

LESSONS FROM A SHIPWRECK

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In Romans 8:28, God gives the great promise “*that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*” Of course, that does not happen by “accident,” but rather by God’s action. Indeed, He “*worketh all things after the counsel of his own will*” (Eph 1:11). An example of this is found in Acts chapters 27-28, when Paul was shipwrecked on his journey to Rome as a prisoner.

For the good of the men on the ship

As Paul neared the end of his third missionary journey, he was already planning his next trip to spread the gospel to new territory. From Corinth he was inspired to write the letter to the Romans, and therein expressed his intention to travel ultimately to Spain by way of Rome (Rom 1:9-15; 15:22-33). However, when Paul completed that third journey, he was taken prisoner in Jerusalem and then spent two years as a prisoner in Caesarea (Acts 21-24). To avoid being delivered to the Jews (who would have killed him), Paul exercised his right as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:1-12). He was eventually placed on a ship to be taken to Rome to appear before Caesar (Acts 27:1-2). The journey had a slow beginning because of contrary winds (Acts 27:3-8), and they spent a lot of time waiting on the island of Crete (Acts 27:8-9). And “sailing was now dangerous” and Paul warned them not to sail, because the ship and their lives would otherwise be in jeopardy (Acts 27:9-10). Acts 27:11 says, “*Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul. And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.*” Nobody listened to Paul at that point. As Paul had warned, the ship was caught in a terrible storm and was driven “for many days” (Acts 27:13-20). Paul then told them, “Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man’s life among you, but of the ship. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island” (Acts 27:21-26). As the ship was about to run aground on the island of Melita, the shipmen were about to flee in a boat (Acts 27:27-30). Paul then said, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off” (Acts 27:31-32). They now listened to Paul to the point that they were willing to let their rescue boat go! Clearly, the men

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(continued)

on the ship had learned something about Paul and the God he served.

For the good of the people of Melita (and others)

All 276 souls, including Paul, safely reached the shore of the island of Melita (Acts 27:37-28:1). This is the island nation in the Mediterranean Sea that today goes by the name of Malta. Acts 28:2-4 says, *“And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 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. 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.”* But Paul “shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm” (Acts 28:5). Acts 28:6 says, *“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.”* Many years before, Peter and John healed a lame man at the temple in Jerusalem, and made the point to the people that it was not by *their* power or holiness that the man was healed, but by the power of God (Acts 3:12-13). On his first missionary journey, Paul similarly healed a crippled man at Lystra (Acts 14:8-10). The people there responded by saying, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men,” and were going to worship Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:11-13). Paul told them to “turn from these vanities unto the living God” (Acts 14:14-17). The miracles done by the apostles and prophets were God’s witness that they were speaking His word, and thus served to confirm that word (Heb 2:3-4; Mark 16:20; Acts 14:3). On Melita, Paul healed the father of Publius, the “chief man of the island,” who “lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux” (Acts 28:7-8). *“So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary”* (Acts 28:9-10). Thus, the people of Melita also learned about the true and living God through the miracles performed by Paul. Of course, Paul himself grew spiritually by enduring these trials on his faith, including the experiences of his shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25-30; 12:9-10; Jas 1:2-4). Ultimately, God brought Paul to Rome and he preached the gospel there for two years (Acts 28:16-31). In spite of the shipwreck and Paul’s imprisonment, God used Paul to spread the gospel into the very palace of Caesar himself (Php 4:22). We do not have the ability to foresee how God is going to work all things together for good in every situation in our lives, but by looking at examples such as Paul’s shipwreck, we can grow in our trust in the Lord that He will always do as He promises.