



"Deceived By The South Wind Blowing Softly"
"A Bible Commentary On Acts 27"
"Effective Expositions For Life"

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Scripture: Acts 27:1-44

Introduction

I want to begin this article by saying that I sincerely love the Apostle Paul as one of the greatest men of God whoever lived. Earlier in this newsletter, I mentioned the dynamic ministry of Dr. Billy Graham who recently went home to be with Jesus. I told you that I considered Dr. Graham to be only second to the Apostle Paul in his standing as one of God's greatest servants. Truly, Paul was God's choice to replace the diabolical disciple called Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus and ultimately went to the valley of Gehenna to hang himself and take his own life. Peter and the other disciples tried to run ahead of God in replacing Judas Iscariot with the man named Mathias, but I am totally convinced that Jesus had planned to replace Judas with Paul to become the Apostle of our Lord to the Gentile world. I say this because Mathias was never heard of again, and because during the writing of my Master's Degree thesis on Paul, I just came adamantly to believe that Paul was truly appointed by Jesus to become the thirteenth Apostle in order to become God's messenger to the Gentiles. Yes, Paul the Apostle was a dynamic vessel of honor to our Lord and a man that still benefits the Kingdom of God today through his marvelous writings. This article is about Paul the Apostle as he boarded a small boat and later a larger ship to make his way across the Mediterranean Sea to the capitol city of Rome because he appealed his case to Caesar when he was brutally arrested in Jerusalem under false charges, taken to Caesarea where he spent two years in prison, and then escorted by soldiers onto these boats headed for Rome.

The main purpose of Paul submitting to this imprisonment because of false charges and false imprisonment was not to defend his case, but to have the privilege of sharing the Gospel message with the Roman Emperor where he had always desired to go. Paul was put on a small boat at Caesarea, taken North to Sidon, and then he and his captors set sail for Rome. After many days out in a tumultuous ocean, Paul's ship landed in the small harbor called Fair Havens. After many days in this harbor of Fair Havens, the ship's mariners got ready to leave again for Rome, but Paul the Apostle told them that it was not safe to leave and travel back on the oceans because winter time was upon them and the sea would be treacherous and the likely-hood of disaster would face them as they journeyed on. Yet, like so many times today, these mariners and Roman soldiers would not believe the man of God, and so they pushed forward and left the protection of the Fair Havens harbor and ended up in total shipwreck on the turbulent sea. They had to learn the hard way that when God gives you a personal warning by one of His anointed servants, you best pay attention and obey his warning. But you see folks, the problem was that when they were trying to decide whether to leave Fair Havens, **the wind was blowing softly giving the impression that it would be good weather, but they were enormously deceived by this soft wind.** And, may I say that this is happening everywhere today. Satan sends the soft winds to give the impression that everything will be alright, and then a decision is made to move forward in life totally

disregarding any warning the true man of God gives. The end result of this is total disaster, and everyone of you reading this article can readily attest the fact that you too have made bad decisions based upon inadequate information because you did not obey the Word of God, and now, your life is filled with horrible scars and serious regrets because you are trying to live with the ruins of improper and wrong decisions. I just wished that every professing born-again child of God would stop and wait until God says the way is clear, and then move out according to the wisdom of God's man from the Bible. There would assuredly be so much less heartache and scars if people were not so easily deceived by the soft winds which Satan sends to give us the wrong impression about what we should do. Let's take a long and detailed look at this wonderful Scriptural passage and learn all that we can so that we don't end up shipwrecked in our lives.

I. NOTICE THE ROUTE TO THIS DECEPTION. vs. 1-8

As we begin to take a look at Acts 27, we need to notice the steps that were taken by the mariners and the Roman soldiers as they carried Paul toward Rome. They started out on this voyage to Rome with a self-assurance that everything would be okay, but in just a few days when they arrived in Fair Havens the character of their journey changed tremendously. They were convinced that everything would be fine as they traveled, but when the time came for them to listen to Paul, the man of God, they decided they were smarter than he was, and thus they rejected his warning. Some of this rejection probably began with the easy going and comfortableness of the first part of their trip. Let's take a look at the beginning of their trip and see how they ended up on the route to deception.

A. This deceptive route provided many friends for Paul. vs. 1-2

As Paul started on this long trip to Rome from Caesarea, God gloriously gave him two dear friends to begin the journey with him. The one friend was Dr. Luke who wrote this Book of Acts, and then there was a friend from Macedonia named Aristarchus. I believe that these two servants of God had been ministering to Paul in Caesarea probably for the two years Paul had been incarcerated there. When the time came for Paul to leave in chains with Julius the Centurion from Rome, Aristarchus and Luke decided to travel with him not even knowing what was ahead for all of them. This commitment by these two brothers in Christ had to be an encouragement to Paul, but sometimes when we have dear friends to travel with us, we may have the tendency to get misdirected by our friends and not foresee the dangers that might be ahead. Truly, friends are a blessing from God, but we must be careful to not get distracted from the journey before us by the fellowship of those who are traveling with us. Without a doubt, Paul had some great friends, but when I look at this story I notice that when the time came for Paul to try to convince the sailors to not travel out of the Fair Havens harbor, there was no attempt by Luke and Aristarchus to help Paul try to convince the mariners and the soldiers to remain there until after the winter was past. Therefore, we must be careful in our journeys for Jesus to not become distracted by the presence of our friends.



