangerous, because the Fast was now already gone by. Paul advised the sailors to remain where they were for the winter. The Fast fell on October the fifth. The time when the sea was especially dangerous was from September the fourteenth to November the eleventh. Paul warned them that if they attempted to go further the voyage would result in damage to the ship, the cargo and the passengers. The Roman officer took the advice of the master and owner of the ship rather than that of Paul. Fair Havens was not a commodious harbor in which to winter and the most of the sailors wanted to go on to Phoenix and there spend the winter. This seemed to be an entirely reasonable matter since Phoenix was another harbor on the southern shore of Crete, not over fifty miles distant, and only a few hours sail from where they were. "**when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete**" (Acts 27:13).

DRIVEN TO SEA

They had, however, not gone far when the wind changed as is common in that part of the sea. Instead of a southern there began to blow a violent northern wind. The Cretan mountains towered above to a height of over seven thousand feet. From these mountains there came down a typhonic wind driving with terrific fury from the north-east. That is the meaning of the term, Euroclydon, which is here used. An old sailor said to Sir William Ramsay that the wind comes down from the mountains fit to blow a ship out of the water.

The ship was driven in a south-westerly direction. They found a temporary shelter to the leeward of a little island called Clauda, which is about twenty-three miles from the Fair Havens, and with great difficulty under-girded, or frapped, the ship, that is, wound great cables around the hull. This is only done in the greatest extremity. It is done to prevent the ship from springing a leak and foundering, owing to the great strain upon the mast in a terrible storm. The old single-masted ships were more apt to spring a leak in a storm because the strain all came in one place and was not distributed over the ship as in modern vessels. This was no small ship. It would be small in comparison with our largest ocean liners, but it was not small when, in addition to its cargo of grain, it could carry two hundred and seventy-six passengers.

TAKE ON THE BOAT

They had evidently not thought it worthwhile to take on board the little life boat as they were intending to sail only the short distance to Phoenix. But when the storm came on they could not pull the boat on deck until they came under the shelter of the island of Clauda. Here they took on the boat, though with the greatest difficulty.

FEAR THE QUICKSANDS

Their greatest fear was of being driven upon the quicksands upon the African coast, known as the Greater Syrtis, therefore they kept the right side of the vessel to the gale, or as a sailor would probably say, on "the starboard tack." Thus the ship was driven in a direction slightly to the north of westward. But even after the ship had been under-girded with cables and the sail had been lowered, it was in danger of foundering with the terrific strain of wind and waves. They therefore lightened the ship by throwing overboard everything that was unnecessary. The next day, as conditions grew worse, they cast out the tackling of the ship, by which is probably meant the "main-yard," a huge spar almost as long as the ship, and to throw over which it took the combined efforts of both passengers and crew.

SAILORS LOST HOPE

The storm drove on with terrific fury day after day. They did not see a direct ray of light from sun or stars and had little idea of their location. Even the sailors gave up all hope of being saved. They had little desire to eat and no doubt very little opportunity as they were tossed with the fury of the typhoon. They had thrown over the freight and probably most of the food.

PAUL COMFORTS THEM

What a contrast was the simple faith and firm conviction of Paul with the terror-stricken sailors, who had, in all probability, been kneeling, or prostrating themselves upon the deck of the vessel, crying out to Castor and Pollux, the twin guardian gods of the ships, as the Romans believed. But though they had prayed to their gods day after day there was no response. Like the prophets of Baal on Carmel, their gods heard not.

We often say that “man’s extremity is God’s opportunity,” and it was so in this instance. Paul now became the hero of the hour. He stood forth in the midst of this group of two hundred and seventy-five men and exhorted, comforted and cheered them. He reminded them of his former warning that they should not have loosed from Crete. This would come home with telling force now that they all felt that they were lost. Then he said, what none but a man of faith could say, **“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”** (Acts 27:22). As Paul said this the men would listen with the utmost attention. Probably some would be glad, ready to cling to any hope, and others would sneer at this prisoner who presumed to know so much about the sea. He continued by saying, that there stood by him an angel of God, telling him not to fear for he must be brought before Caesar, and that God had given him, in answer to his prayer, the promise that all who were on the ship would be brought to shore alive. Then Paul added: **“For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve . . . Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me”** (Acts 27:23, 25).

