

The Naked Bible Podcast 2.0

Number 60

“Acts 27-28”

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With

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August 2, 2015

Acts 27 & 28

This episode wraps up our study of the book of Acts. These two chapters focus on Luke's account of Paul's hazardous journey by ship to Rome. Through the course of his narrative, Luke drops some cryptic references to the theological concept of a promised land for the people of God and Paul's role in reclaiming the nations disinherited at Babel, the heart of the Deuteronomy 32 worldview.

Here is the paper referenced in the show:

[Colson Triangular Numbers in the NT](#)

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 60, Acts 27-28. I'm your layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey Mike, how are you doing this week?

MSH: Very good. And we're finally at the end of the book of Acts. What do you know?

TS: I know. It's only taken us, what, 3-4 months? It's been an in-depth Acts Bible study.

MSH: Well, I hoping people sort of get the hang of what we want to do here. It's not verse by verse. There are other people who do that. Mike will go through it and whatever sort of pops out at him that's interesting that we'll sort of focus on. I think people are getting it and I think by and large are certainly appreciating it, at least that's my impression of it.

TS: Absolutely. I get tons of feedback saying I hope we continue doing it and we certainly have enough material to keep doing it. So that's good. Well Mike we have a special announcement for the end of the show so that's exciting.

MSH: Yes it is. It concerns the companion website to my book, the Unseen Realm

TS: Awesome, a little tease there so you're going to have to wait until the end of the show to get that.

MSH: Absolutely, so we'll finish Acts today so let's just jump in. There are a few things here in these final two chapters I think people will find real interesting. This may not be one of the longer episodes but there are things to pick up here that relate to some of the things we've talked about before and, again, some new turf as well. So let's just start right at the beginning of Acts 27. So here in verse 1,

And when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort named Julius.² And embarking in a ship of Adramyttium, which was about to sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica.³ The next day we put in at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for.

MSH: Now I'm going to stop here. There's something that is interesting and it's a little bit off here that might draw attention. For those who have a good accounting, have read through their Old Testament a couple of times, the place names Sidon will probably sound familiar. It really is more familiar because the Old Testament, usually paired with Tyre, Tyre and Sidon. This in the Old Testament times a Phoenician city just like Tyre was. And we get to this point, well, why would Sidon be included here? What's the point? It seems like it's pretty far north of what we

would think of as the holy land and whatnot, and yeah, it's familiar for the Old Testament and it gets mentioned a few times and whatnot. So is there a connection?

Well, I think there is a bit of a connection here and the curious phrase that might catch your eye or your ear is Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him leave to go to his friends and be cared for. Now what's odd is why would Paul have friends in Sidon? When was he ever there? What's going on there? Why would there be people in Sidon who are friendly to the apostle Paul? And what I think is really going on here, and I'm going to try and tie this into the Old Testament, is I think this is Luke's way of letting the reader know and the hearer know that there were believers in Sidon. There were believers in this place who maybe had been led to the Lord by Paul or at least knew Paul. But they were not antagonists. They were not just Jews be who could have conceivably been opponents for some reason. It doesn't say they were family. So I think the best conclusion is that there are people here who've heard the gospel, who know Paul is, and they're believers. And when Sidon is mentioned, this is another one of those geographical references that sort of serve the purpose of some of the other geographical references we've come across in Acts where Luke is letting us know that hey, there are places, now catch what I'm saying here.

There are places in the Old Testament that you're familiar with that are actually either associated with the land promised to the patriarchs, to the people of Israel, or are in some way associated perhaps with Genesis 10 or they have some other connection to this bigger idea of the people of God having a land, a holy land, what is the rightful possession the people of God. In one sense, this is all the nations. And we've talked about the reclaiming of the nations and whatnot, that's very familiar. But there are, again, some of these places that are specifically mentioned in connection with the history of Israel. We talked about Samaria. We talked about Damascus. We talked about Caphtor, these places that show up in the book of Acts that have some relationship to Old Testament Israel, the people of God, and perhaps their enemies, the giant clans or what not, places that sort of should have been included in the conquest. And then there are these, just the nations surrounding Israel that are going to be reclaimed. Well, Sidon is actually sort of belonging to the first group. Believe it or not, Sidon is a place that is connected with the patriarchal promises, the Promised Land, and where you get that is Genesis 49. Now I'll grant that Genesis 10 does include Sidon so we have that going on as well. Genesis 10:19 connect Sidon with the territory of the Canaanites. Specifically the verse says,

And the territory of the Canaanites extended from Sidon in the direction of Gerar as far as Gaza,

MSH: So it's there but it's in association with Canaan. And that takes us into the territory and raises the question, well, is Sidon actually part of the Promised Land according of the promises of the patriarchs and the answer is yes it is. Genesis 49:13 when Jacob is blessing the children of Joseph and his own children to chapter 49, the 12 tribes, his 12 sons, we read in verse 13 about Zebulun.

“Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea;
he shall become a haven for ships,
and his border shall be at Sidon.”

MSH: So this seemingly kind of random reference to Sidon in Acts, now were in chapter 27, is yet another way for Luke to telegraph that all of these places that I'm mentioning in Acts have some connection back to territory that rightfully belonged to Israel, the people of God, and by referencing it here in Acts 27, it's just sort of an offhanded way of saying, yup, even at Sidon there were believers. There are people who are our good friends of Paul. It's Luke's way of saying the gospel had reached there, too. So including the geographical reference, it's just another way of letting the reader know that the plan hasn't stopped. The gospel is spreading everywhere. It's consuming all these places that would have been associated with the territorial kingdom of Israel and it's reaching into the outer surrounding nations that are under the dominion of other gods that get referenced in Genesis 10.

All of these places are going to be the dominion, the domain of the family of God, this whole concept of the fullness of the Gentiles being gathered from the nations so that "all" Israel could be saved. We talked about that last week or couple weeks ago, actually a couple times, This concept is just a little bit obliquely being telegraphed by another place name reference so that we know, the reader knows, that the places that you'd associate with these ideas are indeed coming under the dominion of the kingdom of God. The gospel is penetrating into these territories. So I thought that was worth mentioning. In an older episode, I referenced an article by a guy named Kallai on the on the borders the promised land and you could go back in earlier episodes and find that article on the website. But I just want to read one little section here about this area Sidon. Kallai writes,

In the north it falls short of the frontier of Canaan, and is drawn from the Mediterranean Sea, somewhat north of Sidon, to Baal-gad, at the southern end of the Valley of Lebanon, below Mount Hermon. Hence, the land of Israel includes Mount Hermon and the northern and central part of Transjordan, comprising the Bashan, Gilead and the Plain (Mishor) up to the river Arnon.

MSH: So Sidon is sort of the northernmost point, just like Genesis 49 said that the border of Zebulun will be at Sidon, so it sort of is the outermost reaches and here we find it referenced in kind of the outermost chapter of the book of Acts, second to the last chapter. It's just sort of a geographical note that factors in this cosmic geographical idea of the fullness of the Gentiles and the territory that rightfully belonged to the patriarchs. If we keep going in the narrative, just go down to verse 5,

⁵ And when we had sailed across the open sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. ⁶ There the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing for Italy and put us on board. ⁷ We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind did not allow us to go farther, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. ⁸ Coasting along it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

⁹ Since much time had passed, and the voyage was now dangerous because even the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, ¹⁰ saying, “Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” ¹¹ But the centurion paid more attention to the pilot and to the owner of the ship than to what Paul said. ¹² And because the harbor was not suitable to spend the winter in, the majority decided to put out to sea from there, on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing both southwest and northwest, and spend the winter there.

MSH: So, we get this little narrative that really sets up the fact that they’re going to run into a lot of trouble. They should've stayed where they were, should've listened to Paul. They're going to hit disaster. This reference to the fast is probably the Day of Atonement. Most commentators would land there, people like Fitzmeyer would be holding that particular view. So he gives you an idea sort of in the calendar when this activity was happening. So I get questions periodically about what the fast was. Was it on the Jewish calendar? Probably, again, the best guess is the Day of Atonement because it was associated with fasting on the 10th of Tishribe. Leviticus 16:29-31, you can look that up. The narrative continues on and we get a narrative of how they run into terrible things. They're having lots of trouble and we'll get down to verse 21. We're familiar with the story of how they're tossed around, have to throw things overboard to save the ship. Verse 21 says,

²¹ Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. ²² Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. ²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ ²⁵ So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. ²⁶ But we must run aground on some island.”

