

*Pastor's Papers* | Ronald H. Gann  
Bible/Apologetics

### ***The Extradition Of Paul***

A Survey Of The Life & Ministry Of The Apostle Paul (Part 8)  
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Vince Lombardi (1913–1970), the head coach of the NFL’s Green Bay Packers from 1959–67 and winner of five league championships, famously said, “Leaders aren’t born, they are made. And they are made just like anything else, through hard work.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly Lombardi’s words call to mind the emotional and physical discipline necessary to cultivate an athletic champion. Beyond athletic prowess, however, Lombardi’s words are best applied to the many unsung heroes of World War II. When called upon in times of peril, countless soldiers, airmen, and Marines rose valiantly to the call of duty—some reluctantly rather than willingly—and demonstrated heroic leadership. At the time of the doomed destiny of the USS *Indianapolis* on July 30, 1945, amid the worst naval disaster in U.S. history, senior medical officer Captain Lewis L. Haynes emerged as such a man.

Under top-secret orders to transport components for an atomic bomb (that would be dropped on Hiroshima three weeks later) to the U.S. air base at Tinian Island, the USS *Indianapolis* put out to sea from San Francisco Bay just after dawn on July 16. After unloading her deadly cargo ten days later, the heavy cruiser set sail again on the Pacific Ocean for the Philippine isle of Leyte in preparation for the Allied invasion of Japan. The ship’s course steered her through a marine wasteland infested with Japanese submarines and whitetip sharks.

At 12:14 AM, on July 30, 1945, midway between Guam and Leyte Gulf, the unsuspecting *Indianapolis* was hit in the bow and midship near the fuel tank and powder magazine by two undetected Japanese I-58 submarine torpedoes. The impact of the artillery hits and the resulting explosion virtually severed the ship in two, short-circuiting all electrical power.

The shock of the surprise attack caused hysteria among the 1,196 sailors on board. By the time the frenzied crew—many of whom were badly burnt or blinded by fuel oil—had readied their battle stations, the tattered vessel was beginning to capsize and was already headlong into her submersion. It took only twelve minutes for the ship to dip her bow, roll to starboard, and slip eerily beneath the sea. Of the 1,196 crewmembers aboard, an estimated nine hundred survived the explosion—but worse was yet to come.

The treacherous open seas offered little safety for the *Indianapolis* survivors. Although many survived the sinking of the ship, only a small number were fortunate enough to secure lifeboats. The remainder was forced to drift helplessly in the ocean with lifejackets or on floating wreckage while others tread water to survive—finding

possible salvation only when a life jacket became available through the death of a shipmate.

Minutes earlier, while the ship was still afloat, radio operators were able to transmit distress signals to alert the U.S. Navy of its coordinates. But in one of the many controversies surrounding the USS Indianapolis's demise, the SOS calls were either not received or went unnoticed. Nearly a full week had gone by before a Ventura Bomber plane on routine antisubmarine patrol discovered the surviving crew by happenstance.

Many of the sailors could not withstand the ocean's unforgiving nature and succumbed to dehydration, hypothermia, drowning, salt-water poisoning, desquamation,<sup>2</sup> or dysentery. And for those who did manage to survive the elements, their hardship was only exacerbated by the ravenous sharks that encircled them. The man-eaters began feasting at sunrise on the first day and continued until the men were physically removed from the water.

The morale of the men quickly fell as an average of a hundred and forty of their comrades perished each day. Drowning and sunstroke, together with innumerable shark attacks, were later determined by witnesses as the most common cause of death. Fearing that the distress call had been lost in transmission, due to the radio silence that shrouded their clandestine mission, all hope was abandoned by the survivors. Furthermore, many of the commanding officers had been killed in the initial explosion or were too debilitated to assume charge. But optimism and leadership eventually appeared in the command of Captain Lewis L. Haynes.

Dr. Haynes was the Chief Medical Officer aboard the Indianapolis. Between the time the torpedoes struck the ship and her sinking twelve minutes later, Haynes was able to dress many of the casualties with life jackets before saving his own life by grabbing onto a rope dangling from an open porthole. With great effort and little time to spare, he managed to climb the rope to safety where he and an assistant quickly issued life jackets to those still alive.

