

## Lesson 33: Acts 27:1-28:6 God's Sovereignty Over the Journey

### Introduction

<sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. <sup>26</sup> *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; <sup>27</sup> *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 2 Corinthians 11:25-28

Paul has been through a lot. And God has always brought him through, though not always without pain and suffering. Paul has always escaped with his life and with something more, a continued resolve to trust God. The wisdom he offered to the Romans came from his own personal experience.

<sup>3</sup> ...We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; <sup>4</sup> and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; <sup>5</sup> and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Romans 5:3-5)

Suffering has not driven Paul away from God. Suffering has solidified Paul's hope in God. Paul has an ongoing experience of the love of God poured out into his heart, even when he is hurting. He does not turn away, or grow bitter, or give up. He is convinced that God is good, that God is sovereign, and that God loves him. That does not mean God will keep him from danger or pain. That does mean God has a plan, and God will bring him through to glory.

That's a point I remember my sister-in-law made years ago on one of our family beach trips. She had completed chemotherapy treatment for the early stages of cancer. Thinking of how awful that must have been, I remember how calmly she spoke of God's sovereignty. He is in control. And He is good. And He loves me. That is not being naïve. That is fundamental truth. That is building your life on the rock that is God. That truth had worked its way from her head into her heart and soul through tribulation and perseverance to produce in her the reality of proven character and hope.

Paul makes that connection between God's love and sovereignty in Romans 8:28-29.

<sup>28</sup> And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. <sup>29</sup> For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

That is one of the major things life is all about. Life's struggles, life's pains, the things that make no sense. If we are in a relationship with God, where He has loved us and we have loved Him, that means that He has caught us, and He has this plan. And the plan here is that we'd be conformed to the image of His Son; that we become who we are truly created to be. That we become a true Adam, a true Eve. That we reflect God. It's not going to be complete till Heaven, and God will take us through all the ups and downs, the valleys of death to get us there. He will bring us to glory.

We have come to the final movement of Acts part VI. The sovereignty of God is on display in this final act of Acts; His sovereignty over all the events in Paul's life and His sovereignty over the growth of the Church. I will address this final movement in two lessons. In this lesson, Paul has yet another danger to avoid before Luke concludes the story.

While highlighting the sovereignty of God, the story of shipwreck in Acts 27 also provides a wonderful literary climax to the book of Acts. Is Paul going to take the Gospel to Rome, center of the western world? Or will he die trying? Acts part VI began in 19:21 with this declaration from Paul, "After I have been [to Jerusalem], I must also see Rome." Paul then escaped a mob in Ephesus, traveled to Jerusalem in spite of all the voices telling him danger is there. He escaped another mob

in the Temple, escaped an ambush, escaped another ambush, and now finally makes it on to a ship for a leisurely cruise to Rome.

No! Not a leisurely cruise to Rome! It could have been, but it wasn't. This is not the falling action of the story, just bringing us to the end. This is the climax. Does Paul make it to Rome or not? We thought he would, but then dark clouds gather on the horizon.

This chapter really deserves to be read through with all the dramatic pauses and intonation of a good story. The next time a big storm comes up wherever you are, try standing out on a balcony and reading through Acts 27. It's really a great story.

What I want to do now is read through the story at a slow pace with interruptions for interpretive commentary. Starting with chapter 27 in verse 1.

#### **Danger Avoided (27:1-44)**

<sup>1</sup> When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. <sup>2</sup> And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica. <sup>3</sup> The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care.

So, if you have a map of the Mediterranean in your head, the ship carrying Paul is not headed out to sea directly west to Rome but is heading north up the coast and will then curve around to the west, following Asia Minor's coastline. This is a safer route. Also, the ship is Adramyttian, a city up and around the coast of Asia Minor close to Troas. They will have to switch ships at some point to catch one going to Italy. You can get some indication of how long this trip is going to be by noting on your map the short distance between Caesarea, where they just left, and Sidon, their first stop, which took a day to accomplish. This is going to be a trip of weeks or months, depending on the wind and on whether or not they can beat the onset of winter weather.

Paul is not alone on this trip. The "we" indicates that Luke is on board with him. So is Aristarchus, a believer from Thessalonica who joined Paul as a traveling companion on his third missionary journey. In fact, Aristarchus was one of two men dragged into the theater of Ephesus during the riot there. Later in his letter to the Colossians, Paul will refer to Aristarchus as his fellow prisoner, indicating that at some point in the future, Aristarchus will be imprisoned for his faith. So, like Paul, he will say he escaped a mob, he escaped a shipwreck, and he was imprisoned for his belief in Jesus.