MSH: So, again, Paul is giving them advice. The reference to an angel of God, and there are other places in the book of Acts about the angel of the Lord so on and so forth, I just wanted to make a comment here that because of the way definiteness works in Greek grammar, we actually had a definiteness question in our last Q&A. The angel of God, an angel of God, the angel of the Lord, in the New Testament this is not the angel of the Lord figure as we would think of it back in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament it has to be translated definite, the angel of the Lord, because of Hebrew grammar. In the New Testament you'll find that it doesn't have to be translated that way but sometimes English translations do just for style.

So don't read into this passage or other passages that we have this Old Testament figure. Frankly, if you're familiar with the two powers idea, what I have in my books, Unseen Realm especially, about the two Yahweh's figure, the second Yahweh figure, we had this question Q&A as well, is the second person of the Trinity. Now, post Old Testament times, now become incarnate in Christ and by this time in the book of Acts, Christ has died and been resurrected. So

it's not the second Yahweh figure post resurrection. Christ is at the right hand of God. In New Testament passages that describe him after the resurrection is embodied. We're not dealing with the same figure here so I don't want people to conclude by virtue of their English translations and get confused that now we're back to talking about this Old Testament guy. We're not. Just thought I'd bring that up because some translations here will have the angel of God or the angel of the Lord or something like that. This isn't the only place that kind of thing happened. So I thought we need to bring it up at some point. Verse 31, Paul has just given his directions that continue. Let's just go back to verse 27 so we'll continue with where we left off.

²⁷ When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. ²⁸ So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. ²⁹ And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. ³⁰ And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, ³¹ Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved." ³² Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go.

MSH: So that's a nice narration. It's a nice story. Now they're finally believing Paul. They're believing what he says. They're trusting that yes, he'd been visited by an angel and the angel told him all this stuff. If you go back to those earlier verses where the angel says you must testify of the Lord in Rome, what this section really telegraphs is that Paul is going to get the Rome come hell or high water, pun intended. That's really what the messaging is here, that God intends for Paul to get to Rome. And we've talked about this before. Paul views this as important but really he needs to get the Rome so that he can take this, get this Caesar thing taken care of and these charges because he's going to leave there and go to Spain. So it's this idea that God is going to get Paul to where he needs to go no matter what. And he's giving him these messages and Paul is giving the information to the soldiers and they're actually believing him. So they cut the boats loose and there they all are.

They're all in the same ship and they're all going to live or die. And they're trusting him. I'm not saying this is a faith conversion but they're trusting him. And the theological messaging is Paul is going to get to Rome no matter what and God's going to see to it. So we have to do what we're supposed to do here. So they're beginning to sense there's something special about the guy, at least in the sense that you got somebody divine looking out for him, giving a messages, and they're starting to buy at least that much. It's going to get a little more interesting as it goes on in these two chapters but it's very clear that Paul is not viewed as a normal prisoner. Now when we get to verse 33, we'll just pick up where we left off.

³³ As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, "Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing." ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you." ³⁵ And when he had said these things, he took bread,

and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat.³⁶ Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves.³⁷ (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.)³⁸ And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea.

MSH: Now this strikes me as really odd and I'm not the only one. This little reference here, 'we were in all 276 persons in the ship,' has gotten a lot of attention in the scholarly literature. I should telegraph this by saying there is a variant reading here that reads 76 but 276 has very good textual support. The number could very well be literal because we know from other accounts Josephus actually was in a shipwreck and writes about it. And the boat he was on had over 600. So this is not like a ridiculously high number to be literal number. So having said that, fine. Now it's me, so we're going to get into something different here. There have been people who have wondered about this number, whether we have another gematria situation here. And I suspect that we do.

Now I'm going to give you my spin on this. If you're at all interested in this, I'm going to mention a source and I'll make sure Trey has that and he can post it. It's just a very short article on a certain aspect of gematria that is relevant to this even though it doesn't specifically discuss this passage. But a number of commentators have said the number 276 is what is called a triangular number, that is, it's the sum of the numbers of one through 23 and those numbers can be arranged in a triangle so that they have the equal sides. Now that's true. The question is, is that fact about 276, the fact that it's one of these magical triangular numbers where the sides are all added the same and you get this total or whatnot. Did Luke care? Did Luke know about that? Did Luke use the number for some cryptic reason? Well, here's the case. I'm going to lay it out for you.

