



PART 1

PAUL IN CHAINS: LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Chapter Two

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

When Paul's long journey to Rome got under way again after that brief stop in Sidon, the ship encountered what would be the bane of the whole trip: contrary winds. Luke wrote:

Acts 27:4-5 (NASB)

⁴“From there we put out to sea [from Sidon], and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary.

⁵When we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia.”

THE GOING GETS TOUGH

In order to see how Paul's leadership lifts him even higher among the men on the ship, until he is completely in charge and everyone is dependent on him, we need to look into the details of this story.

Cyprus is an island just south of Asia Minor, north and west of the land of Israel (see map). Myra is a harbor town a little farther west and just on the southern tip of Asia Minor, in modern-day Turkey. So after leaving Sidon, on the northern coast of modern-day Lebanon, the ship's captain turned west toward Rome and sailed northwesterly in the direction of his home port, Adramyttium. Cyprus was the closest island, and a large one. The winds were from the west, so they sailed to the east of Cyprus, trying to avoid the stiff winds as much as possible.

Obviously, a sailing vessel cannot sail straight into a strong wind. The only way to advance into headwinds is by a maneuver called *tacking*. **Tacking** involves steering a zigzag course, first perpendicular to the wind, utilizing the sails to gain speed, then turning into the wind and dropping the sails to allow the ship's momentum to carry it into the wind. Then the sails are raised at the opportune moment and the ship runs perpendicular to the wind again.



The maneuver is extremely difficult and labor-intensive, but it makes it possible to sail into a moderate headwind.

There were several kinds of ships in those days. Some were large ships that ventured into the open sea to transport loads of cargo through the shipping lanes. Others were port hoppers that skidded along near the coastlines and moved from port to port. This was apparently a ship of the second variety, because Luke describes its journey from port to port. It went from Caesarea to Sidon, then from Sidon to Myra, on the southern tip of Asia Minor.

The route was somewhat out of the way for a journey to Rome. It would have been a straight shot west from Sidon to Rhodes (nearly halfway to Rome). But because of the winds, instead of sailing straight for Rhodes, they made a detour that took them north of Cyprus, a safer but less direct route.

The chronological clues in Acts suggest that it was mid-August, which is consistent with what we know about the wind patterns of the region. In August, the winds are westerly.

Sailing season was quickly coming to an end. From approximately November 11 to the end of March, winter winds on the Mediterranean can be treacherous, so no ships made any regular crossings during those months. And even in early autumn, from September 14 to November 11, travel on the Mediterranean could be risky. So time was short to make the journey, and speed was of the essence. According to maritime historians, the journey from Sidon to Myra, into a headwind, would have taken approximately nine days. By the time Paul and his entourage arrived at Myra, the dangerous season was already approaching.

Myra had a harbor. The city itself was some two miles inland, but the harbor was a busy, active port, chiefly for vessels from Egypt.

Egypt was a major source of grain for the Roman Empire. Ships would bring grain from Egypt to the granaries of Myra, offload, and return to Egypt. Other ships bound for Rome would collect the grain and carry it to the imperial capital. There happened to be in Myra one of these ships bound for Italy. Luke said,

Acts 27:6 (NASB)

6 “There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it.”