

Scripture Lesson Text

ACTS 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

2 And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid *them* on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

4 And when the barbarians saw the *venomous* beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen

down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

10 Who also honoured us with many honours; and when we departed, they laded *us* with such things as were necessary.

NOTES

Miracles on Malta

Lesson Text: Acts 28:1-10

Related Scriptures: Acts 27:1-44

TIME: A.D. 59 or 60

PLACE: Malta

GOLDEN TEXT—"Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him" (Acts 28:8).

Lesson Exposition

HOSPITALITY EXTENDED— ACTS 28:1-2

The location (Acts 28:1). Paul was on a ship that had been driven by a storm and grounded on an island. Only after the travelers went ashore did they learn that the island was Melita, today called Malta.

The reception (Acts 28:2). Luke recorded that "the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness." "Barbarous people" (translated "barbarians" in verse 4) does not mean savage or crude persons. It was used by the Greeks to describe people who spoke languages unknown to Greeks and Romans.

They proved to be hospitable to the stranded travelers. They built a fire and welcomed every one of the castaways.

A MIRACLE OBSERVED— Acts 28:3-6

Paul's snakebite (Acts 28:3). As Paul had assumed a useful role on the ship during the storm, so he continued to make himself useful on land. He gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, recognizing that without additional fuel the welcome fire would soon die out.

But a hidden danger lurked. As he

put the sticks on the fire, a viper was driven out of the bundle by the heat, and it fastened itself on his hand. The islanders recognized it as poisonous.

The people's interpretation (Acts 28:4). The superstitious islanders quickly reached their own conclusion when they saw the snake dangling from Paul's hand. They thought he was "a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live."

Paul could not escape this destiny, they believed. A murderer might survive the storm, but vengeance would catch up with him and punish him.

A change of opinion (Acts 28:5-6). Paul, however, "shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm." His well-being could not be explained by claiming that the snake had not really bitten him or that it was not really poisonous. Paul's survival was due to divine protection.

The Maltese people were awed by what they saw. They expected to see Paul swell up or even suddenly fall down dead. These would be signs of the venom taking its toll. But after they watched him for quite a while, they saw that he remained unharmed.

Now, in a wild swing of opinion, the

people concluded that Paul was a god. Superstitious pagans, devoid of any revelation of the true God, were greatly impressed by phenomena in nature. Unfavorable events were interpreted as signs of disfavor by the gods and favorable ones as signs of their blessing. When events such as this one absolutely defied nature, they concluded that deity was present with them.

MIRACLES PERFORMED— Acts 28:7-10

The healing of Publius's father (Acts 28:7-8). Through Paul's miraculous preservation, God opened up new avenues of ministry for him. These began with the temporary stay with Publius, the chief man of the island. His estate lay in the region where the shipwreck had occurred, the northeast sector of Malta.

Publius, wrote Luke, "received us, and lodged us three days courteously" (vs. 7). He gave the shipwreck survivors a gracious reception. "Us" probably refers to the entire group.

Publius's hospitality brought him an unexpected reward—the healing of his father (vs. 8). His father "lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux" (dysentery).

Entering the presence of this sick man, Paul prayed for him, laid his hands on him, and healed him. Earlier, Paul had been acclaimed as a god, but his praying would make it clear that he was dependent on a deity himself.

With this healing, Paul demonstrated that the God he served had power not only to protect him from a snake's venom but also to restore health to others.

The healing of others (Acts 28:9). Just as the miracles of Jesus had drawn huge crowds to Him, so this display of apostolic authority by Paul soon led many others to seek healing.

This is, indeed, a curious set of circumstances. As a prisoner, Paul was

unable to go to them. They came to him to be healed!

Though Luke said nothing of evangelism, Paul surely used the miracles as a means of introducing the populace to the saving power of Jesus Christ. To do less than this would have been a betrayal of his calling (I Cor. 9:16).

The islanders' gratitude (Acts 28:10). The Maltese showered the travelers "with many honours." We do not know what forms these honors took, but it surely means they continued to give them lavish hospitality for the rest of their stay. It was extended to the whole party because one man, Paul, showed his faith by giving himself to others.

—Robert E. Wenger.

QUESTIONS

1. What did the Greeks and Romans mean in calling others "barbarous people" (Acts 28:2)?
2. What did the islanders do for the travelers when they arrived?
3. Why did the people first think Paul was a murderer?
4. Why did they soon afterward conclude he was a god?
5. What did Publius do for the voyagers?
6. What unexpected benefit did Publius's hospitality have for him?
7. When Paul prayed for the healing of Publius's father, what did this demonstrate to others?
8. Why did the islanders go to Paul to be healed and not he to them?
9. Why is it safe to surmise that Paul's ministry on Malta included more than just healing?
10. How did the Maltese show their thanks when the travelers left?

—Robert E. Wenger.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. God always has the right people in the right place at the right time to accomplish His purpose (Acts 28:1-2).
2. No task is too demeaning for a good leader (Acts 28:3; cf. John 13:4-5).
3. God's protective hand is upon us even when we do not realize danger's presence (Acts 28:3-4).
4. Never let the unexpected cause you to doubt God's clear promises (28:5-6; cf. 23:11).
5. One of the best ways to evangelize is to serve others in Jesus' name (28:7-9).
6. God often meets our needs in unimagined ways (vs. 10).

—Don Kakavecos.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does Acts 28:1-2 demonstrate God's provision for His children (cf. Dan. 1:8-9)? How should this keep us from anxiety even while serving God among unbelievers (cf. Prov. 16:7)?
2. What are some of the dangers the Christian faces when he or she is in a position of leadership (Acts 28:4-6)?
3. What do you suspect was Paul's response to the people's belief that he was a god (Acts 28:6; cf. 14:6-18)?
4. What principle does God's healing of Publius's father and the other islanders illustrate (Acts 28:7-9; cf. Gen. 12:3; Matt. 10:40-42)?

—Valante M. Grant.

Golden Text Illuminated

“Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him” (Acts 28:8).

Paul's time on Malta, or “Melita” (Acts 28:1), was strategic for the continuation of the ministry of the gospel. The three months he was there proved to be an effective time.

God wanted to show His power in Paul's life, and He did not wait long to do it. It is not the easy times that prove our faith but the difficult ones. Because God miraculously delivered him from snakebite, Paul had further ministry in the home of Publius, the island's leader. He healed the man's ill father, and it was not long before many of the people of Malta had gathered around to hear Paul and be ministered to by him.

For many of us the healing is the highlight of this passage. Yet we dare not miss the faithfulness of Paul in serving, even in great difficulty.

An old proverb says, “The same sun that hardens the clay softens the wax.” The issue is whether we have hearts of wax or of clay. Some believers encounter tragedy and become bitter. Faithful Christians face disaster and become more effective in their ministry.

Believers should continue strong in service even when tragedy strikes. God did not promise that life in a cursed world would always be pleasant. He has promised to see us through the difficulty and to strengthen us for service. He has also promised a retirement that is (literally) out of this world! Even if you go through trials, be strong and courageous, and let God use you.

—Joe Falkner.