You won't hear this anywhere else in commentaries, I'm just telling you that right now. And yes, it's speculation but it's just kind of interesting. It goes like this. 276, this triangular number, is also the gematria number, in other words, the number that's produced, for the phrase Yahweh our righteousness. In Hebrew is the tetragrameton YH WH and then tsidkenu, so YHWH tsidkenu. That phrase, Yahweh our righteousness, the letters at up to 276 and so that's kind of curious. That's interesting. Well, that phrase, Yahweh our righteousness, occurs only two times in the Hebrew Bible, Jeremiah 23:6 and Jeremiah 33:11, and they both basically say the same thing. I'm going to read them both to you. They're going to sound very similar. Jeremiah 23:6, let's just include verse five for a little context here. It says,

⁵ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

MSH: Now here's Jeremiah 33, again, basically the same thing. It's actually 33:16, not 33:11, so I misspoke a few seconds ago. Let me just read this and I'll include verse 15. It's going to sound very familiar, very similar.

¹⁵ In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

MSH: Now here's the question. Could 276, because it's the numerical equivalent of the phrase, Adonai tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness, Yahweh our righteousness, could 276 be a cryptic number used to convey the idea that God had insured Paul's passage to Rome, which as we've seen earlier, he believed to ultimately be a rest stop on the way to Spain, Tarshish, at which point, if he got there, at which point the fullness of the Gentiles will be brought in, which would result in turn in "all" Israel being saved? Going back to Romans 15:24, listen to what he says. 'I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain and to be helped on my journey there by you once I've enjoyed your company for a while.'

Paul really believes that he will get to Tarshish. He will get to Spain and when he does, he will have completed his mission to spread the gospel to all of the places, the gospel will have will have spread out to all of the places that had been disinherited in Genesis 10, the nations disinherited, and the gospel will have spread to all of them, pulling out Gentiles that belong to the family of God and then that would be the trigger, that would be the trigger for his countrymen, Israel, for them to be grafted back in to the family of God, for them to get a second chance, for them to be saved, and then the Lord would come back. Is 276, this number, is it literal? Sure, it could be. Is it a possible reference to these Jeremiah passages that talk about, look at them, 'I will raise up for David a righteous branch.' Well that's Jesus. He shall reign as king and deal wisely in his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely and this is the name by which we call the Lord is our righteousness.' Is this a way of taking the mind of the reader, again, it would have to be pretty literate reader, but it's Luke the physician and he does the stuff.

We've seen this kind of thing before in his writings already and in other books like John, where they'll do things like this to telegraph points very cryptically. Is this supposed to take people's minds back to these Jeremiah passages and create a conceptual link to Paul getting to Rome, getting to Tarshish or Spain, and bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles? Is that what's going on here? I don't know. You can make a good argument for it. It makes sense but we're not actually told whether this was Luke's intention. I frankly I don't know any way to know if that was Luke's intention but it is sort of random for Luke to say, oh by the way, there were 276 of us. Well, okay, maybe he is just reporting that but maybe there's something else going on. I don't know for sure. Now I will say this as well. There might be a little more cryptic support for a gematria approach like this when we get to Acts 28 because there's something in Acts 28 that might contribute to this argument, to actually looking at this number this way. We'll get there in a moment.

So we know the rest the story. We're familiar with this part of the book of Acts. They make it to land when it was day verse 39. They didn't recognize the land but they notice a bay of the beach. Of course, they the get out and the soldiers were going to kill the prisoners because they're afraid they'll escape but the Centurion, verse 43, wishing to save Paul kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land and the rest on planks or pieces of the ship. And so it was Acts 27 ends, that they were

all brought safely to land, just like the Lord had told Paul. You're all going to survive but you'll be in the boat. So then we get to Acts 28 and we read as follows. Let's just jump into the beginning of the passage there.

After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. ² The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. ³ When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. ⁴ When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." ⁵ He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

MSH: So let's just stop there. It's the first six verses. Again, this God talk is kind familiar from Acts 14 where Paul and Silas have been doing miraculous things. Paul and Barnabas, I believe it was, well, these guys are gods. Of course they have to say no, you're misunderstanding. The natives here have the same reaction because Paul doesn't die. He didn't even get sick. And it is kind of interesting. You have a reference to a viper here so, is there some sort of symbolic thing going on about how the power the serpent could not conquer Paul and whatnot, could not thwart God's plan. I think there could be a reading of that. I would actually suspect that more though if there was again some sort of citation of the Old Testament or we had something maybe from Genesis that would sort of bolster that argument, but we don't have that. So I tend to read this just as a normal accounting.

