

Paul on Malta – Acts 28:1-10

Introduction:

Two hundred and seventy six souls boarded a ship from a port in Fair Havens on the island of Crete. Though warned of the dangers of sailing at that time of year by a passenger – a prisoner at that – the experienced captain of the ship and its owner decide to press on to a better port. They had not travelled far when a great hurricane force storm hit their little vessel and drove them out into the sea. The storm hid the sun and the stars so the crew had no idea where the winds were taking their ship. After fourteen days the men aboard are weak, and tired and without hope of survival.

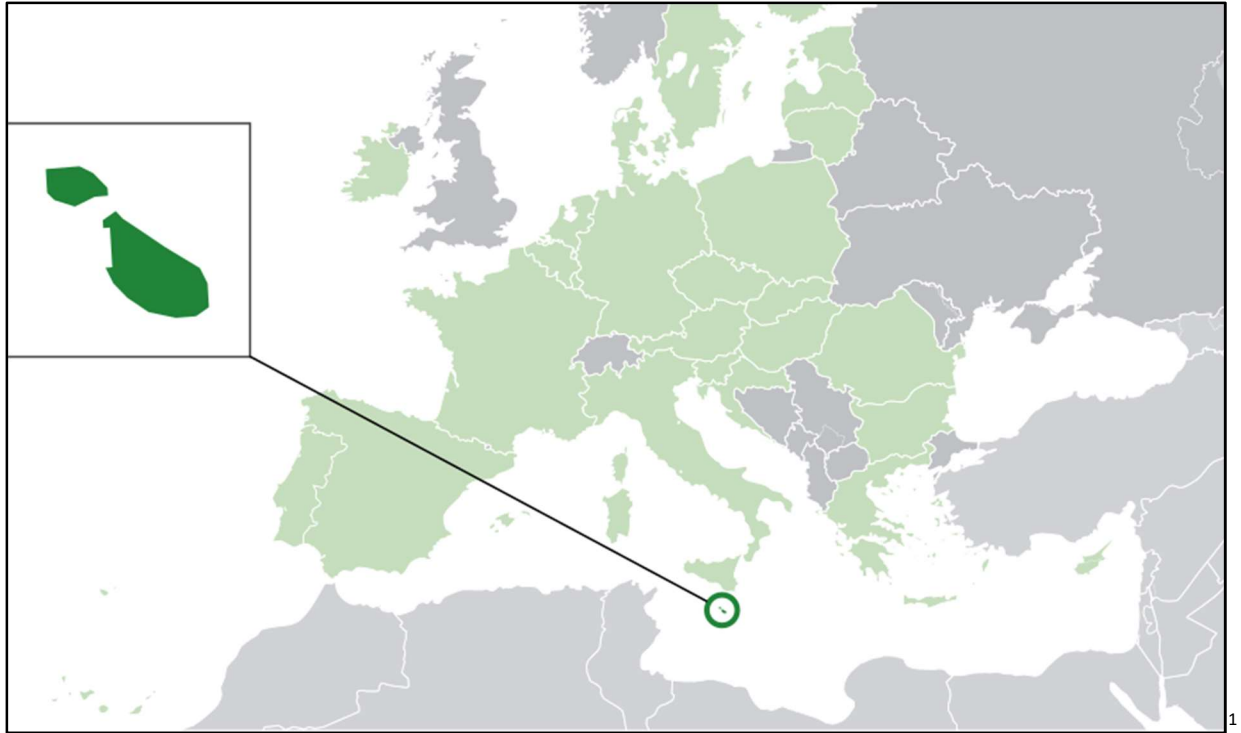
At this point that same prisoner who warned them against traveling in the first place stood up and said he had a message from God: they would lose the ship but all would survive. He then broke bread and gave thanks and shared it with everyone. Sure enough, the ship ran aground and was destroyed by the waves, but every single person made it to shore safely. The only question was, where were they? The storm had driven them a long ways, so where were they now?

