

Notice how Paul explains this generous act on the part of the Macedonian brethren. It was a response to the grace of God that they had received through the gospel, and it was given in the face of their own meagre circumstances. In verse 3 they did not just share a little of their abundance, but they extended themselves.

In chapter 9 Paul commends the Corinthians for also being willing to share with their Jewish brethren, and he points out that their generosity would be recognised by the recipients: “For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men” (vv. 12,13). The word “distribution” in verse 13 is the word *koinōnia*, or ‘fellowship’. In this context fellowship took on a very practical manifestation in meeting the need of destitute saints.

Think about this in the context of what we saw in Acts 2 and 4, when all the believers were Jews and they were all in Jerusalem. There was a high

degree of commonality amongst them. We are always more likely to be generous with people with whom we share something in common, even if we might not know them very well.

In the case of these brothers and sisters from Macedonia and Achaia, however, where was the sense of commonality? In the normal course of events Gentiles living in Greece would have no contact with or interest in Jews living in Judea. They were from cultures completely at odds with one another. Jews and Gentiles had a deep distrust and dislike of each other; they were separated by hundreds of miles; it is highly unlikely that any of the believers in Macedonia and Achaia knew any of the brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

So why was there this outpouring of love and care? Because they shared something! They had never broken bread together and never would; they had never attended a meeting together and never would; but they shared the same faith and hope. They shared an acceptance of the teachings of the apostles about the things of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. And this was manifested in a loving concern for their fellow believers—a fellowship with them.

[\(To be continued\)](#)

Exposition

Paul’s epic journey to Rome

Supplementary studies (3)

Tom Barling

Paul’s journey to Rome was largely by ship. The earlier conquest of Egypt by Octavian had secured the corn supply for Rome, and eradication of piracy on the Mediterranean meant that the large numbers of corn ships could travel between Alexandria and Rome safely. However, there was always the weather to contend with!

THE OBSERVATION has often been made that the first-century world was prepared for the spread of the gospel, a truth which is confirmed by Paul, so deeply involved himself in the process of proclaiming the ‘good news’: “but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4, RV). Much could be written

on this matter, and much has been. Among other considerations, one could mention the dispersion of the Jews, who carried with them their Old Testament Scriptures, conveniently translated from Hebrew into Greek (at Alexandria, it would appear, because of the numbers of Jews resident in the city who spoke Hellenistic Greek).

What is now of more immediate interest is the unity of the Mediterranean world, brought about by the genius and energy of Octavian, better known as Augustus, the future *princeps* (‘first citizen’—which was tantamount to being the first emperor). We have already written about some of the remarkable achievements of Octavian; but

as far as maritime matters are concerned, one of his principal successes was to subdue piracy in the Mediterranean, where it had long been the scourge of maritime commerce.

The importance of Egypt

Under the Roman Republic, and as a consequence of his defeat of Antony at the sea battle of Actium in 31 B.C., Octavian founded Nicopolis (meaning 'city of victory'), where the site of his triumph had been. At a later date, Octavian progressed towards Alexandria, where both Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide, fearing the worst. Octavian was thus able to take command of Egypt and make it a Roman province, a truly glittering addition to the Roman crown. On 16 January 27 B.C., the Roman senate bestowed on Octavian the title of Augustus, and that is how he became more generally known. It was during his reign as emperor that an event took place in Bethlehem which was to have a profound effect on the history of mankind—an influence that is by no means over. It was during the reign of Augustus' successor Tiberius (A.D. 14–37) that the Lord Jesus was crucified.

Egypt, Alexandria and Rome

There has already been occasion to dwell on the importance of Egypt as a source of corn for Rome; but the great port of Alexandria was to prove a valuable warehouse for much more than corn, and we hope to return to this subject in due course.

To revive an earlier reflection: the Mediterranean was a most important highway; and it was possible, during the reign of Augustus (27 B.C.–A.D. 14), for a Roman citizen to journey from the Straits of Gibraltar ('the pillars of Heracles') all round the Mediterranean and as far as the coast of North Africa and still be under the protection of the Roman flag. In modern times cargoes are often transported by river or by sea when it would be folly to transport them by land; and so it was in Roman times.

There were huge quantities of grain to be transported from Alexandria to Rome, and it would have been quite impracticable for them to have been taken overland. In fact, immensely heavy loads of grain were transported across the Mediterranean on a regular basis from Alexandria to Puteoli on the Italian coast. One historian refers to a vessel launched in the reign of the Emperor Caligula (A.D. 37–41), which had "a cargo capacity of 1,335 tons and [which] transported an Egyptian obelisk to Rome".¹ The Mediterranean

was to prove an extraordinarily useful waterway for the Roman Empire; and the subject of this sea merits our closer attention.