Adrift at sea, Dr. Haynes was compelled by his conscience to put the needs of others above his own. Covered in fuel oil that stung the nose and eyes, many of the men were also vomiting profusely. Haynes later recalled: "At that time, I could have hidden but somebody yelled, 'Is the doctor there?' And I made myself known ... and that's probably why I'm here today—I was kept so busy I had to keep going. But without any equipment, from that point on I became a coroner."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Haynes rallied the men together in the water, provided what medical oversight he could, and assuaged the crew's despair. His first act of leadership was to defend his men from the violent waves that threatened to divide them by organizing the swimmers into one mass group. Next, he ensured that all the wounded, together with those who were deathly sick, were safeguarded at the center of the pack—which he regarded as a floating sickbay. Instead of the customary cots normally found in naval infirmaries, Haynes used floating dinghies as makeshift beds. As other leaders began to emerge, Haynes performed rudimentary examinations on the living:

When daylight came we began to get ourselves organized into a group and the leaders began to come out. When first light came we had between three and four hundred men in our group. I would guess that probably seven or eight hundred men made it out of the ship. I began to find the wounded

and dead. The only way I could tell they were dead was to put my finger in their eye. If their pupils were dilated and they didn't blink I assumed they were dead. We would then laboriously take off their life jacket and give it to men who didn't have jackets. In the beginning I took off their dog tags, said The Lord's Prayer, and let them go. Eventually, I got such an armful of dog tags I couldn't hold them any longer. Even today, when I try to say The Lord's Prayer or hear it, I simply lose it.<sup>4</sup>

It was not long before severe dehydration began to affect the men. Despite being plunged into a bed of deceptively safe, translucent ocean, the doctor was well aware that ingesting the sea water would only heighten their peril. And with the scorching heat of the Asian sun relentless, the temptation to drink only increased with each passing hour. Only two days into their ordeal, the men were desperately parched. His greatest challenge, Haynes later recalled, was not the school of sharks that circled their camp or the threat of drowning, but to convince the men not to drink from the ocean:

When the hot sun came out and we were in this crystal clear water, you were so thirsty you couldn't believe it wasn't good enough to drink. I had a hard time convincing the men that they shouldn't drink. The real young ones—you take away their hope, you take away their water and food—they would drink salt water and then would go fast. I can remember striking men who were drinking water to try and stop them. They would get diarrhea, then get more dehydrated, then become very maniacal.

In the beginning, we tried to hold them and support them while they were thrashing around. And then we found we were losing a good man to get rid of one who had been bad and drunk. As terrible as it may sound, towards the end when they did this, we shoved them away from the pack because we had to.<sup>5</sup>

Lost at sea for days, Dr. Haynes was well aware that time was of the essence. Many of the men were semi-comatose and the life jackets had lost their buoyancy. Hallucinations began en masse—clusters of men convinced themselves that an island sat just ahead, promising certain rescue. It was all that Dr. Haynes could do to prevent the men from being enticed by the mirage and breaking formation. He fastened the hallucinating men together by securing each man's arms through the life jacket of the man in front of him to form an interlocking daisy chain, which thwarted escape.

On August 2, 1945, the plight of the USS Indianapolis came to an end. At 10:25 AM the survivors were accidentally sighted by PV-1 pilot Lieutenant Wilber Gwinn and copilot Lieutenant Warren Colwell on a routine reconnaissance flight. The pilot had spotted the crew adrift while stretching his neck. The two pilots radioed the military base on Palau, an island in the Pacific Ocean located some five hundred miles east of the Philippines and two thousand miles south of Tokyo. "Many men in the water," they alerted the base. Three hours later, a Catalina PB-Y seaplane arrived, piloted by Lieutenant R. Adrian Marks.

On route to the scene, Lieutenant Marks flew over the destroyer USS Cecil Doyle below and alerted her captain of the urgent situation. The captain of the Doyle, on his own authority, diverted from his planned coordinates to assist in the recovery effort.

Arriving hours ahead of the heavy cruiser, Marks' aircraft hovered above the sea and dropped portable rafts, provisions, and a radio transmitter to the men. To his horror, Marks witnessed repeated shark attacks as men skirmished and thrashed about for their lives. Disregarding standing orders not to land at sea, he taxied his plane on the turbulent waves to pick up the lone swimmers who were at greatest risk. When he learned that the men were the crew of the Indianapolis, he radioed the information to headquarters, requesting immediate assistance. All air and surface units capable of rescue operations were dispatched to the scene at once.

As darkness fell, Marks waited for the USS Doyle to arrive, all the while continuing to hunt for and haul in half-dead men. When the plane's fuselage was filled to capacity, survivors were tied to the wing with parachute cord. At long last, the USS Doyle arrived and began working in tandem with the PBY to load survivors.

Unnerved by the mass casualties, the Doyle's skipper quickly pointed the ship's largest searchlight into the night sky to serve as a beacon call for other rescue vessels. Three destroyers and two ships soon answered the summons. Of the nine hundred men who went into the water on July 30, 1945, only 317 remained alive on August 2. It was the worst sea catastrophe in U.S. Navy history. After nearly five days of fending off shark attacks, with open wounds and while becoming increasingly malnourished and dehydrated, the men of the USS Indianapolis were at last rescued from the sea.

In terrifying circumstances, senior medical officer Captain Lewis L. Haynes, a veteran corpsman unfamiliar with gallantry or heroism, found himself to be the very glue that held his shipmates together. He personified biblical leadership in the same manner as the apostle Paul when shipwrecked on the island of Malta (Acts 27–28).

