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Paul Ashore at Malta
28: 1-10

Late 59 AD

Paul ashore at Malta DIG: In light of the fact that God wanted Paul to get to Rome, why do you think He allowed all the events of 27:1 to 28:9 to take place? What stories might the centurion tell his fellow officers once they arrive? How might this set the stage for Paul to write about how the way imprisonment at Rome served to advance the gospel (Philippians 1:12-13)? How do you see Acts 1:8 still being carried out?

REFLECT: How has God used a disaster in your life for ministry? What have you learned from it? Don't think for a minute that people aren't curious about God, knowing deep inside that He exists and will in some way determine their eternal destiny. How have you seen any evidence of this in different people you have known? What might be some of the reasons why ADONAI has chosen to reveal Himself in this way, not knocking people over the head, but leaving traces throughout their lifetime? We have all seen enough concert footage and sporting events to know what adulation looks like. But how should a servant of God handle it when we are given recognition? What has to change inside your heart before you can truly brag on God, before you can take your own contribution out of the mix and genuinely give Him all the glory?

Acts 28 opens with **Paul** on the Mediterranean **island** of **Malta**. **He** had left Caesarea more than two months earlier, bound from Rome to have **his** appeal heard by the emperor. In a risky attempt to reach a more favorable harbor on Crete to winter in, **the apostle's ship** had been caught in **the** dreaded **"Northeaster."** That violent **storm** had driven **the ship** for fourteen terror-filled days across the Mediterranean to Malta. There **the crew** attempted to beach **the ship**, but it ran aground and was destroyed by the pounding surf. Miraculously, all **276** persons on board managed to reach **the shore** safely. **God** had promised **Paul** that although **the ship** would be destroyed, no lives would be lost **(27:22). He** had also promised

that **the ship** would run aground on an **island (27:26)**. Both promises were fulfilled when **the ship** reached **Malta**.[632]

Once having made it **safely** through the breakers to **ashore, we** (**to see link click Bx – Paul's Vision of the Man of Macedonia: A closer look at the "us" or "we" passages and sea passages**) **learned that the island was called Malta (28:1).** A small **island** only 18 miles long and 8 miles wide, **it** lies about 58 miles south of Sicily and 180 miles northeast of the coast of Africa. The latter is important because it was colonized by the Phoenicians about 1,000 BC, apparently from their base in Africa. Even in **Paul's** day the vernacular language was still a Punic or Carthaginian dialect, though clearly some Greek and Latin were also spoken there as well, primarily by **Rome's** representatives and the various Greek and Roman settlers who had come to live there over the generations. In fact, most of the inscriptions that have been found on **the island** are in Greek or Latin. This suggests that **the islanders** would have been perfectly capable of speaking to these shipwrecked travelers in Greek, though most likely **they** spoke in Punic among **themselves**.[633]

The natives continually **showed us unusual kindness. Luke's** use of the word **natives** to describe **the people** of **Malta** does not mean **they** were primitive of uncivilized, but merely suggests a people whose native language was not Greek or Latin. The reaction of **the Maltese** to **their** unexpected **visitors** proves that **they** were anything but uncivilized **because** when **it had started raining and it was cold, they kindled a fire and welcomed us all (28:1-2).** Exhausted from **their** long ordeal, soaked from **their** swim to **shore**, drenched from the driving rain, and chilled by the cold November wind, **they** welcomed a **fire** to warm **themselves**.

The snake incident: Wood needed to be added continually to **the fire** to keep it from going out. **Paul's** servant heart was evident as **he gathered a bundle of brushwood and placed it on the fire. But a viper came out because of the heat,** bit **Paul and fastened on his hand. When the natives saw the snake hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer! Though he has been saved from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live" (28:3-4) The islanders,** knowing **Paul** was a prisoner, assumed that **he** had committed some great crime, and the Geek goddess of **justice**, Dikee, would not permit **Paul** to go on living.



However, God didn't preserve **Paul** from **the storm** just to let **him** die by **a snake**. **He shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no harm. They were expecting Paul's hand to swell up or suddenly fall down dead – but after they waited a long time they saw no harm come to him (28:5-6a). Paul** was protected. It was promised that **he** would **go to Rome** and **witness before Caesar (23:11; 27:24),** and **Paul** wasn't at **Rome** yet. It wasn't so much that nothing could stop **Paul** as it was that nothing could stop **God's** promise from being fulfilled. **Paul** could take **God's** past faithfulness as a promise of future blessing and protection. Moreover, **Divine Justice** had no more claim against **Paul** because it had all been fully satisfied by **Yeshua's** death and resurrection. And if you are a believer, all of your sins have also been paid for on the cross.[634]