Not only was Paul allowed to have traveling companions accompanying him on board, but the centurion also allowed him to disembark at Sidon and receive care from believers in that city. This continues the kind of low-level security Paul was under when he was in Caesarea.

<sup>4</sup> From there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. <sup>5</sup> When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. <sup>6</sup> There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it. <sup>7</sup> When we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us to go farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; <sup>8</sup> and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

Luke's style of writing, as we have seen, is historical. He regularly gives us names and details that ground his narrative in real human experience of the first century. He has done that well throughout Acts, and he really stepped up his game in this chapter, especially with all the sailing details. He speaks about the problems and decisions of the voyage with the familiarity an author might use today in talking about a car trip across Europe or air travel. A modern author could refer to traffic jams, or snowplows, or weather delays, or security lines with no explanation because readers would

either know what he is talking about from personal experience or know enough about modern travel to understand him and to feel that he is describing something very real in the present world.

Luke does that with sea-travel. He is not going to go into so much technical detail that a sailor would know exactly what is going on. He leaves open some questions. But he gives us plenty of detail to imagine the trip, especially if we have a general sense of travel by sea in a wind-powered ship.

Changing ships at Myra, the new ship continues to sail west along the Asia Minor coastline. They changed course turning south to Crete because the winds did not permit a westerly course. The comment, “we had sailed slowly for a good many days,” indicates either a lull in the wind or that they are sailing directly into the wind. Tacking back and forth, they could continue west but would gain ground slowly. After rounding Crete on the south side of the island and turning back to the west, the contrary winds again make progress difficult, and the ship stopped at the port called Fair Havens.

<sup>9</sup> When considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul *began* to admonish them, <sup>10</sup> and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” <sup>11</sup> But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul. <sup>12</sup> Because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter *there*. <sup>13</sup> When a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had attained their purpose, they weighed anchor and *began* sailing along Crete, close *inshore*.

Winter was a dangerous season to travel the Mediterranean. Ships just did not sail. Captains had to judge in the autumn when to stop and find a place to winter in. The fast referred to in verse 9 would be the Day of Atonement. The reference might help establish the year of this journey. In 59 A.D. the Day of Atonement fell on October 5. Because the Jewish calendar was a lunar calendar, the Day of Atonement didn’t occur on the same day of the year on our calendar. It occurred in September both years before 59 A.D. and both years after 59 A.D. The October date is later, it fits well with the worry of the men on this voyage. If it is 59 A. D., attempting to sail the open water from Crete to Sicily would be quite risky.

Everyone agrees they should not try for Italy. Paul speaks up to say they should not even try for a more favorable port on Crete. You know, not one more day of travel is safe. As we’ve read, Paul has experienced three shipwrecks in his life. He spent a day and night in the deep. He is not a complete novice to the dangers of sea travel. But he is also not a sailor, and certainly not the captain. The fact that he has just said, “Men, I perceive...,” would be taken very seriously by Luke and Aristarchus, who put a lot of weight on the guidance Paul receives from God. But that trust in Paul’s insight is not shared by the centurion or the captain. At this point they are not trusting Paul.

The majority reached a decision to travel on to a port better suited for wintering. The ancient site of Phoenix did have two inlets, one from the southwest and another from the northwest, affirming Luke’s description. Fair Havens was open to three points of the compass. The next day, a moderate south wind seemed to affirm their decision to head further west to Phoenix, though every sailor knows how quickly the wind can change. The captain stays cautiously close to shore.

<sup>14</sup> But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; <sup>15</sup> and when the ship was caught *in it* and could not face the wind, we gave way *to it* and let ourselves be driven along. <sup>16</sup> Running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the *ship’s* boat under control. <sup>17</sup> After they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on *the shallows* of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along.

In Split, Croatia I had my first experience of living somewhere where a wind had a name. The Bura blew down the coastal mountains out to sea, sometimes with hurricane force winds that twisted metal road signs. The Euraquilo, a northeaster, was one of the worst-case scenarios for Paul's ship. The powerful gale blowing down from the mountains of Crete forced the ship out to sea. In other circumstances the ship's boat could be set out with rowers to tug the ship along. In the face of Euraquila, the sailors barely rescued the boat, pulling it out of the water. And then Luke mentions that they were going by a small island, and that gave them just enough of a buffer to be able to accomplish that, to get the ships both safely aboard. The wind and waves pressured the ship so much that the wooden planks expanded, leaving gaps for water to pour into the hull. And that's why cables were wrapped around the ship to keep the planks together. A sea anchor was set out to create drag on the ship and slow its headlong plunge into waves as she was given up to the driving wind. The hope now was just to stay alive and intact until the wind blew itself out.