Like Captain Haynes and the ill-fated USS Indianapolis, Paul's extradition to Rome on an Adramyttium vessel ended in shipwreck that marooned 276 sailors. Having previously endured three shipwrecks on the Adriatic Sea (2 Cor. 11:25), the apostle had firsthand experience with the horrors of seafaring. Indeed, similar to the men of the Indianapolis, the apostle had "spent a night and a day in the open sea" (v. 25). But Paul's encounter with the dangers of seagoing would only serve to bolster his faith, and those with him, and highlight his apostolic leadership.

## The Appeal To Caesar

Paul's Roman citizenship played a strategic role in his ministry as the apostle to the Gentiles. Indeed, he availed himself of the privilege more than once in the wake of Greek and Jewish mistreatment (cf. Acts 16:38; 22:22–29). With its badge of prestige also came significant civil liberties. In addition to certain sway, its protected status also afforded Paul, and all other classified citizens, a pardon from hostile interrogation when indicted on thorny legal matters abroad.

Roman citizenship rights were first formulated in the Valerian Law at the founding of the Roman Republic in 509 BC. It exempted Roman citizens from shameful

and disproportionate forms of punishment, particularly those deemed as excessively violent like scourging or crucifixion. It also established the right of appeal to reverse a lower court's decision, an entitlement Paul invoked at his trial before Agrippa and Festus (Acts 25:10–11).

In approximately 23 BC, the Julian Law was adopted throughout the Roman Empire. The Julian Law was originally intended as an addendum to the Valerian Law, establishing certain legalities regarding marriage and adultery as well as bestowing to state commissioners, local magistrates, and individual landowners the right to craft boundaries and colonial landmarks in towns, prefectures, markets, and meeting places. Owing to its celebrated success, Roman law and citizenship rights—pooled together in the Valerian and Julian Laws—became the basis by which western Europe governed until the end of the eighteenth century.

The advantages of Roman citizenship for first century journeymen such as Paul were far from inconsequential. It provided unobstructed access throughout the Mediterranean world. It was a privileged status with respect to travel, individual rights, corporate laws, property, marriage, and taxation. Yet not all Roman citizens were equal or shared the same civil liberties. To preserve her unity in the face of shifting ethnic composition, four classifications for citizenship were crafted: (1) *Citizens*, (2) *Municipia*, (3) *Latin Allies*, and (4) *Italian Allies*.

Those deemed to be *Citizens* were individual Romans who boasted full rights and privileges. To them alone, the license of Roman marriage, land holdings, voting, and tax incentives were given, as well as fair and speedy arbitration.

The *Municipia* were incorporated, adjunct Roman communities. Residents of these communities received limited citizenship, forgoing the right to participate in the Roman electorate. As a municipality, however, they were allowed to self-govern and to exercise the rights of trade despite restricted privileges for the individual. Its citizens were also required to serve in the army and to pay Roman taxes.

Likewise, *Latin Allies* were also self-governing communities. They did not hold Roman citizenship but were allowed equivalent trade rights and supplied Rome with foreign legions.

Lastly, *Italian Allies* were Roman protectorates, or sovereign states, that enjoyed Rome's protective muscle in exchange for certain obligations. Typically, they dispatched troop levies to Rome as payment for Imperial protection against rogue militias. They also were allowed to share in the spoils of war.

Exactly which class and to what extent Paul held Roman citizenship has been a matter of speculation among biblical scholarship. However, the New Testament evidence favors the apostle's full-fledged Roman rights. It seems he had the right to Roman marriage, the right to own property, and exercised before Agrippa and Festus the right to appeal his court case to the emperor (Acts 25:10–11). Moreover, he could not be legally bound or scourged without a formal trial sanctioned by Rome (Acts 16:37; 22:22–29).

Having inherited his Roman citizenship from his father (Acts 23:6; Php. 3:5), Paul used his Greco-Roman credentials as a means to further his message and preserve his ministry. By appealing to Caesar to adjudicate the case brought against him by the Sanhedrin, he found himself on the journey to Rome, the very city he had initially set out to visit (Rom. 15:22–24) and before the very leaders God had promised him an

audience (Acts 23:11; 27:24). He was a citizen of Rome by birth and he used the rights of a citizen to appeal his case and to further his apostolic mission.

### Premonition At Sea

“**W**hy are you weeping and breaking my heart?” Paul had asked his supporters at the house of Philip the evangelist in Caesarea, only days before entering Jerusalem. “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:13).

Paul’s words defied the ominous prediction of the prophet Agabus who, just moments earlier, had tied his own hands and feet with Paul’s belt saying: “The Holy Spirit says, ‘In this way the Jews of Jerusalem will bind the owner of this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles.’” Not to be dissuaded, Paul’s retort to the prophet was stoic, if not stubborn: “The Lord’s will be done” (v. 11b, 14b).

