Acts 27 — Paul's Voyage and the Sun, Moon, and Stars

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The Voyage as the History of Christendom

Acts 27 devotes an entire chapter to a voyage that begins at Fair Havens and ends at Rome in chapter 28. Many who have read this passage carefully have seen in it a veiled history of the professing church. It is worth tracing the broad outlines. Fair Havens was the place of blessing — the early church after Pentecost, where the Holy Spirit had descended, where the body of Christ was formed, where no one said that anything he possessed was his own, where there was large-hearted mutual sharing and no lack. There were imperfections from the beginning — the grumbling of Hellenistic believers, the case of Ananias and Sapphira — but it was a place of blessing.

The voyage ends in Rome, in captivity. Paul himself was a prisoner. The doctrine that God had given through him was set aside almost immediately after the apostolic generation passed. The pattern of the house of God, the truth of the one body, the distinction between the earthly and the heavenly — these things were practically all but lost in the post-apostolic church. Judaism took over the character of the professing church. That condition has continued. The journey from the blessing of Pentecost has ended in a bondage not of Rome but of a system that has rejected Paul's doctrine.

Three Names — and One Unnamed

The Holy Spirit names four persons in the opening verses. Paul, whose name means little, was God's servant to bring the gospel of the grace of God to the

Gentiles. If any man is spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write are the commandments of the Lord — that was Paul's claim, and the Corinthians rightly bowed to it. He represents the word of God.

Aristarchus, whose name means best ruler, was with Paul on this voyage. Who is the best ruler in the assembly? Not the elders, though they were given authority to exercise local administration. The best ruler — the one the assembly is to recognise as its sovereign authority — is the Holy Spirit, the vicar of Christ, His unseen representative here on earth. Where is He in Christendom today? He is acknowledged in doctrine by most who call themselves Christian. But is He recognised as the one who orders the assembly, who distributes gifts, who alone has authority to direct the gathering of God's people? The clerical system, from Rome to the simplest chapel, represents a non-recognition of Aristarchus. It is a serious matter to set aside the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

Luke was present — we know this because he uses the word we throughout the account — but he is not named. Paul elsewhere calls him the beloved physician. He is there to heal when spiritual disease enters. And Julius, the centurion, represents the power of Rome, of earthly government. Verse 3 shows the sovereignty of God over that power — he courteously allowed Paul to visit his friends. As the rivers of water are turned wherever the Lord wills, so is the heart of the king in the hand of the Lord. It is not the believer's business to change government, but to submit to the powers that be, as both Peter and Paul teach.

Fair Havens, the Storm, and Paul's Word

Paul admonished them in verse 9 not to sail — he had spiritual perception, a prophetic sense of what lay ahead. But the centurion believed the master and owner of the ship more than Paul. When a soft south wind began to blow, they supposed they had obtained their purpose and sailed close by Crete. The tempest followed immediately. Verse 20: when neither sun nor stars in many days

appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Paul stood in the midst of them with two things. First, his word about what would happen — no loss of life, though the ship would be lost. Second, the ground of it: there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am and whom I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul. The angel is the Lord Jesus Himself — the angel of Jehovah in the Old Testament. Whose I am and whom I serve. Then: I believe God, and it shall be even as it was told me. I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord. That is the word of faith in the darkness, and it is what sustained Paul and what sustained all those with him.

Then in verse 33–35, Paul besought them all to take food — fourteen days of fasting — and he himself gave thanks to God in the presence of them all and broke the bread and began to eat. The practical care for those around him. And they were all encouraged. The word of God, commended to God and the word of His grace — that is what builds up and gives inheritance. They all escaped safe to land.

I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. — Acts 27:25

Three Occasions Without the Sun — and What Each Means

Acts 27:20 says that neither sun nor stars in many days appeared. The natural question goes unasked by the Scripture: where was the moon? The silence is eloquent. The sun is the type of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great source of light. The moon is the great reflector — the one that should shine in reflected light upon the dark world during the night season. The stars have their own significance as those who shine in the darkness. But where was the moon? The question of Acts 28 answers it. In rejecting Paul and his doctrine, the light of testimony in Christendom went out.

Luke 23:44–45 records an earlier occasion: it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour, and the sun was darkened. On the cross, when the Lord Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the tree, the sun was darkened. No mention of the moon, no mention of the stars. They are not relevant. The only light that could have been present was the light of God — and it was there, not to shine but to judge. God is light, and in the sinless Son of Man hanging there as sin, the light of God judged every one of our sins. The three hours of darkness were not empty — they were the most morally weighty three hours in the history of the world.

Revelation 21:23 gives the third occasion: the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. No night there. No moon needed, no stars needed, no sun needed. The Lamb is the light. Between the cross and the new heaven and new earth, the church passes through its dark voyage — the sun and the stars not appearing, the moon absent. But the light of Paul's doctrine is there for those who will receive it. And at the end of all things, glory for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, forever.

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