

4. The captain, crew, and passengers are discouraged victims of the vicissitudes about which James warns in:  
**James 1:6b** ... the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. (NASB)
5. A class one hurricane produced wave crests of about 45 feet driven by winds of at least 74 mile per hour. Currents in the south central Mediterranean flow from the west in opposition the westward movement of the hurricane.
6. Its violent winds and waves, plus the currents placed the ship in multiple areas of stress while the Syrtis sandbanks lurked off the coast of Libya.
7. The folk Paul addresses in Acts 27:21–26 are in no way copacetic. He assures them they will survive, but the ship will ultimately be lost.
8. During his warning he informs them of the source of his confidence is “an angel of the God to whom I belong.”
9. The angel commanded Paul, “Do not be afraid, Paul!” This mandate is introduced by the negative conjunction **μή (mḗ)**: “Do not,” followed by the aorist middle imperative of the verb **φοβέω (phobéō)**: “fear.”
10. The ingressive aorist stresses the beginning of an action or the entrance into a state which means Paul has not yet entered, that is, he was *not* in a state of fear.
11. Therefore, the apostle is obviously copacetic in the midst of horrid weather conditions. The seasoned sailors had already begun preparation to do battle with the elements by undergirding the ship in Acts 27:17.

### Isagogics on Shipping in the Graeco-Roman World

1. The ships of the Romans were not steered by a single rudder. All Roman ships had a two-paddle rudder system noted in Acts 27:40 with the plural form of the noun, **πηδάλιον (pēdálion)**: “rudders.”
2. Most of the ancient ships had one large mast and therefore one sail.

3. The one mast system concentrated the strain rather than distributing it over the entire hull. This gave the ancient ships a greater tendency to break up.
4. Because of leakage and the danger of foundering, ancient ships were equipped with undergirders<sup>2</sup> (Acts 20:17). The technical term for it is “strapping.” It is a system of passing ropes, and later chains, completely around the hull. They were used to keep the planks from springing in a storm.
5. The ships in Paul’s day were not small. The ship in which Paul was wrecked in Acts 27:37 carried 276 people. After the wreck Paul eventually went to Rome on a ship called *Castor and Pollux* (“gods of navigation”; see Acts 28:11 [KJV]. It carried the 276 who were wrecked plus its full complement of passengers and crew. So it was probably carrying 500 people. Josephus was once involved in a wreck and there were 600 people aboard (80 survived). So they were not small boats.
6. Paul’s ship in Acts 27:15 could not “look at the wind”—which is what the Greek says. Ancient ships were unable to make headway into the wind of a storm. A ship could only sail within seven points of the wind [32-point compass].
7. The speed on an ancient ship can be determined from historical information. Under fair winds a ship could sail about 7 knots per hour, i.e., 8 mph.
8. The Romans had no natural love for the sea. As far as possible they left all seamanship in the hands of the Greeks and the Phoenicians, and later the Egyptians.
9. But seamanship had a great deal to do with the Roman Empire because in the ports of Naples and Rome the harbors were constantly filled with ships.

**NOTE:** Although I have been noting that Paul was the only copacetic occupant on board I must add that there were two other passengers who were believers and who did maintain unalloyed happiness:

**Luke.** As the writer of the historical background of the incipency of Christianity in the Acts of the Apostles and is identified among those who accompany Paul on his trip to Rome:

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<sup>2</sup> “To gird, strengthen, or brace from the bottom side of a ship” (*Webster’s New Twentieth Century Dictionary: Unabridged*, s.v. “undergird.”)

Luke is mentioned by name only three times in the New Testament—all by Paul while in prison. (Luke) never mentions his own name in his writings. Luke does identify himself in a measure in the “we” sections of Acts. All the leading associates of Paul (mentioned in the Epistles) are eliminated from possible authorship by data in Acts, except Titus and Luke. Since no case can be made for Titus, Luke implies his own authorship. There are, then, valid autobiographical references by Luke particularly in Acts.<sup>3</sup>

**Aristarchus** was an associate of Paul’s who traveled with him on numerous occasions:

Aristarchus was one of those faithful companions of the apostle Paul who shared with him his labors and sufferings. He is suddenly mentioned along with Gaius as having been seized by the excited Ephesians during the riot stirred up by the silversmiths (Acts 19:29). He is mentioned as accompanying Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2). There he attended Paul and shared his imprisonment.<sup>4</sup>

**Julius** was assigned to Paul as both guard and protector during the apostle’s voyage to testify before Nero:

Julius, the centurion who conducted Paul to Rome. At Sidon he allowed Paul to visit his friends, and treated him courteously throughout the voyage (Acts 27:1, 3, 43), A.D. 62.<sup>5</sup>

10. Paul was also reminded by the herald angel that he must be brought before Nero therefore he assured Paul that all onboard would survive the storm.
11. Hearing this, Paul encouraged the people with his confident report in:  
**Acts 26:25 - “Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will be just as I have been told.” (NET)**
12. The clause, “keep up your courage,” is the present active imperative of the verb **εὐθυμέω (euthuméō)**: “be courageous.”
13. This is a command for objectivity as opposed to the present subjectivity and depression that developed in the face of catastrophic circumstances.