Only twelve days into his Jerusalem homecoming, Agabus’ prophecy came to pass. The apostle was exiting the temple courts, having just received the water of purification in completion of his Nazirite vow, when the impropriety of being seen with a Gentile sparked bedlam. Guilty by association, Paul was accosted and beaten by Jewish pilgrims from Ephesus before finally rescued by Claudius Lysias, the Roman temple guard. He was detained at the Antonia barracks under Lysias’ command for further investigation. On trumped up charges such as sectarianism, sedition, and sacrilege, Paul was finally arraigned before Judea’s political powerbase, consisting of the Jewish Sanhedrin, Roman Governors Felix and Festus, and the Jewish tetrarch-turned-traitor, King Agrippa of Galilee. When the courts failed to render a verdict after two years of detention, Paul exercised his right as a citizen of Rome and appealed to Caesar.

With his plea granted by Festus, the logistics behind Paul’s extradition were quickly arranged. He was booked on an Adramyttium cargo vessel scheduled to depart Caesarea for Myra, located in southern Asia Minor. Included in the itinerary was a planned freight exchange at neighboring Sidon, in the region of Phoenicia. From there, the boat was to taxi Paul nearly half way across the Mediterranean Sea to Myra where he would then catch a transfer boat for Italy.

Dispatched on the voyage was a Roman centurion named Julius. He was an elite soldier of the Imperial Regiment who, among other military duties, guarded high-profile prisoners. As a police escort, he did not belong to any division of the Roman army legion; instead he was a member of a special unit of centurions who served at the pleasure of the emperor. Undoubtedly he was well aware of the prisoner he had in Paul and the political and religious controversies surrounding him. Like other centurions mentioned in the New Testament (cf. Matt. 8:5ff., 27:54; Acts 10:1ff.), Luke records that Paul found Julius to be a man of integrity and honor.

Embarking upon the vessel with the apostle Paul were his ministry cohorts, Luke and Aristarchus, in addition to some two hundred shackled inmates. Given that Paul was to receive favorable treatment as a Roman citizen, the centurion granted the apostle certain perks to accommodate his needs. One such privilege was that Luke and

Aristarchus were permitted to travel with him, no doubt listed on the passenger manifest as the apostle's physician and personal servant.

The ship put out to sea from Caesarea and made its way seventy miles north to Sidon, a Phoenician port famous for its industry and commerce. It was there while at harbor that Julius showed kindness to Paul and "allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs" (Acts 27:3b).

The Sidonian Christians likely received the apostle with great adulation. Many in the city had become believers years earlier through the witness of exiled Christians who had fled Jerusalem after Stephen's martyrdom; a wave of persecution spawned by Paul himself (Acts 7:54–60; 8:1–4). Now the famous persecutor-turned-apostle was in their midst, as a prisoner on behalf of Jesus Christ no less, and they were happy to entertain his needs. He likely invested all the time available to him in teaching the Sidonian believers and sharing in their fellowship. Through their care, Paul was able to receive encouragement as well as provisions for his journey.

That Julius allowed Paul full liberty in Sidon is no small tribute to the impression the apostle made with the centurion. Certainly Julius had been advised by Festus to be lenient with Paul, owing to his blameless character and Roman citizenship. But to grant temporary freedom to a prisoner while at port was a gamble that could have jeopardized the centurion's own standing with Rome, perhaps even cost him his life. Paul's presence in Sidon had the potential to spark a riot among Sidon's Jewish population, exacerbating the volatile relations between the Jews and Rome. Further, Paul's life may have been at risk, and Julius would have paid with his own life were something to happen to his illustrious prisoner. Yet in just a short time, the centurion had apparently developed a high regard for Paul and believed the apostle would not betray his trust.

The duration of the layover at Phoenicia is unclear but Paul and his comrades returned to port in due time. With the cargo apparently exchanged, the vessel set sail toward Cyprus. Cutting across the northeast corner of the Mediterranean, passing the island of Cyprus on the port side, the boat sailed effortlessly, undisturbed by the prevailing westerly winds. The voyage continued onward toward Cilicia in the northeast. Crossing the open sea between Cyprus and Cilicia, the passenger boat then worked its way westward to Myra in Lycia, on the southwest coast of Asia Minor, helped along by local land gusts and a westward current that ran along the coast.

Finally making port at Myra and disembarking, Julius learned that the Adramyttium vessel would not take them any closer to Italy; instead it was slated to dock at its homeport in Asia Minor on winter hiatus. But as chance would have it, an Alexandrian grain ship had recently arrived at Myra whose final destination was Italy. The centurion was able to negotiate the successful transfer of his prisoners to the Alexandrian ship, most likely invoking his Imperial Regiment credentials.

Leaving Myra not long thereafter, the Alexandrian grain ship crawled slowly along the peninsula for a number of days with considerable difficulty due to the opposing northwest current. They had little to show in terms of movement despite the many hours spent at sea. It was becoming increasingly evident to Paul that the blustery weather was not only making travel difficult but threatened the vessel.

