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**Bible Study**  
**Acts 27**  
**The Shipwreck: “Broken to Be More Beautiful”**

***Introduction: The Royal Palace***<sup>1</sup>

Many years ago an architect planned that the walls of the Royal Palace be covered with sheets of beautiful mirrors from Paris. But when the shipment of glass arrived from Paris every mirror had been smashed in travel. The entire shipment was destroyed! The entrance could not be completed. Just as the workmen started gathering the broken pieces together to discard them the architect said, "Wait a minute. I've got an idea!" He then took a hammer and broke some of the larger pieces into tiny pieces. He gathered them up in his hands and walked over to the entry. The skilled architect then put some glue on the wall and arranged the tiny pieces. He did this several times until he had an enormous distortion in reflections, sparkling with a rainbow of brilliant colors! At no point were they broken alike and at no point was the angle exact. Today, the Royal Place is a dazzling brilliant display of prisms, reflecting light! As I read this story I could only think of one line, "Broken to be more beautiful!"

We read in John 12:3, *“Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil.”* The box of jar of precious ointment had to be broken to release the fragrance. There are many instances where life itself has to be broken to release its fragrance.

Today, we will be reading Acts 27, which describes Saint Paul’s journey from Jerusalem to Rome. The chapter ends with a shipwreck on the island of Malta. We will read through the chapter and describe what is happening, and then take a few lessons from this incident. Let us contemplate on how God allowed this ship to break to pieces in order to glorify His name to all who were on board.

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<sup>1</sup> Coniaris, Anthony M. Homilies from an Orthodox Pulpit. Minneapolis, MN: Light & Life Publishing, 1992 (page 108)

### ***What Led to Saint Paul's Voyage to Rome? (Summary of Acts 21-26)***

In brief summary, here are the highlights of the four chapters that lead up to the voyage:

1. Saint Paul was mobbed during a temple riot when the overzealous Jews made accusations against him that he taught against the Jews, the Law, and the Temple (Acts 21)
2. The Roman commander broke up the mob and bound Saint Paul
3. Then Saint Paul offered a defense at the Temple and recounts the story of his conversion. After he makes his speech, the crowd cries, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" The commander ordered Saint Paul to be brought into the barracks to be examined under scourging, in order to extract a confession from him. Saint Paul appeals to his Roman citizenship because it was unlawful to punish a citizen until he was proven guilty of a crime
4. Next, Saint Paul is brought before the Jewish council, and in order to divide the council, Saint Paul brings up the issue of the resurrection of the dead, knowing that one party, the Pharisees, believed in it, while the other party, the Sadducees, did not. So the Pharisees found no evil in Saint Paul. Fearing that Saint Paul would be harmed by the council, the Roman commander commanded his soldiers to go down, take Saint Paul by force and bring him into the barracks. Here, the Lord stands by Saint Paul and says, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome" (Acts 23:11).
5. Some of the Jews then plotted to murder Saint Paul, but Saint Paul's nephew reveals their scheme to the commander. The commander then prepares two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to take him to Caesarea.
6. Saint Paul was brought before Felix, the Roman Governor. Felix after hearing about the Christian ethical values of righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come becomes afraid because he was dishonest and in an adulterous marriage, and command Saint Paul to "Go away..." Felix would later be called to Rome to answer charges of misrule
7. Festus succeeded Felix, and two years after his arrest, Saint Paul is once again brought to trial
8. Perceiving that Festus would yield to the wishes of the Jewish authorities, Saint Paul appeals to Caesar, because it was his right as a Roman citizen to be tried before the imperial tribunal in Rome.
9. Saint Paul is next brought to King Agrippa, ruler of Galilee, who recognizes Saint Paul's innocence and says that he would have been free had Saint Paul not appealed to Caesar. But Saint Paul still needed protection from the Jews who were seeking to kill Him, and He fulfills God's command to go to Rome.

### ***The Voyage to Rome and Shipwreck (Acts 27)***

At first glance, we may seem to have a lot “boring” details about the voyage to Rome, but when we look into the deeper meaning of this verse, we will see how God took the brokenness of the ship, and indeed all who were on board, to turn it into an opportunity for preaching and for the glory of His holy name. Let us meditate on the course of this journey as if it were the course of our lives in this world.

#### *Verses 1-3*

Here, we are introduced to the major players in this chapter. First, the word “we” indicates that Saint Luke, the author of the Book of Acts accompanies Saint Paul on this voyage.

There were also other prisoners, which reminds church fathers, such as Saint John Chrysostom how Saint Paul is imitating Christ. Just as Christ was innocent and was numbered with the transgressors, so Saint Paul, also innocent, is numbered with these transgressors of the law.

Aristarchus was a young man whom Saint Paul met in Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. It is good and useful for Aristarchus to be with him because he would go back and report to the Macedonians all that he had seen.

Lastly, we have Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment (a body of soldiers responsible directly to the emperor himself) who does not seem to regard Saint Paul as a common criminal but treats him kindly. We’ll see how his relationship with Saint Paul develops in our story.

#### *Verses 4-8*

Here, we have some details of the journey. They are mostly sailing along the coast. The wind was blowing against their favor which forced them in this direction. They got on a much larger vessel at the port in Myra. They encounter more difficulty and sail slowly. Let me pause to ask this question now, and we will come back to it, when we contemplate on these verses: God commanded Saint Paul to go to Rome, and Saint Paul is obviously following His will, so why is God making the journey so difficult?