<sup>18</sup> The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; <sup>19</sup> and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. <sup>20</sup> Since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing *us*, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

You notice the understatement there, "No small storm was assailing us." This wasn't just a moment of wind blowing off of Crete. That is what drove them out to sea. But this is a major storm that they are in. It did not abate the next day. It did not abate after three days. So further precaution was taken to lighten the ship, so that it might ride higher in the water and pass over underwater dangers, such as the sand shoals off the coast of North Africa. If the wind keeps like this, it could blow them all the way to that continent. Some of the cargo and the ship's tackle was thrown overboard. Ship's carried extra sails, an extra mast beam and other equipment needed for repairs. So, this is a desperate, real emergency situation if they are throwing that kind of tackle overboard.

<sup>21</sup> When they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete and incurred this damage and loss. <sup>22</sup> "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship. <sup>23</sup> "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, <sup>24</sup> saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' <sup>25</sup> "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. <sup>26</sup> "But we must run aground on a certain island."

Everyone goes days without eating. Much of the food may have been washed overboard or spoiled by sea water. The continued strain to keep the ship afloat may have allowed little time day or night to eat. The storm would make preparing food difficult. Whatever the combination of reasons, the men are not eating.

Paul speaks into this desperate situation. Though, the last thing anyone wants to hear is, "I told you so. I told you not to set sail." Still, Paul says it, so his listeners might take heart to his message for them now, that they might trust him now. The message has to do with God's plan for Paul. These words are the whole reason this story of storm and shipwreck has been included in this theological narrative of Acts. Luke included it to put an exclamation mark on the truth that God has a sovereign plan of salvation for all peoples. That plan does include the person of Paul. But this is greater than the person of Paul. God has decided that His Gospel message will go to Rome, and He has decided it is going to go to Rome through this messenger. And so, the Gospel is going to go to Rome through this messenger. Sailors know what it is to be dependent on forces beyond their control. God does not know what that is like. God is not dependent on other forces. God is always in control. Paul will stand before Caesar because God wills it.

This is a foundational theme of Acts. God's sovereignty has run throughout. Remember the words in Peter's Pentecost sermon,

<sup>22</sup> “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. <sup>24</sup> “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. (Acts 2:22–24)

And again in 4:27-28. This is the conviction of the believing Church as they are gathered to pray,

<sup>27</sup> “For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Whatever the source of this storm, whether purely natural or whether also demonic, the storm does not happen if God does not permit the storm to happen. It is not only God’s will that Paul be saved from the storm. It is God’s will that Paul be in the storm. That is true of every storm we encounter in life. Whether the crisis we face is purely natural, the result of actions by others, or the consequence of our own choices, whatever the source, human or demonic, the crisis does not happen if God does not allow it to happen. God has a multitude of reasons for allowing crises to happen. There may be many reasons for this storm. One clear reason for this storm is to identify Paul as God’s messenger and so allow Paul to participate in bringing glory to God. These men know this storm is beyond the power of any man to control. As the sailors who threw Jonah into the sea recognized it was Jonah’s God with whom they had to deal, so also these men are going to eventually recognize they are dealing not with Paul, but with the God who Paul serves.

Again, I think Luke and Aristarchus would receive Paul’s word with great encouragement, since they already trust in Paul’s walk with the Lord. They would believe him when he claimed an angel appeared and spoke to him. Luke does not report any immediate effect on the others. We don’t have reason to believe that they started to trust Paul, or they believe him. As far as they know, it was an angel, or it was a demon that appeared to Paul. But we can be sure they are going to remember these words later.

<sup>27</sup> But when the fourteenth night came, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors *began* to surmise that they were approaching some land. <sup>28</sup> They took soundings and found *it to be* twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found *it to be* fifteen fathoms. <sup>29</sup> Fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak.

That last phrase just hit me. We all know what that is like, going through life, going through a dark night, and just wishing for daybreak, just wishing light would shine into the darkness. I take the fourteenth night here in this text to be the fourteenth night since the storm struck at Crete. So, we’ve had two weeks, being driven by the storm. Taking soundings required dropping a line from the ship to the bottom of the sea. Twenty fathoms is 40 yards or 36 meters. Just a little further on, that depth shortens to 30 yards or 27 meters. Because of that, because of the shortening of the depth, the sailors fear they may be approaching land. More anchors are thrown out, not only to create drag but with the hope that if they are approaching land, the ship will be held in place until daylight when they can see what land may appear and decide what to do.

