

Remaining in God's will

By Dan & Brenda Cathcart

The video version is available at: <https://youtu.be/DmepCbT79aQ>

The scripture reading is Acts 27:1-28:16

From the time of Paul's arrest in the temple during the feast of Shavuot to the time he was sent to Rome, Paul testified to many people including Felix, Drusilla, Festus, King Agrippa, Bernice and the officials in Caesarea. Yeshua had come to Paul when he was first arrested telling him he would testify in Rome as well as Jerusalem. Now, after more than two years, Paul is finally on the way to Rome, the capitol city of the sprawling Roman Empire with all its political intrigues.

Paul's journey began in the late summer of 59 CE shortly before the Feast of Trumpets or Rosh Hashanah. The most dangerous time to sail the Mediterranean Sea would begin in just a couple of weeks. Paul's journey and that of those who accompanied him to Rome would be affected by these storms. One encounter with a storm would result in a ship wreck stranding them in Malta for the winter.

Paul's journey is surprisingly similar to that of another messenger sent from God. The prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the capitol city of the largest Empire of his time.

The ship that carried Paul on his journey to Rome headed north out of Caesarea staying close to the coast. The first stop was at the port city of Sidon.

Acts 27:1-3 NKJV 1 And when it was decided that we should sail to Italy, they delivered Paul and some other prisoners to one named Julius, a centurion of the Augustan Regiment. 2 So, entering a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, meaning to sail along the coasts of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us. 3 And the next day we landed at Sidon. And Julius treated Paul kindly and gave him liberty to go to his friends and receive care.

During Paul's time in Caesarea, he had gained the respect of the Roman guard. Julius, the centurion in charge of Paul on this journey, respected Paul and gave permission for Paul to leave the ship in Sidon. This allowed Paul's friends to provide for him on his journey.

Jonah's journey to Nineveh started only a few miles to the south of Caesarea in Joppa. While Paul fearlessly headed toward Rome to the west, Jonah also headed west, but away from Nineveh which was to the northeast of Israel.

Jonah 1:3 NKJV 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Paul and his contingent left Sidon well provisioned for the next stage of their journey; they continued along the coast of Asia staying north of Cyprus for protection from the winds ultimately landing in Myrus. From there, the storms worsened. The travelers skirted the island of Crete unable to land because of the winds. They finally were able to land at the small port city of Fair Havens.

Acts 27:7-8 NKJV 7 When we had sailed slowly many days, and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, the wind not permitting us to proceed, we sailed under the shelter of Crete off Salmone. 8 Passing it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.

With their journey delayed by the winds, it was now well into the dangerous time to sail. Rosh Hashanah had passed as had Yom Kippur, the day of the Fast.

Acts 27:9-10 NKJV 9 Now when much time had been spent, and sailing was now dangerous because the Fast was already over, Paul advised them, 10 saying, "Men, I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives."

Paul advised that they winter at Fair Havens before continuing their journey to Rome. What was Paul doing advising the captain of the ship and the Roman Centurion who was his jailer about how and when to conduct the journey? Why would the centurion and the captain even consult him? The fact that they would even consider Paul's words show the respect that Paul earned among his captors. However, Fair Havens was a small port and not a good place to winter. Further, the grain the ship carried was needed in Rome. At the very least, they needed to proceed on to a larger city where they could more easily spend the winter.

Acts 27:12 NKJV 12 And because the harbor was not suitable to winter in, the majority advised to set sail from there also, if by any means they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete opening toward the southwest and northwest, and winter there.

The distance between Fair Havens and Phoenix was not far, only about forty miles which was an easy day's sail. Unfortunately, the ship was caught in a headwind and driven completely off course. A short day trip ended up lasting fifteen days! On the thirteenth day, Paul encouraged the sailors with a word he received from God.

Acts 27:21-25 NKJV 21 But after long abstinence from food, then Paul stood in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. 22 "And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 "For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 "saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 "Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.

That night, they began to approach land. Some sailors wanted to abandon ship and use the skiff to row to land. Paul warned strongly against them doing so.

Acts 27:30-31 NKJV 30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, when they had let down the skiff into the sea, under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved."

The attempt to abandon ship in the night was stopped by the soldiers. As the morning of the fifteenth day approached, Paul encouraged the company to eat in preparation for the ordeal to come. When the sun rose, they saw a bay where it looked like they could run the ship onto its beach. While making for the beach, the ship ran aground and was being broken up by the waves. The only choice was to swim for the beach.

Acts 27:42-44 NKJV 42 And the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim away and escape. 43 But the centurion, wanting to save Paul, kept them from their purpose, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest, some on boards and some on parts of the ship. And so it was that they all escaped safely to land.

The soldiers wanted to kill all the prisoners to keep them from escaping. But the centurion, wanting to save Paul's life, prevented the soldiers from killing the prisoners. As a result, all two hundred seventy six people on

board the ship safely landed on Malta. Paul's assurance that although the ship would be lost everyone onboard would survive was fulfilled. It was clear that God's favor was with Paul.

Jonah's journey was also met with stormy winds. These winds were sent by God to get Jonah back on the path to Nineveh. Like Paul's ship, Jonah's ship was in danger of being broken up by the fierce winds.