If he had been merely guessing, he might have asserted that they would be saved, but he could not have told them that they would be cast upon a certain island and that all would be saved, without having supernatural knowledge received from the angel of God.

BREAKERS AHEAD

There was no relaxation from the fierceness of the storm or the tenseness of the danger for many days. On the fourteenth night, as the tempest was blowing off the Adriatic and driving them through that part of the sea then known as the Adrea, about midnight the ears of the sailors caught a sound which sent added terror into the hearts of the stoutest of them. They heard the boom of the breakers on a rocky shore. They sounded and found the water twenty fathoms deep, and when they sounded a little later and found it was but fifteen fathoms they thought that in a few moments they would be on the rocks. So close did they seem to be to the shore that they did not dare to cast anchor from the bow of the ship and allow her to swing around lest she should be dashed upon the rocks. They also wished to hold the ship in the best position to drive her upon the beach in the morning. They cast four anchors out and anchored her from the stern. The method of anchoring a vessel in a storm has been questioned, but there are many proofs, both ancient and modern, that it has been done. In a storm and in grips with life or death men do not always stop to ask what has been done; they will try any extremity. If they could but hold the ship till morning then they could see where best to land: this was all they desired. The moments must have passed very slowly as they wished for the day.

SAILORS TRY TO ESCAPE

During the darkness the sailors were planning to escape in the little boat and leave the soldiers and passengers to their fate. Paul’s eagle eye caught their movements and discerned their intentions although they were pretending to cast anchors out of the foreship. He told the centurion and the soldiers, who drew their short swords and cut the ropes, allowing the boat to fall off into the sea.

PAUL ADVISED EATING

As the darkness began to break Paul urged them all to take food, reminding them of their long fast since the storm began, and saying that it would be much better for them to take food as they would need all the strength they could muster to escape from the sea. But even in this extremity, before Paul had eaten, he asked God's blessing upon the bread. When he showed courage and cheer the rest also ate, were much refreshed and more cheerful. They could see that Paul's prophecy was being fulfilled.

GROUNDING THE SHIP

A very difficult task was still before them; to run the ship aground in such a way as to allow them to escape to land in a quiet bay where they could swim to shore. In order to lighten the ship so that it would draw as little water as possible and make the best speed when they let her run ashore, they threw out the wheat into the sea. They discovered a creek with a sandy beach, in what is now known as Saint Paul's bay, where they planned to ground the ship. They cut off the anchors and hoisted up the foresail. They loosed the ropes which held up the rudder paddles so that they could steer the ship. With rapidly increasing speed the ship began to turn. She swung around clear of the rocky precipice and toward the creek. The wind and the waves roaring behind her drove her into the bay and the sailors guided her as they had intended so as to drive her into the sand and mud of the beach. Inexperienced men could not have done this. This was why Paul had warned the centurion that the sailors must remain in the ship if they were to be saved. A little island, which from the distance had looked like the mainland, so directed the sea that it ran through and met the waves from the opposite direction. The waves beat upon the hinder part of the ships so violently that they soon broke it to pieces. The forepart had been driven into the sand and mud so deeply that it held fast, and in the comparative calm of the bay they were all able to swim or float on the wreckage of the ship to the shore. This was a very remarkable fact since there were two hundred and seventy-six people on board.

THE PRISONERS SPARED

Had it not been for the favor which Paul had won with the centurion the prisoners would no doubt have been killed lest they might escape. Paul had won the favor of them all, and for his sake the rest of the prisoners were spared.

THE RECORD ACCURATE

Mr. James Smith, in "*The Voyage and Shipwreck of Paul*," has shown that all the details of this description by Luke are most carefully and accurately stated, and that it must have been written by an eye-witness. Sir William Ramsay in his book, "*Saint Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen*," has shown that the record is correct. Conybeare and Howson in, "*The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*," have likewise pointed out the trustworthiness of this record. These furnish a strong testimony to the authenticity of the Book of Acts.