Paul gets bitten by a snake. We don't have to think of snakes every time we see a snake. But I'll grant that there might've been some messaging there. You could read that into it just because it's a snake, I get that. I just need a little bit more to go down that road very far. What I think is interesting here though is the reference to native people. Native people is the Greek word *barbaroi*. It specifically refers to non-Greek speaking Gentiles. So we spent a lot of time in the book of Acts talking about the Gentiles and typically we associate that with everybody speaks Greek because that's the language of the New Testament, Hellenistic era, how everybody inherited the Greek culture. Well, here, Luke makes a point to reference the native people here who were not Hellenized in anyway. They're essentially barbarians, *barbaros*. They're not civilized in terms of the Greek culture, let's just put it that way. And they get to participate here. They're nice.

They treat them wonderfully. Malta has some relationship to the Phoenicians. A lot of scholars think that the language that they probably spoke here, the Greeks refer to it as the language of the barbarians. But they even liken it to the twittering of birds, something real foreign. Most scholars think it's probably a form of spoken Punic which is a development of older Phoenician which is a Semitic language related Hebrew. So there is some relationship there linguistically that's kind of interesting. But I think just really the point is that here Paul, it doesn't really say he evangelized even though it's going to say he healed people here, and if

Paul's track record is the same here, and we have no reason to think otherwise, he would've told him about the Lord and so and so forth. So even beyond the normal Gentile, we're picking up to the barbarian Gentile here, too, who get exposed to Paul and his ministry, what he was preaching.

The reference to Justice is interesting as well. Though he has escaped from the scene, the pagans, the barbarians say justice has not allowed him to live. The Greek word for justice is *dike*, *DIKE*, pronounced with a long E, *dike*. This is actually a divine name in Greek. It's a personification of a goddess, goddess of justice. This was her name personified as a goddess of revenge who pursues the guilt, pursues people who deserve to die and make sure they get their just desserts. So that's what they're thinking here when Paul gets bit on the hand by snake, a-ha, *dike* justice is not going to allow this guy live. But their gods don't have any control over this guy Paul or his circumstances or his situation or what he's about or where he's going. There is at least that much theological messaging going on here. Paul's going to heal in verse 7.

⁷ Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. ⁸ It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. ⁹ And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.

MSH: So it's just another reference to what we associate with the advance of the kingdom of God, the power the kingdom of God and the gospel. Even here in this little island that's totally uncivilized, even here it's going to happen. *Dike* justice has nothing to do with this. Fate has nothing to do with this. Paul and the God that he follows, the God he serves, the God he's praying to, the God who heals you and lots of these other people, that's the one that is in charge. It is a theological corrective. Verse 11 chapter 28 Luke writes,

¹¹ After three months we set sail in a ship that had wintered in the island, a ship of Alexandria, with the twin gods as a figurehead.

MSH: Now this term in Greek is *Dioscuri*, had the *Dioscuri* as its figurehead. These are very well-known divinities, the twin gods. They are youths of Zeus, that means the lads of Zeus, the youth, the young boys of Zeus, usually called the Heavenly Twins. In Latin this is Castor and Pollux, which you may have actually more of a feel for that terminology. They were in Greek mythology, classical mythology, the twin brothers of hell and the children of Zeus in books like the Odyssey they're mentioned. So they're put a boat, they're part of the decoration of the boat because sailors venerated them as astral deities in the constellation of Gemini. So in other words, they were protective deities of people who sail, people who go out to sea, the sailors, protecting them from the storms.

And not coincidentally, I think interestingly, they are also associated in ancient texts, classical texts, and even some modern texts with St. Elmo's fire, again, sort of a really odd lightning or light phenomenon that is often witnessed at sea. So when people would see that they associated that with the Castor and Pollux, the two deities that were there to protect sailors from harm. Luke just says, hey, this is just what was carved on the ship. This is what the ship

looked like, so on and so forth. Now, it is kind of interesting that Luke would throw this in because this is just a sort of I think a peripheral comment but I'm going to throw it in here because of what we talked about the 276. The *Dioscuri* and their symbolism is closely associated with the Pythagorean school, the Pythagoreans. If you anything about Pythagoras, I hate to bring up, dredge up memories of math class back in junior high and high school, the Pythagorean theorem, this is the guy. The Pythagoreanism, this movement that he sort of is the head of, he was just a mathematician. He was a philosopher and in the ancient world numbers had divine qualities attributed to them That's why you have gematria. That's why you have triangular numbers.