The Maritima Port In Caesarea

B. This deceptive route permitted much freedom for Paul. v. 3

As we look carefully at verse 3, we can see that Paul was very respected by the centurion named Julius. I say this because when the boat they were on arrived the next day about 70 miles north of Caesarea, Paul was shown much kindness by Julius and was given much freedom to go unto some of his friends there so that he could relax and refresh himself. This was an enormous act by a Roman centurion, and it just reveals the sovereignty of God in ministering to His special servant, especially after spending two years in prison at Caesarea undeservedly. Truly, it seemed that Paul was going to have a very comfortable trip all the way to Rome, but because we have read the entire story, we know what was ahead for him and his friends. Therefore folks, it is of utmost importance that when our journey is going well with much comfortable, we must not, and we dare not believe that it will be smooth sailing all the way to our destination. What I am saying is that we must maintain a strict vigilance as we travel on the journey for our Lord, even if we have friends on board to encourage us. We must never forget that Satan will do everything to stop and hinder us from taking the Gospel message to whatever Rome God is sending us. For sure, we need to enjoy the good times, but never to the extent of pretending that there will be smooth sailing all the way. Again, the reason is that we have an arch-enemy called Satan that will try to stop us from getting to our Rome in any way that he possibly can.

C. This deceptive route produced mighty forces for Paul and his friends. v. 4

In verse 4 of our text, we are told that when Paul and his colleagues began sailing further west, they suddenly were facing strong winds which were blowing in the opposite direction to which they were traveling. These winds were so bad that the mariners decided that they would hug the northern coast of the Island of Cyprus which provided the leeward shelter to protect them from the fierce winds. With the Island of Cyprus on their south side and the main land on the north, the 276 people on board this ship were protected from the contrary winds, but this protection would not last very long as we will see. You might remember that Cyprus was the home island for Barnabus, and it was Paul's first stop on his first missionary journey when Barnabus was traveling with him, along with John Mark. We need to remember that Paul and his friends sailed out of Sidon westward on the Mediterranean Sea with seeming comfort and much assurance that everything would be all right. Why, they even had the kindness of Julius, the centurion, who showed them much courtesy. In spite of the fact that Paul was a prisoner and his friends were with him, it just seems that they would continue on their journey safely and without problems, but this assurance would be short-lived because the fierce winds had just begun, and these initial winds were nothing to what lay ahead for them. Often times, Satan allows everything to look good for a short while, but soon and very soon with the permission of God, like He allowed to come Job's way, the devil will begin his attacks in order to dissuade and stop the advancement of our Lord's children. Paul had wanted for a long time to go all the way to Rome to share the Gospel message with Nero, and now that he was on his way, Satan is about to raise his head in defiance. The storms Satan send our way are usually small to begin with, but they usually get stronger with more ultimate damage as we go further along.

D. This deceptive route promised manifold favors for Paul and his friends. vs. 5-8

The early contrary winds had subsided somewhat, and now Paul and his associates sailed into Myra, a harbor on the main land of Asia, and it is here that Julius the centurion conscripts a much larger grain ship coming from Alexandria in Egypt which is continuing its journey on to Rome. This new much larger boat promises better traveling with more safety, more room, and seemingly for sure, a definite arrival in Italy. From all obvious indication, it just seemed that God was opening the windows of heaven for this group of prisoners, sailors and Roman Soldiers. It had to seem that they were now on their way to their destination with the favor and blessings of God.

As the journey continued for Paul and his colleagues for the next several days after leaving Myra on the much larger ship, it just seemed that they were well on their way to their planned destination, with the exception that the winds were not cooperating with them again due to the fact that they were not blowing strong enough. So, they had gone from contrary winds hitting them in the face just a few days before until now, there just seemed to have no winds strong enough to push

them on to their destination in Rome. Because of the slight winds now, the mariners and the ship captain decided to go just south of the Island of Crete and direct the vessel to the small harbor at Fair Havens just near Lasea. The ship sailed into the harbor where they spent many days waiting and hoping that some brand new storms would subside before they set sail to go on to Rome. It was here in Fair Havens that there must have been an argument between Paul and his colleagues with the ship captain, his mariners, and others on the ship. Because winter time had already begun, it just seemed to Paul that it was too dangerous to even contemplate leaving their small safe haven they were in, in order to head out into the open waters of the sea. Let me share with you some of what Dr. John MacArthur says in his commentary on this chapter of Acts concerning the discussion between Paul and the others. This is found on page 348 of the second volume on Acts, Chapter 27. "Apparently the sailors and Julius had a discussion to plan their course of action. Paul an experienced traveler was allowed to speak. At the meeting, **Paul began to admonish them, and said to them, 'Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be attended with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.'** The apostle wisely counseled them not to gamble; he had already experienced three shipwrecks (2 Corinthians 11:25) and was not anxious for a fourth. Since it was late in the season, and they had already had problems with the wind, Paul warned that the ship should winter right there in Fair Havens. Here again is another feature of good leadership—wisdom and care in taking risks (in this case with the traveler's lives and the ship's valuable cargo.) "

God had already blessed Paul and the other travelers with great protection thus far, but as we will see in the next few verses, Julius and the others rejected the true message from the man of God. Isn't this what is happening so much today here in America and everywhere else in the entire world. There is not time to listen to the truth that the man of God speaks, but sad to say, when the shipwrecks come as a result of defying the truth of God's Word, it is so often that the first place people run to are the preachers of God's truth. But often when this happens, it is far too late.