Take for instance this one fact concerning the depth of the sea as found by the soundings, first twenty and then fifteen fathoms. A vessel passing Koura Point on the island of Malta would meet with just such conditions, where the ship might be no more than a quarter of a mile from the breakers, but, when traveling in a northwesterly direction, pass over the depths as indicated in the record and still have time enough to anchor before running upon the rocks beyond, at the farther side of what is now known as Saint Paul's bay. When one sits down by a nautical chart of the north coast of Malta, he is impressed with the striking manner in which the coast fulfills the conditions as described in this chapter of The Acts.

Another portion of the record is clearly confirmed in the investigation of practical seamen, who have estimated that a ship drifting under the circumstances here described would probably drift thirty-six miles in twenty-four hours. With the wind driving her at that rate for thirteen days the ship would travel four hundred and eighty-six miles, which is approximately the distance from the island of Clauda to Saint Paul's bay in the island of Malta.

THE SAILORS BEWILDERED

Some have thought it strange that these experienced sailors did not know that it was the island of Melita, or Malta, until they had landed. But men might sail the sea over the same route for a lifetime and never pass close by the side of the island of Malta on which they were cast at this time. Ships would, when possible, keep at a safe distance from the rocks on this part of the island, and if they landed at all it would be at a safe harbor. Moreover, it was raining and storming, and the sky was dark by day as well as by night. They had seen no land in the day time by which they might locate their position, and when they neared land at this time it was on a dark night. Men have often passed their own houses without knowing it during a storm at night.

PAUL THE COMMANDER

One of the most remarkable facts about the voyage is this, that Paul, who was being taken a prisoner to Rome, became, during the voyage from Caesarea to Melita, the most respected man on board the ship and virtually the commander of the vessel. His faith, courage, cheerfulness, reliability, and particularly his divinely guided foresight, had won for him the respect of both soldiers and sailors and had influenced the commander of the ship so that he acted upon his advice. Now, having followed Paul over this notable voyage, let us leave him upon the island for the present and gather up some of the lessons presented in the narrative.

GOD CONTROLS THE FORCES OF NATURE

God controls all the forces of nature. One might suppose at the beginning of this storm that it was out of the control of God; that it was hindering his work rather than promoting it. But it is evident that it was God's peculiar way of taking Paul towards Rome, of vindicating him in the eyes of the centurion and the Roman soldiers of anything verging on a seditious character, and therefore, of giving him a favorable introduction and reception at Rome.

When they would arrive there Julius would no doubt tell what he knew of Paul, of his behavior while under his care, and of the great help that he was to him and the Emperor's soldiers in the greatest peril that they had ever known.

God took Paul by a way that he knew not. He had assured him before he started that he should reach Rome, and He assured him again in the midst of the sea that he would stand before Caesar. The typhoon which drove the ship so many days through the sea was under the perfect control of God. Without it Paul would not have had the favor that he did in Rome at the end of the voyage, and therefore less opportunity to clear himself of the charge that was laid against him. He perhaps would not have had the opportunity to preach in his own hired house at Rome, while he was being held a prisoner awaiting trial, if it had not been for the confidence which the soldiers gained in him during this voyage.

If, during the early part of this journey, Paul had told the sailors that his God held the storm in control, they would have probably laughed at him in scorn. They came to realize, before it was over, that Paul's God knew what was about to take place and was able to preserve their lives. They could not but see that God's power reached out over the sea. Perhaps some of them came to believe on Him.

The Psalmist understood the power of God over the waves, centuries before this, and his words were probably a great comfort to Paul, Aristarchus and Luke during these days of fearful testing. This is part of what he said:

“The storm is changed into calm
At his command and will;
So that the waves which raged before,
Now quiet are and still.

Then are they glad, because at rest
And quiet now they be:
So to the haven he them brings;
Which they desired to see.”

“He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven” (Psalm 107:29, 30).