The contrary winds forced the ship to change its coordinates toward Cnidus, on the southwest tip of the peninsula. Still unable to negotiate the tide, they changed direction a second time toward the southern coast of Crete, a 160-mile-long island

southeast of Greece. Before long, they arrived safely at Fair Havens, a harbor bordering the city of Lasea just south of Cape Salmone, on the south central coast of Crete.

Paul could sense that something was awry. By now considerable time had been lost due to unfavorable sailing conditions. Moreover, the imminent approach of winter threatened to harbor them indefinitely at Fair Havens. For ancient mariners, travel was problematic in the late fall, putting a halt to all seafaring until February or even March. Yet the helmsman of the ship, including Julius the ranking centurion, both agreed that the city of Lasea was unsuitable for winter lodging. They hoped to winter instead at the larger and safer port of Phoenix, forty miles west of Fair Havens, at the southwest tip of Crete.

Paul was well accustomed to traveling by sea and feared the worst when Julius and the ship's captain agreed to put out to sea again. An experienced traveler, Paul was also aware that, between the harbors of Fair Havens and Phoenix, the south coast of Crete turned suddenly to the north and exposed inbound ships to the northern gales before it regained the protection of the coast just before entering Phoenix. The apostle was not inclined to risk his life, as he had already experienced the horror of three shipwrecks and countless dangers on the open sea earlier in his ministry career (2 Cor. 11:25, 26). He confronted the captain and the centurion and warned them that disaster was sure to befall them if they attempted to challenge the temperamental climate:

“Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also” (Acts 27:10).

Although he carried the clout of an apostle, Paul's premonition fell on deaf ears. To Julius's way of thinking, the advice of the professional captain—whose longstanding record as a seaman sailing both the Adriatic and Mediterranean was impeccable—certainly trumped the judgment of a religious outlaw who was likely destined for a Roman dungeon. Thus, it was only a matter of hours before the Alexandrian grain ship and her 276 passengers set sail again, never to reach her final destination.

## The Storm And Shipwreck

For ancient sailing vessels, travel was dangerous from mid-September to mid-November. All sailing in the open sea was prohibited from December until at least February, except for commercial boats working on behalf of Rome. Notwithstanding the Adriatic's unpredictable waters, Emperor Claudius rewarded those who risked their lives in the late fall to transport Rome's winter commerce.<sup>6</sup> The captain and centurion were therefore bent on reaching Phoenix before the full force of the season was upon them. And if they were lucky, they even supposed that they might be able to return to Italy in time to deliver the winter surplus of grain thereby procuring a bonus for the ship's captain and a commendation for Julius. Against Paul's objections, the ship and its 276 passengers—consisting of inmates, crewmen, Imperial Regiment troops, and the apostle and his two friends, Aristarchus and Luke—soon found themselves on the treacherous seas once more.

Shortly after weighing anchor from Fair Havens, Paul's worst fears came true. Luke records that it originally appeared as though "they had obtained what they wanted" in terms of nautical weather (Acts 27:13). But no sooner had they rounded Cape Matala on the southern coast of Crete than the gentle southern breeze that powered their ship turned violent. A hurricane from Mount Ida to the north—"a northeaster" (v. 14)—met them straight on, forcing them to abandon course-plotting altogether. The winds became increasingly brutal and the foaming, choppy waves pummeled the boat. The sailors had no choice but to surrender to the thunderstorm and contrary winds and allow the boat to be driven along recklessly.

When they reached the sheltered side of Claudia, some twenty to thirty miles from Crete, they had difficulty securing the skiff that was in tow, no doubt weighted heavily from sea water. Frantically, other crewmembers began reinforcing the ship with ropes to keep it from collapsing from the angry sea that pounded the hull and threatened to crack the planking. To prevent the ship from being driven south to Syrtis—a gulf on the coast of Africa noted for its dangerous sandbars and graveyard of ships—they lifted the sail and let the air stream pilot them. Helpless and at the mercy of the squall, the Alexandrian grain ship drifted aimlessly throughout the Mediterranean Sea.

The darkening sky promised no reprieve and made map-reading virtually impossible. After a full day and night in the grip of the tempest, both the crew and the prisoners worked as one man to lighten the boat, offloading the cargo into the sea. Social distinctions quickly evaporated as the fight for survival took precedent over military rank and criminal record. They worked in tandem against the crackling thunder, throwing the grain, deck cargo, mast, sail, tackle, and rigging overboard.

After fourteen days lost at sea, pessimism and hunger overcame the sailors. Although some grain was kept in reserve for meals, sickness, fear, and discouragement robbed them of appetite. Almost certainly they spent sleepless nights working for the preservation of the ship and siphoning water that was leaking in from the fractured hull. But all their efforts were to no avail, and any hope of being saved quickly vanished.