It's why you have something called Magic Squares. It's kind of like Sudoku where the numbers add up to the same amount on any side and diagonally. The Pythagoreans would come up with these things and then sort of lend some interpretation to it, or they would assign specific numbers to certain theological concepts. There is a whole theology of arithmetic in the ancient world. You can get books on it, the theology of arithmetic, sacred geometry, that sort of thing. A lot of this is associated with the Pythagorean School and then schools that developed out of it like the Neoplatonic School. Now why do I mention this? It goes all the way back to the fifth century BC. It's because if Luke is mentioning the *Dioscuri* for reasons other than, hey, I like that decoration on the ship, maybe it is a reference to Pythagorean ideas. If it is, that sort of lends a little credence to the fact that he would throw in 276 and expect intelligent readers to interpret it as gematria.

It's all speculation. We don't know but this kind of symbolism in a narrative text with these kind of numbers, a triangular number, would draw the attention of people who were into this stuff, into these ideas, theology of arithmetic, and they would observe, follow where it took them. In this case, it would take them back to Jeremiah and the whole possibility that we have here a reference to the Messiah who would save Judah and Israel and somehow that's associated with this guy Paul who just got off the shipwreck and he's headed to Rome and somehow that means something. Well, to us, as I'm sitting here talking you through it, it does mean something.

I'm not saying I'm sure whether Luke is doing this deliberately but you can see how someone who's thinking in these terms, the whole supernatural, the whole backdrop of all this. If you had someone, dare I say like us, reading the book of Acts and was familiar with the Old Testament worldview, is familiar with you some of these theological ideas in the classical world, some of the symbolism, some of the number theology, they could look at this and say isn't that something. This guy Paul, he was destined for Rome. God said he would get him there. 276, well, let's go look that up. It's got something to do with the salvation of Judah and Israel, the guy getting to Rome, the fullness of the Gentiles. You could put these pieces together is the point. But I'm just being honest with you. You're not going to really read that anywhere, but I'm just saying it's worth thinking about it's a possibility but it's speculation at this point. So when Paul gets to Rome, he is going to leave Malta, has good experience there. We get down to verse 23 in Acts 28, we read,

²³ When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets. ²⁴ And some were convinced by what he said, but others disbelieved. ²⁵ And disagreeing

among themselves, they departed after Paul had made one statement: “The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your fathers through Isaiah the prophet:

²⁶ “Go to this people, and say,
“You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

²⁷ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’

²⁸ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

³⁰ He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

MSH: And that's the way the book of Acts ends. It ends with Paul in Rome. Ecclesiastical tradition does say that you can build a case that Paul did make it to Spain, and we're not 100% certain but there's a high degree of certainty that he made to Spain. I talk a little bit about that in Unseen Realm so you can go look it up there. But the book of Acts ends sort of how it began. If you remember way back in Acts 1, they appoint the other. They have to bring 11 up to 12 because Judas is gone and then we have the promise of sending of the Spirit, which is linked to not only salvation of Israel but also Gentile salvation. We get Acts 2 with Pentecost which starts the process of reclaiming people of every nation for the family of God, the kingdom of God. Those people turn out to receive the Spirit the same way that everybody else does. So the book of Acts ends with this statement, 'The salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.'

Has Luke taken our minds back through the number 276 to the fact that this is Paul's Mission, Apostle to the Gentiles? He's got to Rome now. He's going to get to Spain. We're going to reclaim the nations but there are 276 of us in the boat. And going back to Jeremiah, 'I will raise up a righteous branch and Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in peace.' Is all of this sort of cumulatively capturing this message? I think you can tell because I'm taking you through this. I think you can make an argument that this is what Luke is up to for the literate reader. He's dropping breadcrumbs here but don't know for sure, just offering it for your consideration. So we've made it through the book of Acts and we will traverse other places from henceforth.