Dr. Farrar told the following incident which occurred on a railway in eastern Missouri. One summer morning a twelve-car train containing the members of a Sunday School was bound for a picnic at a point about fifty miles distant. The train had not proceeded more than half way when a thunder-storm broke. The rain fell in torrents. The engineer was worried for fear the terrific downfall might cause a washout, and he slowed down to about thirty-five miles an hour. As the train swung around a curve and approached a small station, which it was to pass without stopping, the engineer, peering through the curtain of rain, saw that the switch just ahead was open. It meant a terrible disaster. He closed the throttle and put on the brakes in an instant. “Better stick to it,” he shouted to the fireman, “hundreds of children on board.”

“I mean to, God help us all!” was the answer. His last words were drowned by a terrific crash of thunder which came with a flash of lightning that seemed to strike the ground just ahead of the engine. The next thing they knew they were past the station, still riding safely on the main line of rails. The train came to a stop and the engineer and conductor hurried back to discover what had happened and how the train had passed the open switch. They found that the lightning had struck squarely between the switch and the rail and had closed the switch. “It was an act of God,” said the engineer. God controls the storm - yes all the forces of nature - whether on land or on sea.

James T. Fields portrays a vivid poetic picture of a storm at sea. When the ship was shattered and the most courageous feared death, he says:

“As thus we sat in darkness,
Each one busy with his prayers,
‘We are lost!’ the captain shouted
As he staggered down the stairs.

“But his little daughter whispered,
As she took his icy hand,
‘Isn’t God upon the ocean
Just the same as on the land?”

“Then we kissed the little maiden,
And we spake in better cheer,
And we anchored safe in harbour
When the morn was shining clear.”

GOD EXPECTS MEN TO USE MEANS

God expects men to use means to carry out His plans. Though Paul had strong faith in God, he did not feel that he was relieved of the necessity of using means. Luke and Paul helped the sailors with a part of their work, in throwing over the tackling of the ship, and it is likely that they helped them whenever they could be of assistance.

It was a part of the sailor’s duty to take on the little boat that they might use it in an emergency; to bind the ship around with cables; to lower the sails; to steer away from the direction of the quicksands; to lighten the vessel in the storm; to sound the depth, and to remain in the ship to control her when running toward the shore. Paul saw the need of these things as well as did the sailors.

Some men in Paul’s place would have said: “God has said He will protect me and bring me to Rome. I am in the hands of the Roman officials, and I have no power to do anything, much less to direct the men who hold me as a prisoner as to how they shall act. I will simply wait and leave things in their hands.” Paul did not reason in that way. He was constantly alert in the effort to do all that he could with his own hands, and in warning and advising the sailors and soldiers.

God expects us to use means, whether in ordinary matters, or in the crises of life. He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly. He who will not sow shall not reap, notwithstanding the fact that God has promised that the ground shall bring forth the harvest in its season. If we will not make use of the strength and intelligence that God has given us, we need not expect His protection or His blessing. God can work without means, but under ordinary circumstances He does not do so. David believed that God could overcome the giant, but he also believed that God wanted him to use his sling as skillfully as he was able.

HONOR GOD AND HE WILL HONOR YOU

Those who honor Him God will honor. Paul honored God and as a result God honored him. Paul told the heathen crew that God had promised him that not one of them would be drowned, and he believed God that it would come to pass as He had said. They might cry to Castor and Pollux as much as they liked, but they could not help them; God only could save them. This was not the first time that Paul had honored God. He had been honoring God for many years and God honored him from the first of the voyage. Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to land and receive refreshment from his friends the very first stop which they made.

Joseph honored God by refusing to indulge in sin though greatly tempted. He seemed to be disgraced at first because of his refusal, but afterward he was given great honor. Not only was he brought out from prison, but he was placed over all the land of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh who sat upon the throne.

Daniel honored God by refusing to bow down to any but the living God. Men plotted against him and tried to disgrace him, but God protected him and honored him by placing him in a position of power in the Babylonian empire, and later over the whole Medo-Persian empire. The fire did not harm Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego any more than the sea harmed Paul. The lions did not harm Daniel any more than a poisonous serpent would harm the great apostle.