II. NOTICE THE REASON FOR THIS DECEPTION. vs. 9-13

In verses 9-13, we discover the reason for the deception of the mariners and Roman soldiers on the ship heading for Rome. We need to really study this section of Scripture in depth in order to learn why it is that so many people today, even those who call themselves believers, make wrong decisions and end up with their lives scarred and sometimes even ruined because of these bad decisions. I believe most of you would agree with me that we are now living in a "victimization society". What I mean by this is that multitudes of people continue to make bad decisions, and then when they suffer the consequences of their wrong decisions, they blame others for their mistakes rather than accepting responsibility for these mistakes. This blame business goes all the way back to Adam and Eve, but it seems to be worse in this modern world than I have ever seen it in my 70 years of life. In our story of Paul on the ship, we are going to see that the centurion and the ship mariners rebuffed the Biblical good-sense advice of Paul the apostle, and set sail when they should have waited until spring. As a result of this, their ship wrecked and everyone was put in

danger because of their wrong decision. And now when they were staring death in the face, they waited for a message of hope from Paul, the one whose message they rejected earlier. Let's take an in depth look at these verses so hopefully, that we don't make the same mistakes in our lives and end up in disaster.

A. The reason included disbelief in the man of the Sovereign. vs. 9-10

Would you agree with me that we are living in the most self-sufficient age that I can remember in my entire lifetime. This was so vividly illustrated in our church several months ago when a man walked the aisle one Sunday morning to give His heart to Christ. After he got gloriously saved, he wanted to share a brief testimony with our congregation. When he did, the first thing he said was, "I would have gotten saved a long time ago if it hadn't been for my self-sufficiency." Folks, this is still the main problem that is hindering people from getting saved, and for following Christ in a life of obedience. The mariners on Paul's ship thought they knew far more than the man of God on their ship, even if he was under the control of God almighty. You see friends, the problem was not so much that because they didn't believe Paul as much as it was that they didn't believe that Paul had been called of God, and that God was giving them wisdom through Paul because he was the anointed of the Sovereign God. So they became deceived due to their disrespect and lack of reverence for the God that had changed and called Paul, and they put their intellect and smartness above their trust and confidence in the Sovereign God of the universe.

As I have studied the life of Paul the Apostle for over 60 years, I have seen many places in Paul's life and ministry where men and women rejected his message just simply because they put their self-sufficiency above the wisdom of the man of God. Sad to say, this is still going on today in our world, probably even more so due to the lack of respect for the authority that God gives to His genuine servants, and to the content of the messages they provide from the Word of God. I would like to scream from the housetop, "if you make fun of or reject the message from God's true servant, you are on the precipice of disaster because inevitably tragedy is coming, and probably coming very soon as it did for the mariners and others on Paul's ship.

B. The reason included delight in the master of Satan. v. 11

Although Julius the centurion was a kind and courteous man, he was probably not saved at all. Therefore like so many today, he nor the ship's captain would allow themselves to put any trust in the warning that Paul tried to give them. This happens because always just behind the scenes and out of sight, there is Satan or one of his demons that is standing nearby to persuade individuals to say no to the truth of the Gospel, and just admonish these people to go on with their lives and do things their way to the outright defiance of God's man with God's message. There are literally billions of souls in hell today who were warned over and over again by men of God to not set sail and try to live their lives without God. But, they rejected the man and message and now throughout eternity they will be separated from Christ and the pleasures of heaven. They literally let Satan convince them to believe

him rather than to believe the man of God which our heavenly Father sent to warn them. This Satanic deception can be believed easily, but the end consequences can never be changed. It is either believe the truth of God's man, or end up with a shipwrecked life. The choice is ours, but just remember, we will reap what we sow.

C. The reason included dissatisfaction with the means of safety. v. 12

The third part of the reason for the deception of the mariners and soldiers was that they were not satisfied or happy with the waiting period of a few months which they would have had to endure if they stayed safely in the Fair Havens port or harbor. We read many things into their dissatisfaction, but I will just say that they didn't like taking other people's advice, they didn't have any patience to wait it out until spring, and more than likely, there may have been a pleasure and money factor that pushed them to move on to Rome where all the action was and where immorality was rampant. The Fair Havens was a small place with probably little fun and activity, and they may have had to stay on the ship rather than have a better place to stay. So, the crew rationalized that maybe a little danger would not be as bad as having to spend a few months waiting out winter and the bad weather on the sea. Their adventuresome spirit took precedence over safety and security, and this is still happening everywhere today. People are crying out, "give me a few moments of pleasure, even if I do contract A.I.D.s" Give me some fun and frolic with transgender action, even if I do pervert God's plan for man and woman. Let me do my own thing with total freedom and no accountability. I will enjoy the moment and worry about the consequences later. This is what happened to the ship's crew and the soldiers on the boat. Let's totally disregard the common sense of staying in port and remaining safe, and just push out into the world and take the chances that we may run into a storm. We must push on, especially if the preacher tells us to stay put safely!

