

Sha'ul of Tarsus & His Letters ~ Part 171

Sha'ul's Voyage to Rome ~ Part 3

We continue in the **Book of Acts**. **Sha'ul's Voyage to Rome** begins in Acts 27:33.

The Passengers Eat Their Last Meal

³³ Just as the day was dawning, Sha'ul urged everyone to eat. "You have been so worried that you haven't touched food for two weeks," he said. ³⁴ "Please eat something now for your own good. For not a hair of your heads will perish." ³⁵ Then he took some bread, gave thanks to God before them all, and broke off a piece and ate it. ³⁶ Then everyone was encouraged and began to eat—³⁷ all 276 of us who were on board. ³⁸ After eating, the crew lightened the ship further by throwing the cargo of wheat overboard. ³⁹ When day broke, they didn't recognize the land, but they noticed a bay with a sand beach, where they decided to run the ship aground if they could.

The men ***haven't touched food for two weeks***, most likely because of severe seasickness brought on by the rough sea. Following ***Jewish custom***, Sha'ul said the **B'rakhah** to **God** for the food they ate. **Sha'ul's** example of steady faith ("he gave thanks to God") and practicality ("he began to eat," v. 35) in the midst of the storm encouraged the battered sailors. Luke mentions the number to show that **Sha'ul** had managed to encourage all of them to eat. The crew threw out the ***cargo of wheat***, which had been acting as ballast for the ship so that they could run it aground (v. 39).

Shipped Wrecked on Malta

In light of the damage to the ship and the loss of the lifeboat (vv. 30–32), the only option for reaching shore was to ground the ship.

⁴¹ But they hit a shoal and ran the ship aground too soon. The bow of the ship stuck fast, while the stern was repeatedly smashed by the force of the waves and began to break apart.

This verse says, literally, ***"And coming upon a place between two seas they drove the vessel; and while the prow, having run aground, remained immovable, the stern was broken by the force."*** The sense is not exactly clear from the text. When a swell reaches an island, its waves split to pass it, and they may meet head-on at the far end of the island. At this place, the sand carried along by the currents from both directions is deposited as a sandbar or sand spit, on which the waves break from two nearly opposite directions, sometimes even running straight into each other. Such a spot makes for lively surfing but is very treacherous for ships and boats.

⁴² The soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners to make sure they didn't swim ashore and escape. ⁴³ But the commanding officer wanted to spare Sha'ul, so he didn't let them carry out their plan. Then he ordered all who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land. ⁴⁴ The others held onto planks or debris from the broken ship. So, everyone escaped safely to shore.

Sha'ul Seen As A God

²⁸ ¹ After our escape, we learned that the island was called Malta.

This is the fifth ***"we"*** section in Acts 16:10, and it extends through verse 28:16.

² Its people showed extraordinary kindness—it was cold, and it had started to rain, so they lit a bonfire and welcomed us all. ³ Sha’ul had gathered a bundle of sticks and was adding them to the fire when a poisonous snake, driven out by the heat, fastened itself to his hand. ⁴ The islanders saw the creature hanging from Sha’ul’s hand and said to one another, “This man must be a murderer. Even though he escaped the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.”

Although there are no poisonous snakes on **Malta** today, this does not mean there were none in **Sha’ul’s** day. Fauna and flora change over time. The residents of **Malta** apparently thought **Justice**, a **Greek goddess**, had singled **Sha’ul’s** out because he deserved death.

⁵ But he shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no harm. ⁶ They waited, expecting him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing that nothing amiss was happening to him, they reversed their opinion and said he was a god.

The superstitious natives of Malta quickly decided **Sha’ul** was **a god** rather than a “murderer” (v. 4). **Sha’ul** shrugged off this false praise just as soon as he had shaken off the snake.

Sick Healed At Malta

⁷ Nearby were lands belonging to the governor of the island, whose name was Publius. He received us in a friendly manner and put us up for three days. ⁸ Now it so happened that Publius’ father was lying in bed, sick with fever attacks and dysentery. Sha’ul went into him, prayed, placed his hands on him, and healed him. ⁹ After this happened, the rest of those on the island who had ailments came and were healed. ¹⁰ They heaped honors on us, and when the time came for us to sail, they provided the supplies we needed.

Leading man or “first man” of Malta is a title reflected in inscriptional evidence from the island. Publius may have been a leading citizen or political leader.

28:8 Publius’s father may have suffered from “Malta fever,” which is caused by drinking impure goats’ milk.

28:9–10 The honors that **Sha’ul’s** received may have been monetary rewards or payment. The same word is used elsewhere in Acts to indicate money (5:2–3; 7:16; 19:19).

Final Voyage to Rome

¹¹ After three months, we sailed away on a ship from Alexandria called “Twin Gods,” which had passed the winter at the island. ¹² We landed at Syracuse and stayed three days. ¹³ From there, we arrived at Rhegium by tacking, but after one day, a south wind sprang up, so we made it to Puteoli the second day. ¹⁴ There, we found brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we went on toward Rome. ¹⁵ The brothers there had heard about us and came as far as Appian Market and Three Inns to meet us. When Sha’ul saw them, he thanked God and took courage. ¹

In our next post, we learn about **Sha’ul’s House Arrest In Rome**, beginning in Acts 28:16.

¹ Acts 27:33-28:11–15.