

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Acts 28:11-15 | Session 74 | Paul Nears Rome | A.D. 63

God delivered Paul and all those shipwrecked with him (28:1-10) on the island of Melita (Today, Malta). While on the island, Paul exhibited many apostolic miracles and performed many healings for the barbarians; i.e., *barbarous* (the island people). Now, with the weather in their favor, and having requisitioned another ship, they continued their journey to Rome.

Verse 11—

And after three months. This likely refers to *three months* since being shipwrecked. **We departed in a ship of Alexandria.** Grain ships were prevalent in the Mediterranean, bringing cargo from Egypt to Rome and other parts of the world. We remember the previous ship that was wrecked, it carried *wheat* (27:38) which the crew threw overboard in the Euroclydon (hurricane). Finding a ship that would carry all 276 *souls* (27:37) to Rome may not have been an easy task, but another **ship of Alexandria had wintered in the isle**, and Rome undoubtedly had rights to request any ship for official business, which *Julius* the centurion apparently does. Luke adds an interesting feature in his description of this ship. The word **sign** means the *figurehead* or emblem sometimes carved into the *pro* (or *bow*) of the ship. In the case of this ship the figurehead was identified in Greek as *dioskouroi* which literally means the ship was dedicated to “*The Twin Brothers*” who were mythological sons of Zeus and it was thought they brought good fortune to mariners. The KJV translates this word as **Castor and Pollux**. They were looked upon as the patron saints of navigation. They are found in the constellation Gemini and are pretty easy to spot in the sky, especially in February. Often there was a common practice of swearing an oath by their names, or by the constellation “By Gemini!”

Luke didn’t tell us what the figureheads were of the other two ships they sailed on during this journey, so why this one? We have to speculate. Maybe to show the irony of how, after God had brought about a great deliverance for this entire ship of 276 souls, they now continue on their journey on another ship that trusts in false gods. And perhaps there is a lesson that no matter what display of Sovereignty God exhibits, most of the world remains unconvinced (or maybe unaware) of the truth, yet God accomplishes His purposes (See 1 Kings 19:1-4 as an example). We know, as does Luke’s readers that it is not the *figurehead* who watches over the voyage, but it is God who protects his servant.

Why did Paul go through these kinds of trials? Paul wrote, “*That we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead*” (2 Corinthians 1:9).

Verses 12,13—

The phrase **we fetched a compass** is just one word in Greek, *perierchomai*. It appears that all the various translators of English Bibles had difficulty knowing just how to translate this word; It means to go about. Why did the KJV translators use **we fetched a compass**? Critics of the King James Version say things like this:

“Surely ‘fetched a compass’ is a phrase that few modern readers, even those skilled in such things, would understand. Some might even think that the expression refers to an actual compass, which, of course, did not exist at the times in which these passages were written. This kind of difficult reading is hardly a rarity, especially in the Old Testament portion of the KJV.”

(Dr. James White, Reformed theologian. The King James Only Controversy).

Should we disregard the KJV because *few modern readers would understand it*, or because *some might think that the expression refers to an actual compass*? This is a poor and weak argument, and a lazy man’s statement.

The apostle Paul instructed Timothy to *Study to show thyself approved unto God*. The evangelical church today practices the exact opposite. Their mantra is *let’s make it as easy as possible*, and the result is the dumbing down of Christians and society in general. In fact, I would go so far to say many evangelicals reject the diligent study of the Word of God. Is it any wonder why Christians today are so weak and feeble in their faith?

It is true that the word **compass** for most people today means a literal compass. But did it mean that when the KJV was translated in 1611. To find out we can look at the Oxford English Dictionary (which anyone today can get their hands on via the internet) and see what the word meant in 1611? What we find out is that it means today exactly what it meant then. Used in the verb form, as it is in vs. 13 it meant and still means: *to go around in a circular course* as in “Magellan’s ship compassed the world.” We typically add a prefix today “en” to encompass which can mean *to surround*. In 1611, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word **compass** also meant *contrive* (bring about) *to accomplish* (something).

The word **fetch** used in the British sense can mean *to arrive, or come to rest somewhere*. With those two definitions we can speculate a bit better as to why the translators used this phrase. I think **we fetched a compass** is tied back to verse 12: **And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days and from thence having accomplished (or gone about) our tasks in Syracuse, came to Rhegium**. Or, it could mean **And from there we went about by way of tacking (due to the prevailing winds) and came to Rhegium** (See 2 Samuel 5:23).

A little study of English words (you don’t need to know Greek) will help us understand a passage. The KJV helps us learn something and become better students of English and the Word of God. There is another reason to use the King James Version and that is, it comes from better and more numerous manuscripts.

Greek Manuscript Types Simplified [Approximately 5,773 N.T. Greek Manuscripts]		
Alexandrian <small>Major manuscripts: Codex Vaticanus; Codex Sinaiticus; Codex Alexandrinus;</small>	Critical Text <small>All Modern Translations, ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT, etc., are based on these texts.</small>	207 of the manuscripts support the Critical text.
Byzantine <small>Not a single edition; many manuscripts, or portions of manuscripts. Early Christian writings support the Textus Receptus as early as A.D. 180</small>	Textus Receptus <small>KJV, NKJV (for the most part), Young’s Literal, and several older English translations are based on the Textus Receptus.</small>	5,369 of the manuscripts support the Textus Receptus.

Verse 14—

We found the brethren. Greek, *parakaleo* - to call to one’s side, Literally, **where we found brethren who called for us to tarry with them seven days:**

Paul has some freedom as a prisoner. He is allowed to stay in **Puteoli for seven days**. Who these **brethren were**, dispersed Jews of “this way” (Acts 9:2) or believing Gentiles, we don’t know? After staying with them Luke records, **so we went toward Rome**.

Verse 15—

The final stop before arriving in Rome, **Appii forum and The three taverns**. Met by **the brethren...whom Paul saw and took courage**. Likewise, we should be encouragers of the brethren.