Control of the Mediterranean

Because of its earlier destruction of the power of Carthage (on the North African coast) in 146 B.C., and by virtue of its own strategic location in the central Mediterranean, Rome was already in command of the middle area of the great inland sea. When Octavian took over Egypt and turned it into a Roman province, he thereby added another jewel to Rome's glittering crown, whilst at the same time ensuring Rome's command of the eastern Mediterranean. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this development; it was one of the greatest achievements of Octavian/Augustus to rid the Mediterranean of the scourge of piracy so that the ships of Rome could sail unmolested over its waters. We can therefore understand why the history of the great inland sea occupies so important a place in imperial Roman history.

A portrait of the Mediterranean

The Mediterranean itself accordingly merits our interest; and, while we cannot engage in any unduly long digression, some attention needs to be devoted to the subject. What may be termed the 'main part' of the sea extends over a distance of some 2,300 miles from the west to the Syrian shore in the east; but we must not overlook the fact that the Roman Empire in the east also embraced the Black Sea.

Acts 18:1,2 illustrates this: "After these things he [Paul] departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, a man of Pontus by race, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome . . ." (RV). This account illustrates two significant facts: first, that the Roman dominion embraced the southern shore of the Black Sea (Pontus being on the northern coast of modern-day Turkey), and secondly, that the movements of Aquila and Priscilla afford a good deal of insight into the subject of freedom of movement in the Roman Empire.²

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1. Ernle Bradford, *Mediterranean—Portrait of a Sea* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), p. 236.
 2. Consider the following passages, which indicate the movements of this couple: Acts 18:18,26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19.



A calm Mediterranean Sea at sunset.

Picture: Ivan Carter

When we approach the subject of the Mediterranean itself, we can do no better than to listen to the guidance of Ernle Bradford, whose book *Mediterranean—Portrait of a Sea* bespeaks his passion for the sea. Bradford explains in the preface of his book that, while there were thousands of other books dealing with “every aspect of the nations, arts, and cultures that has arisen around this sea”, there was no overall portrait of the Mediterranean—a lack which he was going to attempt to fill.³

Bradford’s enthusiasm for the Mediterranean shines through this further extract from his preface:

“There is no other area of the world to equal this for the number of cultures and civilizations that have sprung from its shores, and that have moved across its almost tideless waters to cross-fertilize one another. Its richness stems from the fact that the sea is almost totally enclosed by three continents, which has led to a constant interaction between nations inhabiting them”.⁴

‘Halcyon’ calmness and storms

The relative absence of tides is a special phenomenon characterising the Mediterranean, and has produced many deltas around its shores, the most famous of which is that of the Nile. Like all seas, however, whether great or small, the Mediterranean has its spells of calm and of turbulence. In connection with the former, we recall the origin of the word ‘halcyon’, which, according to *Chambers Dictionary*, means “calm; peaceful, happy and carefree”. The dictionary goes on to give the origin of the word: “. . . the kingfisher [Gk. *alkuon*], once believed to make a floating nest on the sea, which remained calm during hatching”. All this is a reflection of the calmness of the Mediterranean in the summer.

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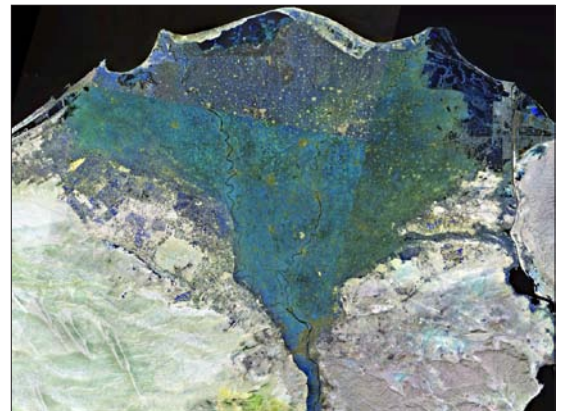
Thus it was that the moods of this great inland sea exercised a profound influence on sailing activity and practice, with most sailing taking place when the sea was calm and the sky was clear in high summer. It was in those months that the long and heavily laden sailings from Alexandria to Puteoli were carried out.⁵

However, storms could blow up quite suddenly, even in summer; and reports of such storms are not difficult to find in ancient literature. But, whereas most of these accounts are characterised by their brevity, Luke’s account in Acts possesses the outstanding feature of fulness. One brief account of stormy Mediterranean weather in

3. *Mediterranean*, *op. cit.*, Preface.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

5. See M. P. Charlesworth’s chapter on Egypt in his second revised edition of *Trade Routes and Commerce of the Roman Empire* (Chicago, 1926), especially page 23, where the rapid passages from Alexandria to Italy are discussed.



Picture: NASA

The Nile delta as seen from satellite. The absence of tides in the Mediterranean Sea produces many such deltas around its shores.

the summer is contained in *The Twelve Caesars* by Suetonius, who reported in his chapter on Augustus:

“The Sicilian War, one of his first enterprises [43–36 B.C.] . . . was interrupted by two storms that wrecked his fleets—in the summer too—and obliged him to rebuild them . . .”⁶

Increasingly, in these supplementary studies, we shall be concerned with the Mediterranean weather . . .

[\(To be continued\)](#)

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6. Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars* (Penguin Books, revised edition 1979), p. 52.