CHAPTER TWELVE

THE THEOLOGY OF SEA STORMS IN LUKE-ACTS

This essay deals with the theology, implicit and explicit, in the narratives about sea storms in Acts 27 and Luke 8:22–25. It attempts to answer two questions: (1) What theological content would ancient Mediterranean listeners have heard in these narratives? and (2) How do the theological implications of these two stories fit into the Lukan whole?


Acts 27

We begin with Acts 27. What theological content would an ancient listener have heard in this narrative? The attempted answer to this question will be developed in three stages: (1) composition, (2) comparative materials, and (3) context.

Composition


INTRODUCTORY ITINERARY (27:1–8)

1. To Myra in a ship of Adramyttium (1–5)
2. To Fair Havens on a ship of Alexandria (6–8)

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1 This essay was co-authored by Talbert and his student, John Herbert Hayes, and is used with the latter’s permission.
2 This way of framing the aim of the paper relegates to irrelevance much secondary literature which either focuses on the question of sources or treats the text of Luke-Acts as something other than a religious document (e.g., a secular narrative).
EPISODE ONE (27:9–20)

1. Paul’s prediction (27:10) based on the time of year (27:9) is disregarded because of greed (27:11) and an unsatisfactory harbor (27:12)
2. Paul’s prediction is fulfilled in three paragraphs:
   (a) the south wind blew gently (27:13)
   (b) a tempestuous wind struck (27:14–17)
   (c) they were violently storm-tossed so that all hope was abandoned (27:18–20)

EPISODE TWO (27:21–44)

1. Paul’s prediction (27:21–22, 26) is based on an angelic message (27:23–25)
2. Paul’s prediction is fulfilled in three paragraphs:
   (a) about midnight, Paul gives a warning (27:27–32)
   (b) as day was about to dawn, Paul gives encouragement (27:33–38)
   (c) when it was day, all escaped to land (27:39–44)

EPISODE THREE (28:1–10)

1. Paul is protected from the effects of snakebite (28:1–6)
2. Paul prays effectively for healing (28:7–10)

CONCLUDING ITINERARY (28:11–16)

1. To Puteoli on a ship of Alexandria (28:11–14)
2. To Rome via the Appian Way (28:15–16)

Acts 27 comprises the introductory itinerary and the first two episodes of the larger thought unit.

Comparative Materials
Acts 27 is an example of the type-scene involving sea storm and shipwreck. Narratives of storm and shipwreck are widespread in Mediterranean antiquity. Among the extensive remains we may mention the following:  

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3 The language of type-scene is that of Pamela Thimmes, *Studies in the Biblical Sea-Storm Type-Scene* (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992).

4 The following accounts of sea storms and shipwrecks were collected by J. H. Hayes as part of a project sponsored by the Spire for Individualized Research at Wake