When W.T. Stead was asked to take up a certain new work he consulted his friend Dean Church on the matter. As Mister Stead left the Dean he expressed his assurance that he would be divinely guided. The Dean expressed some astonishment at his tone of certainty. "I would feel swindled," replied Mister Stead, "if I were not divinely guided." "Why so," asked the Dean? "Why, I read in the book of Proverbs, '**in all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths.**' I have acknowledged Him, and I know I shall be directed." He had asked the Lord, "Shall I go up?" And the Lord said, "Go up. **them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed**" (I Samuel 2:30).

DIVINE PROTECTION TO GOD'S OWN

God gives divine protection to His own. The angel of the Lord appeared to Paul in the midst of the stormy deep in the night. How did the angel of God know where Paul was? God knew every movement of the vessel, even in the midst of the great sea and in the darkness of the night. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him.

Though one might take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there God's hand would lead him and His right hand uphold him (Psalm 139). God gave Paul the assurance that not a hair of his head would fall as a result of the desperate storm.

It is at the moment when human strength can accomplish the least that the Lord assures His servants that He will be with them; that He will never leave them nor forsake them. It was when conditions seemed darkest in Jerusalem that the Lord appeared to Paul and assured him of protection and future service. It was when all hope had been given up on the part of the sailors that the Lord told Paul that all would be saved. **“The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them”** (Psalm 34:7).

When the outlook seemed very dark in Israel and the little nation seemed overwhelmed by a great military power, the Lord appeared to Gideon and assured him that by a little force of three hundred faithful men he would be able to defeat the great host of the enemy and set his nation free.

When the proud conquering host of Assyria was face to face with the little band left within the walls of Jerusalem, and the few who were left wanted to give up; it was then that the Lord sent His angel and, by His mighty arm, smote in one night the flower of the enemy, leaving their corpses lying without the city and the remaining remnant of the host of Sennacherib broken and disheartened. During the darkest hour of that siege the Lord assured Hezekiah that the enemy would not come within the city nor shoot an arrow there, that by the way which he came by the same he would return.

Nor has God's protecting power been displayed merely in ancient times. He is able to deliver today as He was in the days of Paul. We are told that during the Boxer uprising in China, the Lord had made provision for some of the missionaries who were in imminent danger of their lives and knew no way of escape. A native Christian came rushing into the compound with the news that a caravan was at the gate of the city, ready to start across the desert of Gobi, but the trader was unexpectedly unable to go and was anxious to dispose of the caravan. The missionaries hastened to the spot, and there, as one of them said, was the caravan which the Lord had provided. There were even servants and provisions. Thus weeks before these servants of the Lord had known or thought of their future need, their Lord had been preparing for them, and after several weary weeks, He brought them all, men and women, in safety to the haven of rest, to civilization and friends where they were received, welcomed and protected. The Lord is the same **“yesterday, today, and tomorrow!”**

GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN COMMON THINGS

The true servant of God recognizes God's providence in the common things of life. Paul did not wait until he was delivered from the storm to thank God for His goodness. He thanked Him for the food which was provided, even though it was coarse and cold, and was eaten under difficulties. He recognized in it God's blessing and His provision for their needs at that hour. Paul might have complained that they had been prevented from eating so long, and that now they had so little, and it was difficult to eat in the midst of a violent storm.

He did not murmur, but was thankful for little things, as well as great; he saw in this provision a foretaste of the greater provision and blessings which God had in store for him. The man shows little of the Christian spirit of thankfulness to God, who does not see in the provision which God gives to him every day and at every meal, even though that meal be plain and coarse, the blessing of God in supplying his wants for that hour. It is a sad commentary on any so-called Christian community where the blessing is not asked at meals and God is not thanked for His provision for the day.

Henry W. Frost once wrote: "Nothing so pleases God in connection with our prayer as our praise, and nothing so blesses the man who prays as the praise which he offers. I got a great blessing once in China in this connection. I had received sad news from home, and deep shadows had covered my soul. I prayed, but the darkness did not vanish. I summoned myself to endure, but the darkness only deepened. Just when I went to an inland station and saw on the wall of the mission house these words: "Try Thanksgiving.' I did, and in a moment every shadow was gone, not to return. Most people pray little, but praise less. If other things have seemed to fail let us 'try thanksgiving'."