The truth of this last paragraph reminds me of what happened to me many years ago as a pastor when I went to visit one of my sick uncles who was enormously sick and in the hospital. When I walked into his room, he spoke to me and said, "Stan, I have been a complete fool. All through the years of my life, I have had numbers of people try to get me to stop smoking cigarettes, but I would only get mad and tell them I was going to do whatever I wanted to do whether they liked it or not. And now, he said, I lay here in the hospital facing death because of COPD and an incurable lung disease. I have truly been a fool." The Bible says in **James 4:17**, **"Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."** Truly, these mariners and soldiers knew to do good, but they decided to do it their way, and they suffered irreparable consequences. I pray that those of you reading this article will not make the same mistake. Please pay attention to the words of God from His servant, and obey them lest you too shipwreck in the ferocious sea of life. My question to each of you readers, "Do you pay more attention to the politicians, the celebrities, the sports stars, the contemporary punk pastors, or do you listen and obey what God's true man says from His word. There is a tremendous warning here for all of us to not be deceived. Will we push ahead and reap disaster, or will we stay put where God puts us until it is time for us to move forward.

D. The reason included dependence upon mistaken success. v. 13

Verse 13 is the place where I got the title of this sermon. This verse tells us that because the mariners and soldiers disregarded the warning words of Paul the Apostle, they decided to set sail because the south winds were blowing softly. Because the south wind were blowing softly, it gave the appearance that they could leave the safety of the Fair Havens harbor and push on with their trip assured of their purpose and ultimate destination. You see folks, these people guiding the ship didn't realize that often times, things are really not as sure and safe as life might seem. Many times we start out on a journey believing that everything will ultimately be all right, but then, out of the blue here comes the raging winds of Euroclydon. And many times, these unexpected storms bring total devastation to our lives, to our families, to our friends, and to our dreams. Dr. Bill Stafford, a long-time friend of mine who was an evangelist for almost 60 years said one time in my pulpit, "As God's servants trying to serve Jesus, we are either coming out of a storm, riding in the midst of a storm, or getting ready to go into a storm." In other words, we are surely going to face many storms, but truthfully, we probably would not be so overwhelmed by so many storms if we would believe the Word of God and stay put where He puts us until He tells us that it is safe to travel. My dear friends, please, please, don't be deceived by the south winds blowing softly!!!

III. NOTICE THE RESULTS OF THIS DECEPTION. vs. 14-20

If we are deceived by the south winds blowing softly, and if we left port prematurely against the warning of God's men, then we might just as well get ready for the impending storm, because it is coming, just as the mariners and others soon found it. The ship loaded with 276 mariners, soldiers, and prisoners had little more than left the port at Fair Havens when suddenly they ran into hurricane force winds called Euroclydon. This is a word that was used for typhoons and other huge storms. So, this was truly not only an unexpected storm, but it was a whopper and tragedy was just ahead if the man of God had not been on board that ship.

A. The first result of the deception by the soft winds was an unexpected storm. v. 14

Verse fourteen tells us that out of nowhere came this huge hurricane or typhoon, and what had promised to be a trip with smooth sailing turned into a violent wicked storm. I believe you would agree with me that often times in our lives we are smoothly sailing along and everything seems to be going wonderfully well until suddenly all hell breaks out in our lives in the form of a vicious storm. Usually to begin with, we go into a state of panic and disbelief, and we are overtaken by fear and uncertainty. We often say, "God why did you let this storm come our way?" But the truth may just be that we brought the storm on ourselves by our defiant disobedience to God's Word or purpose for our lives. Or, maybe God told us to stay put, but we insisted, defied His word, and pushed off to sea envisioning that everything would be quite all right. Suddenly the storm comes, the waters rage, the

winds blow, and we begin to scream, "Oh God, why did you let this happen?" And God responds through His Holy Spirit and or His Word, and He says, "I tried to warn you, but you just wouldn't listen." Truthfully, the Lord could say, "The storm has come because you needed a more serious test to see what kind of testimony you should have!" But being honest, God might say, "this storm is your fought because you set sail against my will or wishes. Therefore, you must pay the price of learning a valuable lesson." "Stay faithful, and I will spare your lives and bring you out of the storm."

Are you going through an unexpected storm right now? If so, maybe you caused it by your disobedience, or maybe God is just giving you this test to give you a better testimony. If you responded wrongly when He tried to show you His will, this time pay attention and try to learn what He wants you to know.