The reference to the Adriatic Sea in verse 27 makes me wonder if the maps generally depicting the ship’s journey in the storm are way off base. I lived on the Adriatic Sea in Split for eleven years. It is the body of water bordered on one side by modern day Albania, Montenegro, Croatia, little bit of Bosnia, and Slovenia, and on the other side by Italy. Just imagine the back of the boot of Italy. That’s the Adriatic Sea. The Greek in Acts 28:1 will identify the island where the shipwrecked as “Melita.” Two islands shared that name. An argument has been made that this Melita is not the southern Melita known as “Malta” but northern Melita which is now the Croatian island of Mljet in the Adriatic

Sea. So, could our Bible maps be way off? Is it Malta or is it Mljet? Three points are enough to establish Paul was stranded on Malta.

First, the body of water in the middle of the Mediterranean on the way from Crete to Malta was also referred to as “the Sea of Adria”. Some Bibles make the better choice of using that translation, rather than the more confusing translation “Adriatic Sea”. The second-century mathematician and geographer Ptolemy distinguished the Sea of Adria in the central Mediterranean from the gulf of Adria, which is the Adriatic Sea. Josephus also tells of his own shipwreck in the Sea of Adria which happened in the Mediterranean on the way to Italy.<sup>1</sup> If we lived around the time of Luke’s writing, we would see no conflict in identifying the body of water between Crete and Malta as the Sea of Adria.

Second, according to Bruce, the first identification that Melita is not Malta, but the Croatian island of Mljet seems to have been made by the tenth-century Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus.<sup>2</sup> That makes the reference appear ancient from our modern perspective, you know, wow, it was the tenth century, but in reality, it also nine hundred years after the actual events without supporting evidence from earlier sources. So, we don’t have a credible reference to say that this is Mljet.

Third, the northeaster Euraquilo that Luke says blew the ship off Crete could not have blown the ship north up into the Adriatic Sea. To get the ship up into the Adriatic requires going against the plain understanding of the text that works very well when we recognize the Sea of Adria as a valid, ancient name for the body of water east of Malta. Malta is the body of land the ship approaches as the sailors take their soundings.

<sup>30</sup> But as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship and had let down the *ship’s* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, <sup>31</sup> Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.” <sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship’s* boat and let it fall away. <sup>33</sup> Until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. <sup>34</sup> “Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish.” <sup>35</sup> Having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all, and he broke it and began to eat. <sup>36</sup> All of them were encouraged and they themselves also took food. <sup>37</sup> All of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. <sup>38</sup> When they had eaten enough, they *began* to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea.

Paul had advised wintering in Fair Havens. He had also sought to give them courage, telling them an angel told him the ship must run aground but all would be saved. Now again, Paul gives advice and encouragement. And it is based on that message he got, “Everybody is going to be okay.” This time it is heeded. The soldiers heard Paul, and had looked at the sailors, and they believed they were trying to escape the ship. Paul then repeats his prophecy of rescue, “not a hair from the head of any of you will perish.” They take his advice to eat, and they are actually encouraged.

The great Christian preacher and leader, John Wesley wrote in his diary about a storm that overtook his ship while crossing the Atlantic Ocean. He could not get over this group of Moravian men, women, and children who gathered on the deck to worship and sing hymns during the storm. Wesley, on the other hand, hid in his cabin through the storm. When it had abated, Wesley asked one of the men how they could all sing so calmly with the wind and the waves raging around. The man replied, “We are not afraid to die.” After arriving in Georgia, Wesley followed up with the

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<sup>1</sup> F. F. Bruce. *The Book of the Acts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988) 489-490.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, 490.

Moravians and eventually back in England he came to true faith in Jesus because of this moment, because of their witness to calmness that he saw in the midst of the storm.

I wonder what kind of impact Paul's calm assurance through two weeks of storm made on the sailors and the soldiers with him. What would they think or feel on this night as Paul lifted up bread, giving "thanks to God in the presence of all," as he "broke it and began to eat"? It is hard as a Christian not to hear a reference to the Lord's supper in the way Luke wrote that. Especially when we consider he is breaking the bread at night, one last supper before either death or rescue. Probably only Luke or Aristarchus could have made that connection to Jesus.