God can protect His people by the small things as well as the great ones. When Felix of Uola and his followers were fleeing from their pursuers they took refuge in a cave. Just after they entered a spider spun his web across the opening. The pursuers coming along glanced toward the cave, but noticing the spider's web across the opening decided that no one had entered there, so marched on. After they had passed on Felix and his men came out. When he saw the spider's web he said: "With God a spider's web is as an army. Without God an army is but as a spider's web."

GOD KNOWS THE END

God knows the end from the beginning. God could foretell from the first the result of this voyage. Even while Paul was a prisoner in Jerusalem, before he had been tried, and before he had been held a prisoner for a long time, the Lord told him that he need not fear, that he should go to Rome. Then again, before the storm began, God enabled Paul to foretell the result of the voyage. And again in the blackest hour in the midst of the storm He reassured Paul of the preservation of all on board. It is a marvelous thing, that from a wreck during a terrible storm all the people on board should be saved alive. God saved them for Paul's sake. He had told Paul that He would do this. One of the striking things in the Word of God which differentiates it from other books, is that over and over the Lord made known to His people what was to take place many years in the future. Near the very beginning of the life of man upon earth God made known the fact that Christ was coming who should conquer Satan. Nearly all the important events in the history of Israel were predicted. The Lord Jesus told the disciples what was to take place in His own life, that He was to die and rise again from the dead. He told them of the coming disasters upon the Jewish nation. He has told us of great events yet in the future. All this should lead us to be satisfied to rest our whole future with Him in perfect confidence that He will make all things work together for our good. If we feel depressed we should remember that our case is not more threatening than that of Paul, yet he trusted God and was of good cheer. He brought good cheer to the hearts of the sailors who had lost hope.

An old Scotch woman who tramped about selling goods was in the habit of tossing a stick into the air when she come to the cross roads and taking whichever direction the stick pointed. One day she was seen tossing it several times. On being questioned, she said that the road to the right looked so drear-like that she tossed the stick till it pointed to the left, as that appeared to be a more inviting way. We go to God for guidance, but if His way seems dull we often choose what seems to be a brighter one, forgetting that He sees the end as well as the beginning.

We may learn a lesson from Rabbi Eliezer, who, when standing with Rabbi Joshua, saw a fox running upon Mount Zion. Rabbi Joshua wept, but Rabbi Eliezer laughed. "Wherefore dost thou laugh?" said Joshua. "Nay," wherefore does thou weep?" asked Eliezer. "I weep," was the answer, "because I see what was written in the Lamentations fulfilled: because of Mount Zion which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it." "And therefore," said Eliezer, "I laugh; for when I see with mine own eyes that God has filled His threatening to the very letter, I have already a pledge that not one of His promises will fail, for He is ever more ready to show mercy than judgment."

LIFE OF GODLY MEN PRECIOUS

The life of a godly man is precious in the sight of God. God saved the others on the ship for Paul's sake. "**lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee**" (Acts 27:24). This promise seems to indicate that Paul had been praying and asking for all those on the ship, and that God had told him that He would save them for his sake. God could have saved Paul, Aristarchus and Luke, and allowed the others, sailors and soldiers alike, to drown. Then Paul would have been free. This might have been Paul's prayer but it was not. Paul desired, not only the physical safety, but the spiritual salvation of all those with him. God manifested His mercy in saving them from a watery grave and giving them the testimony of His power and grace. It is very likely that many of them were saved from their sins also, through the instrumentality of Paul.

It is worth while to keep good company. "**Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful**" (Psalm 1:1). The most of Lot's family did the very opposite of this; they sought the company of the wicked in Sodom. When Abraham pleaded with God that He would spare Sodom, the Lord promised that He would spare the city if there were ten righteous in it. There were, in all probability, that many in the family of Lot, counting his sons-in-law. Most of them feared not God or the warning of His servant. What a blessing they might have been to the whole city if they had believed! God was gracious to Lot and saved him from the ruins; but the whole city was destroyed because some of his children were skeptical and immoral.