<sup>3</sup> W. T. Dayton, “Luke, the Evangelist,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, gen. ed. Merrill C. Tenny (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 3:999.

<sup>4</sup> S. F. Hunter, “Aristarchus,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, gen. ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 1:241.

<sup>5</sup> Merrill F. Unger, “Julius,” in *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), 623.

14. Paul's use of the imperative is based on the present active indicative of the verb **πιστεύω (pisteúō)**: "to believe."
15. The present tense is progressive indicating continuous action. Paul keeps on believing God's intent communicated by the angel that every person on that ship will survive.
16. He concluded the prophecy by informing the people that at some point they will have to beach the ship "on a certain island" (v. 26).
17. The storm's power began pushing the ship past the Gulf of Sidra and the dangerous environment of the Syrtis Banks.
18. After fourteen days the crew began to calculate they were approaching land. They determined this by taking "soundings," indicated by the verb **βολίζω (bolízō)**: "a measurement of depth with a sounding line; a place or part of a body of water where a hand sounding line will reach bottom."<sup>6</sup>
19. In verse 28, the crew took two "soundings," measured in "fathoms," the first indicated 20 fathoms of depth, the second 15.
20. The fathom is now standardized as six-feet of depth in water. The twenty-fathom measurement indicated a depth of 120 feet while that of fifteen fathoms revealed a depth of 90 feet.
21. Concerned that they might "run aground somewhere on rocks" they dropped four anchors hoping at dawn they might have a sighting of land (v. 29).
22. Based on longitude we are able to surmise that at midnight when they took the soundings it was about six to seven hours before daylight arrived.
23. Paul had related the messages from the angel promising they all would survive the ravages of the sea but that the ship would not be saved.
24. Without the ability to place trust in what they perceived were the optimistic ramblings of a landlubber, these men panicked and decided to abandon ship.

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<sup>6</sup> Meriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th, ed., s.v. "sounding."

25. Their strategy is noted in verse 30. They would pretend to lower the ship's boat into the water and drop anchors from the bow of the ship.
26. This ruse would enable them to then escape in the dinghy leaving the rest onboard. It was a foolish move which Paul discerned immediately:  
**Acts 27:30** Then when the sailors tried to escape from the ship and were lowering the ship's boat into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out anchors from the bow,  
**v. 31** Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."
27. Paul continued to provide divine guidance by proxy. He was an apostle of the Lord, who was informed of essential details that assured he would get to Rome.
28. God had decreed the ship would survive the hurricane's 45-foot waves, 74 mile-per-hour winds, sea currents, loss of cargo, and a narrow escape from the Syrtis quicksand in the Gulf of Sidra.
29. Having survived all this the sailors are now in panic to abandon ship over concern there may be rocks nearby that could sink the ship.
30. Paul was clear. He had reported in verse 26, "We must run aground on some island."
31. Observation: Those without doctrine are not able to sustain themselves for very long. These sailors used their professional training, experience, and expertise to shepherd the ship through the meteorological onslaught that lasted for over two weeks.
32. Minus faith rest that would have given them confidence, the fear of subaqueous rocks led to the irrational decision to abandon ship and occupy the much smaller dinghy.
33. Paul gave them prophecies that first calmed their nerves but they did not have a doctrinal inventory to sustain their souls on an ongoing basis.

34. These professional sailors, capable of managing a seagoing vessel through the ravages of the worst kind of weather the seas can deliver, were unable to acquire the courage that the copacetic soul enjoys.
35. Paul encouraged them to have something to eat (v. 33ff.). They had been battling the elements for two weeks primarily without food.
36. Some biblical scholars contend that the two-week fast by the heathen mariners was not due to the constant effort required to fight the storm, but in homage and supplication to idol deities. Once the storm abated the men felt free to eat.
37. What followed was fulfillment of the prophecies Paul had expressed to all the passengers. When daylight broke they saw a bay and a beach. They made a dead run at them with the intent of beaching the ship.
38. Now a new challenge occurred “where two seas met.” A “patch of crosscurrents” drove them away from the beach into the bay where the ship wrecked as it ran aground.
39. Several events transpired as passengers struggled to disembark. The Roman soldiers were afraid the prisoners would escape so their plan was to kill them all.
40. The NET Bible provides a helpful translator’s note for:  
**Acts 27:42**      Now the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners so that none of them would escape by swimming away.  
**The issue here was not cruelty, but that the soldiers would be legally responsible if any prisoners escaped and would suffer punishment themselves. So they were planning to do this as an act of self-preservation.<sup>7</sup>**
41. Paul and the others were spared by the intervention of Julius the centurion, identified in Acts 27:1 as a member of the Augustan cohort.  
**Acts 27:1**      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. (NET)

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<sup>7</sup> “Acts 27:42,” in *The NET Bible* (Dallas: Biblical Studies Press, 1996–2005), 2202sn20.