But all of them, all two hundred and seventy-six, would have the opportunity to see a man who truly believed in Jesus, who trusted in the word he had received from God, who believed in the sovereign love of that God. This time Paul's words did sink in at least on some level and the men are encouraged.

That encouragement they received from Paul's faith did not lead them to wait and to see what would happen. You know, let's sit back and let God rescue us. The encouragement led them to keep fighting for life. After eating, they got back to work. Thrusting in God does not contradict taking the rational steps that are under our own power to make it through a storm. We see now that this was a grain ship, delivering food to Rome from a distant province. There is no hope for the ship anymore. There is a renewed hope for life. The men throw the remaining cargo of wheat overboard.

<sup>39</sup> When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. <sup>40</sup> And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. <sup>41</sup> But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern *began* to be broken up by the force *of the waves*. <sup>42</sup> The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none *of them* would swim away and escape; <sup>43</sup> but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, <sup>44</sup> and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

One remaining, climatic scare occurs within sight of land and safety. In what is now known on Malta as St. Paul's Bay, a smaller island shelters the bay. That smaller island is separated from Malta by a narrow channel about a hundred yards or ninety meters wide. That channel is an example of a place described by Luke as "where two seas met." Stuck fast on an unseen barrier of hardened mud, waves began to batter the ship to pieces. Countless sailors and passengers have died through the centuries in just such a situation, run aground offshore with land in sight. It is now every man for himself. Some will live. But only some. And yet, out of this impossible situation, even with sword-happy soldiers ready to kill the prisoners on board, God's sovereign hand brings every single soul safe to land.

From a literary point of view, this is the climax of Acts. Chapter 28 provides falling action that will bring us to resolution. God has brought Paul safely through once again. The travel to Rome will be mostly uneventful from here on out. Well, except for one event.

This final movement of Acts part VI is following our standard structure. Danger has been avoided. That was this section. God is sovereign over the storm. Let's conclude this lesson with the misconception that is corrected in 28:1-6 and we will save the defense given for our final, next lesson. This is Acts 28:1-6, misconception corrected.

### **Misconception Corrected (1-6)**

<sup>1</sup> When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. <sup>3</sup> But when Paul had gathered a

bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself on his hand. <sup>4</sup> When the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began* saying to one another, “Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.” <sup>5</sup> However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. <sup>6</sup> But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and *began* to say that he was a god.

The natives receive all the survivors with kindness. Shipwrecks were not an uncommon event. The islanders could see the ship breaking up offshore in the waves. They prepared a fire in advance to warm the wet and weary victims of tragedy. But when Paul is bitten, saved from shipwreck only to die hours later by snake poison, the islanders jump to the conclusion he is not a victim of natural tragedy. “Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.” That’s a consistent conclusion based on their understanding of how the gods work.

The inhabitants had enough experience with this kind of snake to know Paul was a dead man. So, when nothing happened, “They changed their minds and *began* to say that he was a god.” They are not far wrong in their interpretation that the gods are behind this event. It is not the gods. It is God. God has again allowed danger to befall Paul that through his rescue he would have credibility in the eyes of the islanders. The misconception of the islanders is not totally corrected. They recognize that Paul is not under sentence of the gods for crimes he has committed, but they do think he is a god. And as we saw on Paul’s first missionary journey, correcting that misconception does not necessarily lead to a positive outcome.

Spoiler alert, in this case the outcome will be positive. God’s sovereign plan requires that Paul stand before Caesar in Rome. And that’s where we will be next time in our last lesson of this series Interpreting Acts.

### Reflection questions

1. Read Acts 27:1-44. Try reading this narrative out loud with appropriate dramatic stress. If you can read it near a large body of water that would be ideal. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What questions come to mind?
2. Luke has provided for us a wonderfully detailed narrative of peril on the sea in the first century. What are some examples of narrative detail provided by Luke that help you imagine the reality of this journey? Details about the sea and land, or weather, or the ship, or the sailor’s actions?
3. How are the sailors’ and soldiers’ opinion of Paul changed through the narrative?
4. What promise is Paul trusting in? How does he express his trust?
5. What is the moment of climax in this story and how is it resolved? (Imagine that scene in a movie.)
6. What is the misconception voiced in 27:1-6 and how is that misconception corrected?
7. Consider back over the five sections of Acts Part VI, starting in 19:21. What dangers has Paul avoided? What misconceptions were corrected? What defenses have been given?
8. From this information, what are five or six points you could make if you were asked to defend Paul during his trial before Caesar?