B. The second result of the deception was an unsuitable ship. v. 15

Do you remember that when Paul and the other passengers left Caesarea, they left on a small boat from Adramyttium. Later when they arrived in Myra, they changed boats and got on to a much larger boat which came from Alexandria in Egypt. This boat was a larger vessel which was carrying grain from Egypt all the way to Rome. Truly, they felt much safer once they got on to the larger boat, but we must remember that no vessel is adequate when God sends the storms our way unless the ship is designed by God for God's people to travel His journey on His time. Therefore, the boat they were now on was totally insufficient for the storm they now were in, and so is every man-made vessel or structure that we so often turn to when we are trying to make the trip our way on our time instead of God's way and in God's time. And, like Jonah learned the hard way, no vessel is adequate for the storms when we are trying to run from God. These mariners and soldiers got into severe trouble because they would not listen to Paul warning them to not travel at that time. So, we better learn to stay when God says stay, and we better go when only God says go! If we don't do it God's way, whatever the size of the ship, it will be unsuitable when the unexpected storm comes.

C. The third result of the deception was unqualified sailors. vs. 16-17

It is very evident to me that the sailors that were sailing the ship for Paul and the others were very incompetent. I say this because it seems to be that just as the storm hit, the sailors went into a state of panic and just didn't know what to do. It was as if they were trying anything to stop the ship from wrecking, but they just didn't know what to do. So, here in verses 16-17, we find the sailors trying to get ropes or wires wrapped around the hull of the ship to try and hold it together as it was literally falling apart. This reminds me of people today who reject the Word of God from the man God until one day when the big storm hits, and then they try every work in the book to try to save themselves. Just think about the arrogance of these sailors not paying any attention to Paul until the storm raged, and without a

doubt, right in the midst of the storm they must have had second thoughts, but now it was too late to try to save themselves. And this is so true when people reject the truth of God's word, sail out on their own with no consideration for God until the unexpected storm comes, and then they can do nothing about their situation. You see folks, this is just a revelation of the inadequacy of men to save themselves. This of course is why Jesus came down from heaven to die on the cross for us. There is no other way for people to be saved other than through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, the skills and labors of the mariners could do nothing about their treacherous dilemma. These so-called well-trained sailors could do nothing to save themselves, but instead their only hope had to come from God's man, the person whose message they had initially rejected.

D. The fourth result of this deception was unsalvageable substance. vs. 18-19

When people get into some unexpected storms, sometimes the main effort of those who are in danger is to try to hold on to the best things they have just in case they do survive. However, in verses 18-19, we discover that in a state of panic and uncertainty, the mariners and sailors began to throw everything overboard that might weigh the ship down which might contribute to it being low in the water and eventually helping to crash the ship. Obviously the situation was very bad and yes, even getting worse. So, in a last ditch effort, the sailors picked up anything that was loose or might make the ship heavier, and they threw it into the ocean.

To me this is a reminder of how so many people hang on to all of this temporary stuff until one day in the midst of a final storm, they just come to understand this worthless stuff can do nothing for their eternal safety and destiny. So, because of the storm, sometimes people will turn back to the preacher or pastor they have rebuffed and rejected, and ask him for a message from God to give them hope. This is exactly what happened just before Paul came up from the bottom of the ship with a message of hope for the people on the ship. Just in the nick of time, there was the formerly rejected man of God with a direct message from the angel of God (probably Gabriel) to instruct the sailors and others on the ship about what they would have to do in order to get safely to the island when the ship crashed. It is so sad but yet so true that a lot of people don't have time to listen to God's man until all hope is gone and life is about over. Then, maybe because of their imminent fear, some do turn to Christ and to believing the message the true man of God preaches. But, may I say that it is such a shame for people to waste their lives doing their own things, rejecting and or neglecting God and the servants of God until they get into real trouble. But, I do thank God that some of these wayward people eventually do turn to Christ just before it is too late, but when they do this, most of them lose all of their stuff plus their potential of having fruitful and productive lives. If only people would open their eyes and believe early so that they could have a fruitful and purposeful life here on earth, and then eventually receive the Father's words, "**well done thou good and faithful servant.**" I don't know about you the reader, but I would much rather have to throw everything overboard here on earth, than to maintain these

earthly things and miss heaven, than to have everything and yet lose my own soul. Do you remember what Jesus said, "**For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**" (Mark 8:36) Truthfully, there is nothing this world has to offer that is worthy of losing our souls and then missing heaven. We must be ready to give up all substance and even cut every tie here on earth in order to be saved and go to heaven faithful for Jesus. There was nothing on Paul's ship that was worth keeping, and yet dying in the shipwreck. And, there is nothing this world has to offer that is worth us forfeiting salvation and going to heaven when we die.

E. The fifth result of this deception was unendurable sadness. v. 20

Verse 20 tells us that things progressively got worse for the mariners and passengers on the ship because the sun did not shine and the stars didn't come out at night for many days. It just seemed that all hope was gone and the only thing left would be total disaster and loss of life. I don't believe any of us could really imagine how hopeless the people on the ship were, nor how frightened the people were because it looked like they all were going to die.