In December, 1922, while she was in the mission hospital at Aleppo, so Mrs. E. Martin writes: "I could see the storm raging. . . . The kind hospital Doctor turned from the window to me. 'It is a fearful day,' he said, 'and I do hope Dr. Martin is not just on his way back from Idlib. If the fields get soaked there will be no possibility of a motor getting through them.' It was the day fixed for the Doctor's return, and if his car would stick he would have to spend the night in the open fields, or, at best in a miserable Moslem hut. Times were then bad in Syria. Wars, insurrections, and brigandage made traveling hazardous; and it was most dangerous to be out after nightfall.

“There was just at that time an American gentleman in the Aleppo hospital who, and his party, when coming from Antioch to Aleppo, had been attacked and fired on. He was badly wounded, and one of his companions was shot dead.” Shortly before this on the journey from Antioch to Aleppo, on a lonely part of the way, five armed Arabs had galloped from behind the rocks and had threatened Dr. and Mrs. Martin. They however, had suddenly disappeared. God’s protection was manifest to them. Mrs. Martin continues: “All this passed through my mind in the long hours of waiting and suspense, and I seemed to hear my husband’s comforting voice saying to me, as was his wont: ‘Trust in the Lord for ever.’”

“Soon I heard a well-known step in the corridor. The door opened, and in came Dr. Martin, tired, but happy-looking. ‘I had a remarkable experience,’ he said to me. ‘We left Idlib this morning - three Ford cars and in each one four passengers and the driver. The rains had changed the fields into a mire - you know there is no road from Idlib - and the dense clay sticking on the wheels made it nearly impossible for the vehicles to proceed. I sent my prayers to the Lord, and whenever I prayed our car moved on, but when I stopped the car stopped too, having stuck fast. Several times we sank into a hole of stiff mud, and once so deeply that it seemed impossible that we could get out again. The passengers and the driver worked to the utmost but the car did not move. They were despairing. I, inside the motor car, sent my supplication to the Lord, and He heard my voice, and **‘He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings’** (Psalm 40:2). The last part of the journey was on rocky ground. So we arrived in Aleppo. Thanks be to the Lord for His mercies.’ And what about the other two cars, I ventured? ‘I never saw them again,’ he replied. ‘I am afraid the poor people will have a bad experience.’ After a day or two we learned that they had not been able to get through at all, and had been obliged to spend the night in wretched quarters in a poor wayside village.” Mrs. Martin closes thus: “**The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth**” (Psalm 145:18). The Lord brought the other passengers safely through the storm and the dangerous road because of the presence and prayers of one of His devoted servants. Like Paul, God gave him all those who were with him.

“Wher’er the path-way lead,
He gives to me no helpless, broken reed,
But His own hand sufficient for my need.
So where He leads me I can safely go;
And in the blest hereafter I shall know
Why, in His wisdom, He hath led me so.”

QUESTIONS (Acts 27:1-44)

1. Under whose care was Paul placed on his way to Rome?
2. What friends of Paul were with him?
3. Where was the first stop and how was Paul treated?
4. Where and why did they change ships?
5. Why did they pass to the south of Crete?
6. About what time of year was it?

7. What advice did Paul give at Fair Havens?
8. Why did they not reach Phoenix?
9. At what island did they pause while they undergirded the ship?
10. What else did they do to help the ship ride the storm?
11. What brought good cheer to Paul?
12. What was the sailors' fear as they drifted?
13. How did Paul encourage the sailors and soldiers?
14. How is it evident from this record that God controls the forces of nature?
15. How is it evident from Paul's actions that God expects us to use means to carry out his plans?
16. How had Paul honored God and how did God honor him?
17. Why did the angel say the others on board were to be saved?
18. How did Paul teach us to give thanks for common things?
19. How is it evident from this record that God knows the end from the beginning?
20. Give some facts, as here stated, which prove the accuracy of the record of Scripture?

~ end of chapter 42 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