#### *Verses 9-12*

The fast that Saint Paul mentions is the fast that occurred on the great Day of Atonement, in the end of September, after the autumnal equinox, which would make navigation through the waters very difficult. While Saint Paul’s advice is heard, the centurion decides to go with the advice of the helmsmen and the owner of the ship. The reason: they found that Fair Havens would not be suitable for them and they didn’t want to spend the winter there.

#### *Verses 13-20*

Things start out smoothly and the sailors and those on board are fooled by this false sense of security. Then, they basically head into a typhoon. When they came under the shelter of Clauda they got the skiff (a small boat or dinghy pulled by the ship) with great

difficulty. Basically, they're in trouble. They lighten the ship, and because they could not see the sun or the stars, they lost all sense of direction in the stormy seas. They basically had no hope of being saved and were desperate. These men had gone a long time without food, perhaps because they were gripped by fear.

#### *Verses 21-26*

When Saint Paul says, "You should have listened to me," he wasn't really giving them a big "I told you so." He doesn't mean to insult them. If indeed he insulted them, they would not have heeded his advice from this point forward. He says this because he wishes that he might be believed in the future. Consider how confident and how strong Saint Paul's faith must have appeared to these men, in the midst of this tribulation.

#### *Verses 27-32*

These sailors are in the dark and have no idea what is happening but they sense they drawing near some land. Look at what the sailors do in their desperation. They want to jump ship and save their own lives and sail off in the lifeboat. From a spiritual point of view, Saint Paul gives the advice to the centurion to ensure God's promise and the centurion believes him. From a practical point of view, if these sailors jump ship, then no one will be able to navigate the ship properly and they will all perish.

#### *Verses 33-44*

Saint Paul encourages their faith and tells them to eat in order to strengthen their lives and to carry out God's promise. Their fear had possessed them to the point that they had no desire of food, but now trusting in Saint Paul's word, they eat and receive strength.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners, because under Roman law, the soldiers themselves would be killed if they could not guard the prisoners properly. But see how the centurion has become so attached to Saint Paul, that he kept his soldiers from carrying out this scheme and letting Saint Paul's prophecy be fulfilled as a witness to all who were on board.

### ***Lessons from the Shipwreck of Acts 27 – Why Must We Be Broken?***

#### *#1. God breaks us to remind us of who we are (and to make room for Him)*

Think of hard ground or the seed. They must be broken in order to be shown their potential. The hard ground must be shown that it can become cultivated and fertile soil in which plants can grow. The seed must realize that it's potential is not to remain a seed, or to be eaten by birds, but to become a tree which provides shade, food, and a nest for birds.

We also have a call to realize our potential for holiness. When God allows us to be broken, He reminds us that we are created in his image. We have a gentle reminder of this during the liturgy when the priest offers incense to us; the same incense that he offers to the altar, or to the icons, or to the Bible. We are icons. We are living gospels. We are the living temples wherein dwells the Holy Spirit.

God reminds us that our purpose is not to love and worship ourselves through our ego, but to enter into a fellowship and union with him. God reminds us that He is our creator and the real captain in our lives. When God allows that our possessions be taken away or destroyed, he reminds us to lay up treasures in heaven where life is eternal, and not on the earth where moth and rust destroy. God breaks us to make room for him, just as the earth is broken and tilled to make room for the seed to be planted.

We can be reminded during times of brokenness, just as the sailors and soldiers in Acts 27 who constantly desired to follow their own will (either by steering their own course, or jumping ship, or wanting to kill the prisoners), instead of trusting in the promises of God that they would all be spared.

*#2. God breaks us as a witness to others*

Here, there is no doubt that after the soldiers and sailors reached Malta and had time to relax and to recall the events that had happened, that they would remember how in the midst of their desperation, Saint Paul was confident in his God. This event was meant as a kind of witness to them of the strength of the Christian faith and of the power of God to spare their lives in the midst of even the worst trouble that would fall upon them. How will others see as you encounter trouble and tribulation?

*#3. God breaks us in order to have fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ*

If we look at the events of the arrest, trial, and sufferings of Saint Paul, and compare them to the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will find remarkable similarities. For instance, our Lord Jesus Christ was innocent and was found innocent by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. So was Saint Paul. Our Lord Jesus Christ was subject to scourging. On many occasions, Saint Paul was also beaten and imprisoned.

Just as the Lord emerged victorious in the Resurrection, so to did Saint Paul emerge victorious when he would be martyred at Rome, winning the Kingdom and the crown of martyrdom.

When we are broken, we share in the very life and in the very sufferings of Christ. We also share in this brokenness when we partake of the Holy Communion: the body that was broken for us and the blood that was shed for us. In a very real way, I am experiencing the power of this sacrifice every time I approach the Eucharist.

Let us conclude with these verses from the Psalm 33 as a final reflection and concluding prayer: *“The righteous cried, and the Lord heard them, and delivered them out of all their afflictions. The Lord is near to those who are contrite [or broken/humbled] in their heart, and will save the lowly in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but out of them all, the Lord will deliver them.”*

**GLORY IS DUE TO OUR GOD UNTO THE AGE OF ALL AGES. AMEN.**