

REFLECTION GUIDE

ACTS 27:1-28:16 | A NON-ANXIOUS PRESENCE IN A SHIPWRECK WORLD

KEY TERMS

Syrtsis - An area of quicksand and shoals off the coast of Libya widely known as an extremely dangerous area for sailors.

Malta - An island in the Mediterranean Sea located between Italy and Libya. Luke calls the people on Malta *barbaroi* (meaning “non-Greek speakers”), which reveals they were likely a tribal people who were not heavily influenced by the Roman Empire.

Justice - When Paul is accused of being a murderer whom *Justice has not allowed...to live* (28:4), they are likely referring to the goddess Justice (which is why the ESV capitalizes it).

DID YOU KNOW?

It was common for ships to take several days in port to unload and reload cargo, but it was not common for prisoners to be allowed to visit friends during this time as Paul was allowed to do in Sidon (27:3).

BACKGROUND

After two years in prison, Paul begins his journey to Rome as a prisoner. He is entrusted to a centurion named Julius, who *treated Paul kindly* (27:3). The journey was difficult and took longer than expected, which meant their travels stretched into winter, when sailing ceased in the Mediterranean due to unfavorable weather (27:9). Paul warned that it would be dangerous to continue, but the ship’s owner and captain wanted to continue and the centurion agreed to go with them (27:10-11). The difficulty only worsened and the ship was *driven along and violently storm-tossed*, causing the sailors to throw over the cargo (27:17-19). After days of storms, Paul is visited by an angel who tells him, *Do not be afraid*, and that Paul and all the people on the ship will make it to their destination, which Paul relates to the crew (27:21-26). After 14 days of storms in which the sailors did not eat any food, Paul encourages everyone to eat, *giving thanks to God*, and when morning came they finally saw land (27:33-39).

Upon seeing the land, the sailors *ran the vessel aground* and planned to kill the prisoners so they would not escape, but because the centurion wanted to save Paul, he convinced them to spare the prisoners (27:40-44). On land, the group learned they were on Malta and were met by *native people* who *showed [them] unusual kindness* and made a fire (28:1-2). While gathering wood for the fire, Paul is bitten by a viper, which the local people take as a sign that Paul is a murderer whom the gods will not allow to live (28:3-4). When Paul doesn’t die, however, the people decide that Paul must himself be a god (28:5-6). Paul is then welcomed to the house of Publius, the chief, and Paul heals Publius’ father who is sick (28:7-8). The result is that many people who were sick on the island come and are healed by Paul and the people give the group what is needed to continue their journey (28:9-10).

GOING DEEPER

Read Philippians 4:4-9. Reflecting on Paul’s steadfastness in this story and his words in Philippians 4, how do you think Paul was able to withstand the literal and metaphorical storms of his life? Read Luke 8:22-25 and Psalm 89:1-13. How does knowing the one with power over all things give you peace for the storms in your life? What can you learn from Paul in Acts or Philippians 4 about facing storms?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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LEARNING THE WORD

1. Read Acts 27:1-28:16. What three physical threats does Paul face? What emotions are experienced by various people in these episodes?
2. In Acts 27:1-3, we see two sources of relational encouragement that God gives to Paul in his journey. Verse 2 says “we” set sail for Italy. Who are the two friends who travel on the ship with Paul?

Verse 3 tells of a surprising encounter that connects Paul with local believers in Sidon so that he might “be cared for.” What kinds of needs can you imagine that might Paul be experiencing at this time?

3. Read in verses 23-25 about the divine word provided for Paul. God previously did something similar in both Acts 18:9 and Acts 23:11. What stands out to you about God’s love for Paul through the way God routinely offers a word of encouragement at key moments of Paul’s journey?
4. Luke likely includes so much information about this journey to demonstrate God’s faithfulness to fulfill his purposes (Acts 1:8, Acts 23:11). How do these verses encourage us (a) not to doubt that God will keep his promises and (b) not to set ourselves up for disappointment by assuming God will make our life easy?

LIVING THE WORD

5. What kinds of personal experiences most push you toward anxiety, stress or worry?
6. The most important theme in the passage is that God can be taken at his word. How can we deepen our theological beliefs about God’s character so that we are better able to walk with confidence even in uncertain day-to-day experiences?
7. Though Paul was a bold person with strong faith, he also needed to be cared for by others. Do you find it hard to let others care for your needs? Why or why not?
8. What is one way that you could seek to provide a gospel witness through being a non-anxious presence in our world this week?