This is where we pick up our story of Paul's journey to Rome. Paul has a divine appointment to be in the most important city in the Western World at that time. It has become clear that this is more than a simple transfer of a prisoner from Caesarea to Rome. It is a spiritual battle, and Satan is trying hard to prevent Paul from reaching his destination. What else will Satan throw at Paul, and how will God redeem those battles for His glory? That is the focus of this study.

Criminal or God? Acts 28:1-6

1. The shipwrecked crew discover where they are. What is the name of the island they have landed on? Where is this? (see map)

Background: Malta is situated on one of the busiest shipping lanes in the ancient world. Many ships would pass by, and many ships were wrecked on the rocks around the island. One of the main businesses on the island was salvaging from floundered ships. But the first rule of even salvagers was to be sure the survivors were cared for. This is what we see played out in this chapter.



2. Luke speaks about the “native people” or the “islanders.” The Phoenicians had lived on this island for over ten centuries. They were people of the sea. How did they treat these strangers who had washed up on their shores? (V. 2) How important was their help?

3. Paul decided to help their hosts out. What practical thing did he do to help the situation (v. 3)? What happened as he tried to help?

4. How did the locals interpret the event with the viper (v. 4)? What have they concluded about Paul?

Background: First, the ancient Greco-Roman world believed in the goddess Justice, daughter of Zeus, who would balance the scales of right and wrong. Evil falls on evil people – Zeus would be sure you got your just rewards.

¹ By NuclearVacuum - File:Location European nation states.svg This W3C-unspecified vector image was created with Inkscape., CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8105216>

Background: If the gods were to bring justice to humans they would often have agents on earth through which they acted. One of the most common agents of justice used by the gods was the snake. To see a snake attack a person was a sure sign they had angered the gods and that person was being punished.

5. Was Paul bothered by this superstition? What does he do (v. 5)? What affects did the snake have on Paul? What were the islanders waiting for (v. 6)? Did that happen? How did this change their opinion of Paul? (v. 6)
6. Throughout scripture the battle between good evil, God and Satan, has featured a snake (ie. Garden of Eden (Gen. 3), battle to destroy the church (Revelation 12)). In what ways was this also a spiritual battle?

Background: In popular religion we get what we deserve. We earn favor and the good are rewarded and the evil are punished. Christianity reaches higher than that. "Justice gives you what you deserve. Mercy does not give you what you deserve. Grace gives you what you do not deserve!"² In Jesus we find grace!

Publius' Hospitality - Acts 28:7-10

7. Who is Publius (v. 7)? What does he do for the disciples (and maybe other travellers)?
8. What "just happened" to be the need that presented itself to Paul (v. 8)? How did Paul respond to this need? How does this parallel another event recorded in Luke 4:38-40?
9. Imagine the people on that island, rather isolated from the rest of the world, now with hope of health. How do they respond to Paul according to

² Randall Denny, In Jesus' Strong Hands, Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, p. 113.

verse 9? (By the way, the word for “cured” implies their health needs were cared for. With Luke at Paul’s side we might infer he was also helping bring wholeness to broken bodies. Someone has suggested that Paul and Luke became the first medical missionaries!)

10. What was the response of the people to the help they received from the Lord through Paul (and Luke)? (cf. v. 10). The wording here implies they received more than physical healing, that this generosity is the outflow of lives touched by God’s grace. Do you think Paul shared the Gospel with the people of Malta (note: it does not say anything about that)?

Conclusion:

Here are some thoughts from Randall Denny on this passage:

“Paul may have heard of Malta, but he didn’t plan to go there. Yet on that island there was great human need: many sick, suffering, needy people. Who can imagine that the desperate prayers that arose from family and friends of the sick and suffering? Wherever disease and death and sorrow lurk, hearts are broken. But no apostles had planned to go to that island. Little did Paul realize what God was doing. In order to get Paul to that island of need, He sent a storm that drove Paul within swimming distance of the beach!”³

God hears and answers prayers. Sometimes we get the privilege of being the answer to someone else’s prayer. This is very humbling. No doubt Paul understood that this divine appointment was necessary, and he made the best of this opportunity. For three months (cf. verse 11) he ministered on that island and there is no doubt that community was never the same after that.

What opportunity has Jesus put before you?

³ Ibid, p. 115.