I don't know if any of you readers have ever been in such a storm that you thought all hope was gone, but I surely have been and it is not very pleasant. I am talking about a terrible storm that I encountered in the African country of Uganda back in December of 1993. As the pastor of a growing church, I felt extremely led of God to take my Outreach and Missions pastor, Rev. Wayne Birkhead, with me on a mission trip to preach the Gospel to thousands of prisoners and school students in Uganda. We spent one week in Uganda preaching and teaching, and during that one week, God gave us a tremendous harvest of over 1,200 souls coming to Christ. On Saturday morning, December 4, 1993, we left our house in Kampala, Uganda and started on a one-hour trip to the airport in Entebbe, Uganda. Just short of the airport, our vehicle ran off the road and when our driver over-corrected, the vehicle turned over and over about six times. Pastor Wayne was thrown out of the vehicle on the second roll of the vehicle, and then I was thrown out on the last roll. There were no ambulances to call, so we put Brother Wayne in the bed of a Toyota pickup and drove a short distance to a small inefficient hospital. At that hospital, Pastor Wayne died while I was pumping his chest trying to keep him breathing. To say the least, this was truly one of the most difficult storms I had ever been in, but God eventually brought me through it. However, the sadness was so unendurable that four years later, I woke up one morning in the throws of clinical depression. My storm started in 1993 and lasted for more than five years. I sincerely think that I do understand the hopelessness that these crew members and passengers on this ship were going through. I must tell you that there is no feeling as bad as hopelessness. This verse 20 truly affirms the despair that these people on the ship were going through.

IV. NOTICE THE REBUKE FOR THIS DECEPTION. vs. 21-26

In verse 20, we have seen a situation with no hope. In verses 21-26, we find Paul the Apostle coming up from the bottom of the ship where he had spent time with Jesus, and after he rebuked the mariners and the soldiers for failing to listen to him before they left the Fair Havens, Paul gives the people the promise from the angel of God that everything would turn out okay. I am sure that his rebuke of these people stung just a little, but truth is truth, and they had committed a grave sin by failing to listen to the warning from the man of God. Let's take a look at these verses and see what God is trying to teach us about obedience to His message. Please concentrate fully so that you don't miss what God is trying to show you.

A. This was a pointed rebuke. v. 21

I sincerely love verse 21. I love it because Paul held back nothing when he rebuked these sailors and soldiers who got them into this storm unnecessarily. Did you get the word unnecessarily? I pray you did, because most of the suffering that believers go through in this world is unnecessary if only they would learn to make decisions based upon the truth of God's Word. Paul had emphatically told them to not leave the safety of Fair Havens, but they just total rebuffed his words and went on and did it their way. Truthfully, what Paul was telling them in verse 21, was "I told you so." He minced no words because he wanted them to see that had they listened to his words from God originally, they would not have been in this mess they were in. In other words, it was their fault that they were in a terrible storm.

Folks, this is what happens so often in our own lives. You see, I have been a pastor for going on 53 years, and I could not possibly tell you how many messes I have tried to help church members get out of because they disobeyed God's Word and went on doing it their way. I do know that God allows us to go through a lot of storms, but as I stated early in this article, much of the suffering we do is because of our own stupidity in making wrong decisions. Then, when all hell breaks loose in our lives, we want to blame God, blame a spouse, blame our parents, blame our friends, or maybe another Christian church member. And I must tell you that often times because of our wrong decisions, we float ashore on bits and pieces of our lives when we could have arrived in good order if we would have only obeyed the man of God.

B. This was a promising rebuke. vs. 22-24

I truly love these verses. Paul had spent a lot of time down in the bottom of the ship fellowshiping with the angel of God. And when he came up to speak to the crew and passengers, he gave them a great promise. The promise was that they should not give up, but be cheerful because the angel had told him that they all were going to make it safely to shore, even if they did lose everything in the process. Paul stated that not one person would lose his life, but they would only lose the ship.

The reason Paul could bring this message of hope to these disobedient people was because he belonged to the God that sent him the angel. Paul emphatically stated that he not only belonged to God, but that he was a willful servant of God. And because God had a greater purpose to get Paul to Rome to stand before Caesar, all of the other people on the boat would survive the storm and the shipwreck. Did you get this? Because of God's greater purpose for Paul, the rest of the people would be saved in spite of the fact that they had rejected Paul's message in the Fair Havens. I just wonder how many of you who are reading this article have been saved because of the faithfulness of some man of God? I am sure that many have, but of course, that is why God sends us His men to intercede for our spiritual, and yes, sometimes even our physical welfare. You may not love and respect your pastor or preacher when things are going well, but you will if he comes to your defense and survivor sometime when you are going through a storm. So my friends, I believe it would be good for us to maintain a good relationship with the man of God because we don't ever know when we might just need him during an unexpected storm. Paul's rebuke of these people included the promise of survival and ultimate rescue in these dire circumstances.

C. This was a proclaiming rebuke. v. 25

In verse 25, Paul repeats his encouraging words to the fearful people on the ship. And the reason for these encouraging words was because he believed God more than any man on that ship. The angel of God had told him that everyone would survive and live, and thus when God speaks, we better listen. The reason they were in the raging storm to begin with was disobedience to God's man, but now, the crew and passengers were more ready to listen to the servant's words. My question is, "why does it take a raging storm in our lives before we will listen to the man of God?" We must learn the lesson from our text that obedience to the Word must come first before an unexpected storm comes our way. Pay attention to the following verse from **I Samuel 15:22**, "**And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.**" In the verse 25 we are studying, Paul proclaimed that there was hope because the Sovereign God had spoken to him. Therefore, the people had to obey the voice of God rather than doing it their way. Their own way had gotten them into the mess they were in.