Paul was all too familiar with the situation. Having experienced the horror of multiple shipwrecks before, he had already withstood the towering, white-capped sea waves; the roaring of the bone-chilling wind; the violent rocking of the boat as first the bow, then the stern rose high in the air, only to plunge quickly down again; the perpetual motion, inducing seasickness and unbalancing one's equilibrium; the splashing salt spray stinging and blinding those exposed on deck; and, worst of all, the looming dread of drowning—all were part of Paul's past as a maritime preacher who braved the seas in search of lost souls. And although these factors combined left even the most experienced sailor nonplussed, only the apostle was capable of rallying the men.

The apostle Paul—a prisoner of Rome on route to stand trial before Caesar and to whom leadership always came naturally—emerged as a beacon of hope in their darkest hour. Earlier, they had ignored his premonition that warned of such peril while they were safely anchored at Fair Havens. But now the worried captain and Julius the centurion had no one else to look to for direction.

Unknown to those on board was the heartening news that Paul had received from an angel of the Lord promising their deliverance from the ordeal. Paul grabbed the attention of every man on board with his message of hope:

“Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.’ So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island” (Acts 27:21–25).

Paul had earned the leadership over all others on the vessel. He alone remained cool, shrewd, and in control, because he had absolute trust in God’s promise to save all those on the ship. After encouraging the men to eat so as to muster their strength, he and his shipmates began preparing themselves for predicted disaster in the night to come.

At midnight, on the fourteenth day after leaving Crete, the Alexandrian grain ship found itself drifting helplessly in the Adriatic region known as the Ionian, the body of water between Greece, Italy, and Africa. The roar of surf and shallow waters warned of nearby land that betrayed any hope of a soft landing. Despite dropping four anchors to slow the boat’s acceleration, the ship glided toward the beachhead studded with sandbars and coral reefs. Backlit by the moonlight, the crew could see the threatening shadows of the coastal mountainside coming at them.

The captain ordered his crew to quickly untie the rudders that were previously raised, and lower them into position. Hoisting the mainsail, they made their way toward shore and drove the ship aground in a channel located advantageously between two islands of Malta. The bow stuck fast in the sand, but the stern soon began to break apart because of the violence of the waves. Beached amid pounding surf, every man went into the water, flailing about and surrounded by loose wreckage. Luke, Paul’s biographer and shipmate, captured the drama surrounding the boat’s final moments:

But the ship struck a sandbar and ran aground. The bow stuck fast and would not move, and the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land. The rest were to get there on planks or on pieces of the ship. In this way everyone reached land in safety (Acts 27:41–44).

## **Marooned On Malta**

The seven islands of Malta were the sanctuary Paul and his shipmates had hoped for. Each man abandoned ship and began to swim to the nearest isle. No doubt unnerved by the clapping thunder overhead, the violent dismantling of the boat behind, and the crushing sea waves around him, Paul swam against the water's current flailing and gasping for every breath. In what must have seemed like hours was, in reality, only minutes before the shoreline was in reach. Indeed, "In this way," Luke recorded, "everyone reached land in safety" (Acts 27:44).

But the apostle Paul remained unmoved. He alone stood composed among a crew of sailors more experienced than he, and a band of hardened criminals thought to be stronger. Once again, Paul's leadership traits came to the fore.

The drenched apostle had little concern for his own welfare. He most likely went in search of Aristarchus and Luke on the beach; his two ministry partners who had risked their lives to travel with him. Although God had promised him earlier that "not a hair from the head of any of you will perish" (Acts 27:34 NASB), he would not rest easy until he could account for their whereabouts. Were it not for intermittent moonlight that managed to break through the storm clouds, the manhunt would have been impossible.

Eventually, to Paul's relief, he found his friends alive and well. No doubt he greeted them with an emotional embrace. But he was even more euphoric, though not surprised, to learn that all 276 passengers arrived safely on Malta.

Malta was a small and densely-populated island nation located in the heart of the Mediterranean. A chain of seven tropical islands spanning seventeen miles formed its borders. Because its terrain was low and rocky with imposing coastal cliffs, only three of its islands were actually inhabitable.

The landscape of the tropical island chain was home to a melting pot of civilizations with a prehistoric history dating back to 5200 BC. After the fall of Tyre in 332 BC to Alexander the Great, Malta became subject to Greek control before being ultimately colonized by the surging Roman Empire in 218 BC. Only decades before Paul's unplanned arrival, Caesar Augustus had stationed a Roman governor on the island, making it a Roman settlement for army veterans and their families, similar to Philippi. Situated in southern Europe just fifty-eight miles south of Sicily, the island-nation prospered as a *municipia* under Rome's rule.