When **Paul** did not drop dead, **they changed their minds and began to say he was a god (28:6b).** One is surprised how quickly **Luke** concludes this incident. On an earlier occasion, when **Cornelius** sought to worship **Peter**, **the apostle** corrected **him** immediately (see **Bg – Peter Goes to the House of Cornelius**); and when the natives of **Lystra** hailed **Paul** and **Barnabas** as **gods**, **Paul** quickly set them straight (see **Bq – Paul's Message in Lystra**). The reader of **Acts** needs no reminder that the response of **the Maltese** was inappropriate. Rather, by ending on **their** acclamation that **Paul was a god, Luke** emphasized another point altogether – namely that **Paul** was thoroughly under the protection of **God**. Whether **a storm** at sea or **a viper** on land, **he** was saved from every life-threatening danger. Protection from **the storm** and **the viper** were both acts of divine providence; both were miraculous.[635]

The healing of Publius' father: This is a miracle story, of the same kind as is related in the gospels, and it bears some resemblance to the story of how **Yeshua** healed **Peter's** mother-in-law and then a crowd of other sick people (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Cl – Simon's Mother-in-Law Was in Bed with a High Fever**).[636] **Now in the vicinity around that place were lands**

belonging to the most prominent man of the island, named Publius. As **his** title **the leading man of the island** indicates, **Publius** was the Roman governor of **Malta**. **Luke** indicates that **he** graciously **welcomed** all **276 persons and hosted us warmly for three days** until **we** could make arrangements for winter quarters **(28:7)**.



ADONAI often rewards acts of kindness to **His people (Genesis 12:3; Matthew 10:40-42, 25:31ff)**, and **Paul** was able to repay **Publius** for **his** hospitality. **It so happened that the father of Publius was lying in bed sick with** intermittent attacks of **fever and dysentery.** The micro-organism, which caused it, was identified in 1887 and traced to the milk of **Maltese** goats. **The fever and dysentery** could last for months or even years.[637] **Paul visited Publius' father and when he had prayed and laid hands on him, he healed him** (Greek: *iasato* meaning *instantly*), just like **Yeshua** did **(Matthew 8:8, 13:15, 15:28, Mark 5:23, 16:18; Luke 6:19, 9:42, 14:4; John 4:47, 5:13)**, although there is no set formula (see **Ap – Peter Heals a Lame Beggar: A Closer Look at Miracles in Acts**) . **After this happened, the rest of the sick on the island started coming** to **Paul for healing (28:8-9).** Although **Luke** does not mention it, **Paul** undoubtedly preached the gospel to **the Maltese**, since the purpose of miracles was to authenticate **him** as **God's** messenger. According to tradition, the church on **Malta** dates from this time, with **Publius** as its first pastor.[638]

After **three months (28:11)** of winter at **Malta**, **Paul** and **his** companions were finally ready to leave. With sea travel beginning again, **Julius** was able to arrange transport to Italy for **his soldiers** and **prisoners. Paul** fondly remembered that when **we** left, **the Maltese also heaped honors on us; and when we sailed, they put on board all the supplies we needed (28:10).** Since **they** had lost everything in the shipwreck, **the passengers** were grateful to have **their** needs

supplied. The hospitality of **the Maltese** would stand in stark contrast with the reception **Paul** found from **the Jews** of **Rome**.[639]

When **God** performed **His** awesome, miraculous work on **the island** of **Malta**, healing all the sick, I believe **His** main purpose was to meet their spiritual needs. Three details suggest **God** worked in the physical realm for spiritual purposes.

The first thing **Paul** did before **he** healed **Publius' father** was to **pray,** not wanting **the Maltese** to think **he** was **a god**. **Prayer** helped redirect **their** attention to the source of all **healing** – **Jesus Christ, the Great Physician.**

The second detail that suggests **God** used physical needs to shed light on spiritual realities was the means of **healing**. **He** used **Paul** to **heal**, yet **Luke** was a physician. Why? I believe **God** wanted **the Maltese** to recognize **God** (instead of some well-educated professional) as the source of **their healing**. No doubt **God** used **Luke** many times to tend to the sick, but when **He** wanted to leave no room for doubt, **He** used someone with no knowledge of medicine.

The last detail that suggests **God** was up to something spiritual was that **Paul**, just like **Yeshua**, healed **all who came to him**. Sadly, an evangelist may not pack the house with good preaching and Spirit-filled worship, but he can draw large crowds with rumors of healing. Yes, **God** cares about the sick. And **He** often heals physical illness in **His** own way, in **His** own time, but never in the Scriptures had a man brought healing to an entire land. **God** used the physical needs of **those** in **Malta** to draw attention to the only **One** who could meet **their** spiritual needs. **He** trusted **Paul** not to take credit for a work only **God** could do.

We, too, must be careful to give **God** the glory when **He** uses us to accomplish things only **He** can do. Every time you exercise a spiritual gift, **God** is accomplishing **His** work through you. If you are a servant of **God** and you have known **Him** long, **He** has used you to do something only **He** can do.

Not to us, ADONAI, not to us, but to Your Name be the glory – because of Your faithfulness. Why should the nations say, "Where is their God" (Psalm 115:1-2)? *May they say instead that they see* ***You*** *in us, that* ***they*** *know* ***Your*** *love by knowing* ***Your*** *children. Please* ***LORD, make known to the nations this glorious*** *wealth of the gospel,* ***which is Christ*** *in us,* ***the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).***[640]