D. This was a prophetic rebuke. v. 26

This verse tells us that God had told Paul in the bottom of the ship that everyone on the ship would survive, but that the people would end up on an island. That island turned out to be Malta, and the people washed and swam ashore on this island, the very same island where Paul had instructed and prayed with the Ephesian Church elders on his way back to Jerusalem on his third missionary journey. I am sure that when Paul knelt on that island and prayed with those elders with tears in his eyes it never once crossed his mind that he would be coming back to that island as a

shipwrecked passenger swimming for his life. It seems that sometimes God has a strange sense of humor as He tries to work with and develop His children. Just remember that Paul would never have come back to this island if the people on the ship had obeyed the voice of God's man before they finally set sail. So, this verse 26 prophesied that all 276 people on the boat would arrive on the island safely, but my, what a terrible way to visit a tropical beach. Yet, we need to learn from this situation that most of our suffering comes from disobedience to the words of God's servants.

V. NOTICE THE RESCUE FOR THIS DECEPTION. vs. 27-44

We now come to the last main point in our Scripture under study. We are going to see the shipwreck, but we will also see all the people rescued by God, and not man. Surely, we must see that all of these 276 people saved was truly a mighty miracle of God. There is no other explanation for this survival. God fulfilled his promise to Paul and brought all of the crew and passengers safely to shore on the Island of Malta. Following the deception of the south wind blowing softly always leads to disaster. It did for Paul and all of the people and this ship, and it still does for us to day. We must follow the voice of God rather than the enticements of smooth sailing and calm seas. We need to understand that often the soft winds and calm seas may just be the seduction of Satan trying to get us to run ahead of God.

A. The rescue included an attempted plot of the shipmen. vs. 27-30

Early in our study, I mentioned the fact that the sailors on board this boat were not very competent. It was like they were in a state of panic, and they were just trying everything they possible could to save the ship. But, they just didn't have it together as is evidenced by what ultimately happened. In verses 27-30, we find these same sailors who had radically tried to wire or rope the ship together earlier now trying to get a lifeboat and flee the ship. I thought the captain and the crew on a sinking vessel were to be the last ones off before the ship went down. Not so with these sailors! They started to lower the lifeboat down from the side of the ship to flee, regardless of what was going to happen to the other passengers on the ship. They weren't concerned about their passengers, but they were just concerned about themselves. May I say here that this is so often what happens when people pay no attention to the man of God. When the preacher tells everyone to stick together in the ship, those who are in a state of panic forget the others and just fend for themselves. We need to remember if we make wrong decisions and get into trouble, we better stick together and strive together to get to the safety of the shore.



**"Fearful Sailors Trying To Leave The Ship In The
Midst Of The Storm With No Concern For Others"**

B. The rescue included an acknowledged plan of salvation. vs. 31-32

These two verses are rather unusual to say the least. The sailors had tried to lower a lifeboat so that they could flee the ship, and suddenly, the soldiers on board run over and cut the ropes so that the lifeboat would probably fall into the ocean empty. Paul told them that if everyone didn't stay on the ship and abide by his instructions, no one would be saved. I personally believe this is a great reminder that we can only be saved by one plan, and that is God's plan through His only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. The lifeboat was a project of men's work trying to save themselves with total disregard for others. But, God's plan says that we all get saved the same way, or no one can be saved. There aren't two ways or more to be saved, there is only one plan given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 32, Paul tells the people to take something to eat before they are washed into the sea because they had been so seasick for the past fourteen days that no one could eat. Paul was trying to get them strengthened for the ordeal just ahead of them. It amazes me that now, they are listening to Paul and obeying his words when initially they wouldn't listen to anything he had to say.

C. The rescue included an allotted provision of sustenance. vs. 33-35

Paul asks the people to bring their food and he prays a prayer of blessing upon the food, and then he promises them that they all would survive and not even lose one hair of their heads. He not only gets them stronger physically by giving them the food, but he also strengthens them emotionally by encouraging them as well. So, he joins with the crew and passengers in their last meal before they end up in the waters shipwrecked and floating for the shore of the Island of Malta. Truly, Paul was a great organized leader, and one that has surely set a pattern for us to follow.

D. The rescue included an acquired peace of security. vs. 36-37.

These two verses remind us that Paul got the people together for a meal before the wreck actually happened, and like a good coach, he pushed the people to be happy and full of cheer. He was simply reminding them that they were all going to survive the shipwreck so they could leave the ship on pieces of the battered ship with assurance that they would survive. What Paul was doing was to give these scared people a peaceful security to hang on to when they left the ship and plunged into the dark waters of the Mediterranean Sea. God had promised Paul that all of them would survive the shipwreck, and he just wanted to remind them so that they could have hope. I might just say right here that the greatest hope we can ever have is in the promises of God.