The shipwreck and the night acoustics of nearly three hundred men abandoning the vessel en masse drew a large crowd of islanders to the beach. By Paul's day, the island had become civilized, even celebrated for its prosperity and residential architecture, and its native population spoke a Phoenician dialect, owing to their Tyrian heritage. More than spectators, the Maltese natives began nursing the wounded on the beachhead throughout the night. They went to great efforts to make the castaways comfortable, every one of whom was thoroughly drenched, both from the sea and from the torrential rain. The Maltese graciously built a fire and showed "unusual kindness" to the men (Acts 28:2).

It was not long, however, before the bonfire began to dwindle, producing less heat as the night grew colder. Wood needed to be added continually to keep it from extinguishing. Still hours from the warmth of sunrise, Paul was well aware that they would have to take advantage of the scant moonlight and go in search of brushwood. But many of the men were still in no condition to hike the island in the dark; their body temperatures were still dangerously low. It is a measure of Paul's character that he

humbly stooped to perform the menial task himself so as to not burden his shipmates or the natives caring for the sick.

The apostle's unassuming nature and kind heartedness would eventually pave the way for the miraculous work of God and to the advancement of the gospel on Malta. When Paul returned with the driest firewood he could locate, he started stacking the bundle of sticks on the campfire. Gradually the flames thickened and crackled and the heat began to rise. Many of the men came alive with the soothing heat. But it was not only the men who were stirred by the rising temperature.

It is uncertain in Luke's reporting if Paul had enough time to react to the shimmering creature nesting near the warmth of the fire. But as he fed the flames its kindling, the creature—a venomous snake—slithered angrily from its home underneath a log. Awakened from its slumber by the sudden heat, the cantankerous viper lashed out at Paul with its poisonous fangs, fastening its bite onto the apostle's hand.

Certainly the apostle Paul was startled, no doubt weakened from the excruciating jolt of venom. He quickly loosed the dangling serpent from its grip and cast it into the fire. He rubbed the bite profusely with his good hand hoping to soothe the pain and to inhibit the poison's effect in his bloodstream. When he looked up at those around him, particularly the Maltese natives, he was caught off guard by their awkward, distant stares.

The locals did not rush to his aid; although they undoubtedly had considerable experience medicating snake bites since Malta was infested with them.<sup>7</sup> Oddly, they left Paul to his own fate. Given the presence of Roman soldiers and the large contingent of prisoners on the boat, they no doubt took him for a serious criminal, likely a murderer whose karmic brush with justice had come. Although he had survived the shipwreck, they assumed that their Greek goddess, Dike—the goddess of justice—would carry out the apostle's due punishment. "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live" (v. 4). It was evident that the pagan Maltese had a clear sense of right and wrong (cf. Rom. 2:15).

Paul had incurred Dike's judgment, or so it was thought. It was to be expected, therefore, that his hand would soon swell up from the bite, or that he would suddenly collapse dead. But the apostle only appeared more invigorated and lively as time went on.

The Maltese grew increasingly astounded. Seeing that Paul was unaffected by the snakebite, they were compelled to reevaluate their preconception as to who he actually was. At first perceived as a criminal doomed to certain demise by the hand of their goddess, Paul was instead promoted to god-like status worthy of reverence. He had shown himself to be immune to death. His wellbeing aroused the people's excitement and word of his invincibility quickly spread throughout the island.

When dawn finally arrived, the Roman governor on the island was briefed on the crew's condition, including reports that one of the passengers had strangely survived a snake attack. As the prefect of Malta, Publius<sup>8</sup>—who personally owned a large amount of land in the vicinity of the beach where the shipwrecked party landed—was fascinated with their story but equally concerned. His first act of official courtesy as Roman governor was to care for the dispossessed. He summoned the ship's leading men—namely Julius the centurion, together with the ship's captain and the famous apostle Paul—and requested that they stay at his royal estate until further accommodations

could be made. The Roman prefect took a sincere interest in their welfare and entertained them for three days.

That Publius extended hospitality to the sailors even though his father was lying in bed afflicted with a recurrent fever and dysentery was an act of kindness not lost on the apostle Paul. He had been shown the same courtesy as had been lavished upon Julian the centurion and the ship's captain, despite being a notable criminal (no doubt his Roman citizenship playing an influential part). Because God often rewards acts of goodwill shown to His people (cf. Gen. 12:3; Matt. 10:40–42; 25:31ff.), Paul was intent on ensuring that the kindness of the Gentile did not go unrewarded. Yet again God had set the stage for Paul to put on display the Lord's miraculous power and compassion.

The malady afflicting Publius's father was likely 'Malta fever.' It was a gastric fever native to the islands of Malta, triggered by bacteria found primarily in goat's milk—a drink of choice among the Maltese. The fever was feared to be long-lasting—averaging four months, but in some extreme cases lasting as long as two or three years. Compounding the fever was also a painful infection to the digestive system—dysentery—that attacked the intestinal track. It caused Publius's father severe cramping and bloody diarrhea.