Jonah 1:4 NKJV 4 But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up.

Both ships had had to cast their cargo overboard to lighten the load. Unlike Paul, however, who played an active role in the helping to guide the journey to Rome; Jonah was sleeping seemingly without a care during the storm.

Jonah 1:5-6 NKJV 5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. 6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish."

Through the casting of lots, it was revealed that Jonah's presence was endangering the rest of the ship. The only solution was for the crew to throw Jonah overboard.

Jonah 1:11-12 NKJV 11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?" -for the sea was growing more tempestuous. 12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me."

While Paul kept his company together to save them all, Jonah had to abandon his ship to save the rest of them.

All of Paul's companions arrived safely on the beach of Malta. They were met with unusual kindness.

Acts 28:1-2 NKJV 1 Now when they had escaped, they then found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us unusual kindness; for they kindled a fire and made us all welcome, because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.

The name "Malta" is actually the word "mel-ee'-tay" of unknown origin. However in the Phoenician and Hebrew languages, the word has a significant meaning. First Fruits of Zion in Chronicles of the Apostles explains:

They had named their island "Melita," which in Semitic languages (including both Hebrew and Phoenician), meant "place of refuge." The verb malat means to escape.ⁱ

The inhabitants of Malta, the place of refuge, showed the shipwrecked company unusual kindness. They went out of their way to help the stranded strangers, building a fire to warm and dry them after their ordeal in the sea. The Torah commands us to take care of the stranger.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 NKJV 17 "For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. 18 "He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. 19 "Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

The writer of Hebrews takes this admonition even further instructing us to take care of the stranger because the stranger might just be a heavenly messenger.

Hebrews 13:2 NKJV 2 Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels.

As the fire on the beach was burning, Paul pitched in to help. He went to gather more wood for the fire.

Acts 28:3-4 NKJV 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 So when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he has escaped the sea, yet justice does not allow to live."

The residents of Malta saw the viper with its fangs in Paul's hand; they concluded that Paul was being divinely judged for the crime for which he was being taken to Rome. But Paul merely shook the viper off his hand and continued to tend the fire.

Acts 28:5-6 NKJV 5 But he shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 However, they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had looked for a long time and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god.

Instead of divine judgment, God revealed that this stranger they were taking care of was His messenger! Paul further reveals his status with God by healing the father of the leading citizen of the island and any others on the island who were sick.

Acts 28:7-9 NKJV 7 In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days. 8 And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 So when this was done, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed.

Paul's entire company lived as honored guests for the entire winter. At the end of the winter, the inhabitants of Malta provided all the ship's company needed to conclude their journey to Rome.

Acts 28:10 NKJV 10 They also honored us in many ways; and when we departed, they provided such things as were necessary.

While Paul and his companions were met with kindness and provisioned for the rest of their journey, Jonah received a different welcome. The ship that he was on apparently reached its destination safely, but Jonah ended up in the belly of the whale.

Jonah 1:17 NKJV 17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Instead of being welcomed by a warm fire, Jonah was welcomed by the damp stench of the inside of a whale. While in the belly of the whale, Jonah repented for running from God's commission to take the message of repentance to Nineveh.

Jonah 2:7-10 NKJV 7 "When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the LORD; And my prayer went up to You, Into Your holy temple. 8 "Those who regard worthless idols Forsake their own Mercy. 9 But I

will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD." 10 So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah's provision to complete his journey was to be vomited up on dry land, dirty, wet, and hungry with the instruction to bring God's message to Nineveh.

Jonah 3:1-3a NKJV 1 Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD.

As Paul continued his voyage, word of his impending arrival reached the believers in Rome. Many of them, excited at Paul's coming, set out to meet him south of the city.

Acts 28:15-16 NKJV 15 And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum and Three Inns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. 16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

The welcome by the believers was a huge encouragement to Paul. Three Inns was thirty five miles south of Rome and Appii Forum an additional ten miles south. This was as much as a two to three day journey by foot! Imagine the comfort Paul received from such a greeting! He knew that he would have to testify before the Jews in the synagogue and ultimately before Emperor Nero, but for now, he was surrounded by friends.

Both Paul and Jonah fulfilled their mission to bring God's message to Rome and Nineveh. Through every trial that Paul faced, he turned to God seeking His will. He stood strong for God and for His faith confident that God would do exactly what He said He would do. At each step of the journey, Paul faithfully shared the good news of salvation through Messiah Yeshua.

Study Questions:

1. How was Paul's call (Acts 23:11) like Jonah's call (Jonah 1:1-2) How was it different?
2. How did Paul's and Jonah's responses to God affect those around them? Are there other examples in scripture of a person's response to God affecting those around them? How do our responses to God affect others?
3. Compare Jonah's companions' view of God with Paul's companions' view of God.
4. There is a hidden word play in Acts 28:1-2. The Hebrew word for escape is "malat" and the place of their escape is "melita" meaning place of refuge. What are the escape and the refuge?
5. What did Jonah "escape" from and what was his place of "refuge"?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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ⁱ Chronicles of the Apostles. D.T. Lancaster. First Fruits of Zion. ©2011, 2016. Book 3, Page 838.