

Acts 27:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

Analysis

They used helps, undergirding the ship—The 'helps' (βοηθείαις, boētheiais) were cables passed under the hull to prevent timbers from separating under wave stress, called 'frapping.' **Fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands**—the Syrtis (Σύρτιν, Syrtin), two shallow sandbars off Libya's coast where ships grounded and broke apart. Their terror was justified; many vessels perished there. **Strake sail** (χαλάσαντες τὸ σκεῦος, chalasantes to skeuos, 'lowering the gear')—they reduced sail or dragged sea anchors to slow the southwestward drift. Frantic human effort—undergirding, lowering sail—achieved nothing without God's promise (27:24). Yet God honors faithful stewardship even when success depends on grace.

Historical Context

The Syrtis Major and Syrtis Minor (modern Gulf of Sidra and Gulf of Gabes off Libya/Tunisia) were graveyard shallows feared throughout antiquity. Ships driven into them grounded on shifting sands and were pounded apart by waves. Ancient vessels' wooden hulls, joined by mortise-and-tenon, needed reinforcement during extreme stress. The crew's seamanship, though ultimately insufficient, showed professional competence.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do you balance diligent human effort with dependence on divine grace during trials?
2. When have you worked desperately to avoid disaster, only to realize salvation required God's intervention?

Interlinear Text

ἥν	ἀραντες	βοηθείαις	έχρωντο	ὑποζωνυντες
Which	when they had taken up	helps	they used	undergirding
G3739	G142	G996	G5530	G5269
τὸ	πλοῖον	φοβούμενοί	τε	μὴ
G3588	the ship	fearing	and	lest
G4143	G5399	G5037	G3361	G1519
εἰς	τὴν	τὴν	Σύρτιν	
			G3588	the quicksands
G4950				
ἐκπέσωσιν	χαλάσαντες	τὸ	σκεῦος	οὕτως
they should fall	strake	G3588	sail	and so
G1601	G5465	G4632	G3779	G5342
ἐφέροντο				

Additional Cross-References

Acts 27:29 (Parallel theme): Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

Acts 27:26 (Parallel theme): Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

Acts 27:41 (Parallel theme): And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

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