The time was right for Paul to repay Publius for his hospitality. Without the dramatic fanfare that normally accompanies a miraculous tale, Luke records that Paul simply went to the bedside of Publius's father and, after some words of hope and prayer, laid his hands on the sick man and healed him. In a short time Publius's father was completely restored.

Luke is silent concerning the response of the Roman governor or of Julius the centurion. But undoubtedly the miracle dispelled their uncertainty and caused many to put their faith in Christ.<sup>9</sup> Paul most likely preached the gospel to all the Maltese, since the purpose of miracles—as well as his own incredible survival from the snake bite—was meant to authenticate Paul as God's messenger and to proclaim Christ (cf. Heb. 2:4). Once news reached the rest of the island about Paul's supernatural gift, it is not surprising that "the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured" (Acts 28:8).

While marooned on Malta, Paul's three-month ministry reaped a spiritual harvest and expanded the gospel's reach even further throughout the Mediterranean. The islanders honored him in many ways befitting a man of God. The apostle was no god, to be sure, but he was indeed a messenger of the one true God who brought to them the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. In carrying out his God-ordained commission, Paul gave of himself unstintingly.

The Lord used Paul's perilous expedition to Rome as the means by which to introduce the gospel to unchartered, remote areas and beyond. But Paul's work in the west was far from accomplished, as he was well aware that Rome still loomed ahead. And it would be there, at the capital of the empire, where the apostle would experience his greatest hour as a herald of the gospel.

Under unspeakable conditions, Captain Lewis L. Haynes rose to valiant heights as a ranking officer aboard the USS Indianapolis. The bombing of the World War II vessel by a Japanese submarine off the coast of Leyte Gulf on July 30, 1945, led to a fatal climax for 879 of its sailors. But for those who survived adrift, Haynes's leadership

helped to save many of them, forever cementing his place among heroes. His resolve to save others rather than himself; to become a servant leader, as it were, is a hallmark of biblical character.

For nearly five days, becoming increasingly debilitated and surrounded by hungry sharks, the chief medical officer had earned the trust of his comrades; took the initiative to secure their safety as best he could; strengthened them in their weakest moments, and led by personal example. Never compromising his military bearing as chief medical officer in the U.S. Navy, Captain Haynes commanded the respect of those with him in the water and availed himself to them in their fight for survival.

Paul's episode with the tempestuous sea and the events that comprised his extradition to Rome showed that he had the same strength of character. He proved to be a man of trustworthiness, initiative, authority, faith, and a role model.

Although a Roman citizen, he could have posed a serious threat to Julius the centurion if he betrayed his trust when permitted to visit the Sidonian Christians, unguarded. In fear of his life, he could have fled Sidon but did not.

At Fair Havens, although a prisoner, he took the initiative and warned Julius and the captain against setting sail in inclement conditions—especially as it involved the unwarranted risk of reaching Phoenix before winter. Paul was not timid about offering unsolicited advice.

He spoke with authority in the raging storm, unshakable in his confidence that God would save everyone on board the Alexandrian grain ship. He strengthened and encouraged the men on board not to lose heart.

Finally, in leading by example, he remained calm and confident on the beach shore, working with the Maltese natives to care for the wounded and to put the frightened men at ease. Like Captain Lewis L. Haynes—a sailor who was forced to live through the worst nightmare that all sailors fear—the apostle Paul epitomized authentic leadership in and on the high seas.

—*Ronald H. Gann*

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<sup>1</sup> Cited at [www.thinkexist.com](http://www.thinkexist.com)

<sup>2</sup> According to [MedicineNet.com](http://MedicineNet.com), the Medical Dictionary defines *Desquamation* as the shedding of the outer layers of the skin.

<sup>3</sup> "The Sinking of the USS Indianapolis, 1945," EyeWitness to History, [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com) (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com) (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. [www.eyewitnesstohistory.com](http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com) (2006).

<sup>6</sup> *Imperial Inducement to Sail Late in the Season: Rapske (Shipwreck, 1994) 22–27*, as cited at <http://www.parsagard.com>.

<sup>7</sup> MacArthur notes that "Critics have charged that this is a fictional attempt by Luke to glorify Paul, or that Luke mistook a harmless snake for a poisonous one. They raise objections because Malta today has no poisonous snakes. But that does not prove that there were none there nineteen centuries ago. They have disappeared due to the progress of civilization on Malta since Paul's day" [MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13–28*, (Moody Press, 1996), 361–62.] Also it is important to note that Luke was a trained physician, and would be unlikely to mistake a harmless snake for a poisonous one. (See Ramsey, Sir William. *Luke the Physician* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 63–64, as cited in MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 13–28*, (Moody Press, 1996), 361–62.

<sup>8</sup> Publius would later become the first bishop of Malta, suffering martyrdom during the persecution of the Church under Emperor Hadrian (76–138).

<sup>9</sup> Church tradition notes that the first Christian church in Malta was established on the heels of Paul's miracle, with Publius assuming the role as the first pastor.