E. The rescue included an abandonment to the providence of the Sovereign.
vs. 38-43

We now come to the actual shipwreck that resulted in 276 people fleeing for their lives from the ship that they had boarded way back in Myra. As the winds got worse and the ocean became more shallow, the people began to throw the remaining items overboard in the water hoping that the ship would not run aground. They even threw out the wheat which was to be delivered in Rome. Under the power of huge winds the ship began to sail more and more rapidly until finally it was out of control and the sailors pulled up the anchors which had been dropped, and the ship made toward shore at a place where two seas came together. The ship moved so fast that the front of the ship stuck in the mud while the back of the ship remained loose and was blown back and forth tearing the boards or planks to pieces. When the soldiers saw that all seemed lost, some of them wanted to kill Paul and the other prisoners, but Julius the centurion loved Paul so much that he would not allow the murders, but instead he gave the order that it was time for every man to cast himself into the sea and head toward the island. Some got boards and others got parts of the ship to use as floating devices, and some just began to swim. This last effort was just simply to allow the Sovereign God who promised Paul that all would survive the opportunity to bring all of the people to shore on the island safely.

There is a great practical application here. There will come times when we get ourselves into horrible circumstances because of bad decisions. It is then that often

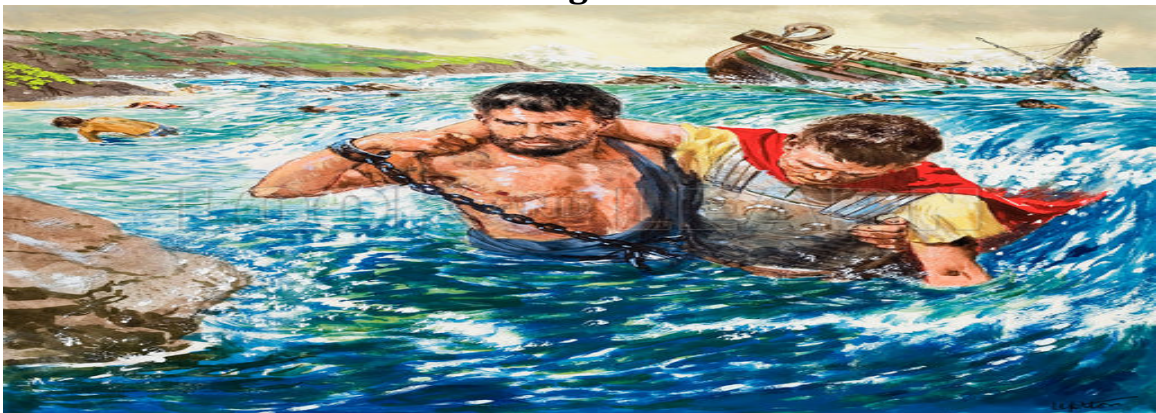
we have to quit struggling and striving, and just surrender to the Sovereign winds of God to get us to where He wants us to go. We need to remember that God had promised Paul a long time ago that he was going to Rome, and because of this promise, no storm, no shipwreck, or any other obstacle would stop Paul from getting to Rome so that he could share the Gospel with Nero. Paul's arrival in Rome later would ultimately cost him his life at the hands of Nero, but obviously, not before he gave his testimony and shared the Good News of Jesus Christ. Paul's dream of taking the Gospel to Rome was going to come to past, but not before a serious shipwreck and a landing on the Island of Malta.

F. The rescue included an arrival at the place of safety. v. 44

The sailors, soldiers, prisoners, and everyone on the ship floated onto the shore on the Island of Malta safely just as the angel had promised. God showed His marvelous grace one more time, even if these wicked and defiant people rejected the message of Paul way back there in the Fair Havens. We should let this story remind us of the goodness of God to all of us. Although we all are fallen sinners, God's amazing grace and love have been extended to us so that we can be forgiven of our sins, and yes, ultimately rich our heavenly destination.



Paul And The Others Arriving On The Island From The Sea



Paul Helping The Centurion Safely Ashore!

Conclusion

As I write about this right now, I can't help but mention that just a little while ago, I took a break and went to my TV to watch the reception of our President and other government leaders as they paid tribute to Dr. Billy Graham in the Rotunda of the nation's capitol building where he will lie in state until tomorrow evening. Then, he will be flown back to Charlotte, North Carolina for burial where he started his ministry over 80 years ago. While the government leaders were speaking, the most important statement they made was that Dr. Graham had reached his final destination where he had always wanted to go. He is now with Jesus where no doubt he is being rewarded.

The arrival of Paul and the people from his ship was temporarily on the Island of Malta, but because of the promise of God, everyone was saved from the wreck, and no doubt they eventually went on to their final destination in Rome. They probably arrived there sick and damaged, but God took them to their final destination as we will see in Chapter 28 of the Book of Acts. We must be reminded that Jesus will indeed escort us to our final destination, but not without some difficult times and maybe even a shipwreck now and then. But, please remember that Paul's shipwreck was the result of the crew and passengers not heeding the warning that Paul gave them. Therefore, while we are traveling on this journey to heaven, let's make sure that we obey the voice of God as He speaks through His servants and His Word. We must not be deceived by the south wind blowing softly!!!