

that when a person dies, “the spirit shall return unto God Who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7).

Conclusion

As members of the ecclesia we are part of the “house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). We are stones being prepared for that temple of believers that will be built when Christ returns: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:19-21). As such, Paul writes, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind” (4:17). We have moved from the “vanity” of the world to the “temple”.

A knowledge of the gospel brings with it a scriptural understanding of the true nature of the world. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things [he understands that ‘all is vanity’], yet he himself is judged of no man [those in the ‘vanity of their mind’ do not understand those in Christ]. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct Him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

As we watch the world becoming an increasingly fearful place, let us ensure we continue to look faithfully at the world from a Divine perspective, knowing that it is only in the sanctuary of God that we will understand the end of the wicked.

Paul’s epic journey to Rome

13. Farewell to Malta

Tom Barling

Leaving Malta, where they had been treated most kindly, Paul and his companions travelled via Sicily to Rhegium on the toe of Italy on the last stage of their voyage.

WHEN WE reread Luke’s account of the sojourn in Malta, it occurs to us that the emphasis is on the islanders’ kindness to Paul and his fellow-travellers, and the response on the part of Paul in his cure of the father of Publius, the chief man on the island, and the representative of the Roman imperial government.

It would appear from the use of ‘us’ and ‘we’ in Acts 28 that Luke himself was personally involved in this response. It has been suggested that Luke’s part was purely medical. For minor and medically treatable complaints, his assistance would certainly be available as a physician, but there can be little doubt that Luke, like Paul, was endowed with the Holy Spirit. In any case, whatever the exact situation, it provoked a generous response on the part of the Maltese. One of the great ironies of the whole situation is that the man who was carrying the gospel of salvation for all mankind, who loved his own people, and Jerusalem, “the city of the great King”, had been

obliged to invoke his privilege as a Roman citizen to escape the murderous fury of his own people; whereas the Maltese, a wholly Gentile people, had shown great kindness to him and

the other refugees from the storm.

Time to leave Malta

The time would inevitably come when the winter weather was being replaced by signs of spring. Whilst we remind ourselves of what Vegetius has to say about the favourable times for sailing,¹ we must always recall that the Mediterranean is a vast, virtually inland, lake, and there must inevitably be great variations in weather conditions. Moreover, it often occurs that a period of storm and turbulence is succeeded by calm. It is as though nature has exhausted itself and needs to rest. There certainly appears to be an indication of this in the fact that, after three months on the

1. Vegetius, in a work earlier quoted in this series (Jun. 2007, p. 206), declares that it was perilous to venture on the sea up to 15 May; Bruce, in *The Book of Acts*, using Pliny the elder, mentions a date as early as 8 February (pp. 500-01).

island (v. 11), the weather conditions must have changed for the better and a departure could be contemplated.

According to most commentators, the month of February had come round. There would be many staying temporarily on the island who would want to be on the way to Rome, for there was the prospect then of returning to Alexandria in favourable sailing conditions and returning with a fresh cargo. Economics then, as now, were all-important, and the Roman emperors did all they could to keep Rome well supplied with corn. Among those wanting an early departure would be Julius, the centurion responsible for Paul and the other prisoners.

When the time for possible departure was approaching, it is no strain on the imagination to see Julius looking to make the necessary arrangements. Enquiries would thus be made, as at Caesarea, to see what ships were available. He would obviously be interested only in some large vessel, capable of accommodating the whole party of 276. At Myra the situation had been entirely different; the group for which Julius was responsible was a small one, looking to join a vessel. Now it was the total company of a large vessel that had to be accommodated, and only another corn-ship would be able to receive such a large party. As the result of his preliminary enquiries, Julius discovered that there was such a vessel in harbour, another corn freighter by the name of *Castor and Pollux*. Contact would be established with those responsible; could they accommodate the whole company of 276? Yes, that was possible.

Arrangements were accordingly completed for departure. It is when we take into account the number of existing crew and passengers and add to them the 276 from the stricken vessel that we can appreciate that the 600 mentioned by Josephus in his account of being shipwrecked in the Adriatic is reasonable.² The carrying capacity of these ships was thus very great, and we begin to understand how important they were for the Roman economy.

The emphasis in Luke's brief account is on the singularly happy associations between Paul and his fellow travellers on the one hand and the islanders on the other. In the case of the Maltese they received services that they had never previously experienced; as for Paul and Luke, their hearts must have been warmed by the kindness they received. As verse 10 follows immediately upon the mention of the services rendered to the Maltese by Paul, and, we can be sure, by Luke also,

we can reasonably conclude that this verse refers to the two of them: ". . . who also honoured us with many honours; and when we sailed, they put on board such things as we needed",* although all the passengers on the shipwrecked vessel had suffered considerable loss, and doubtless the islanders showed kindness to them as well.

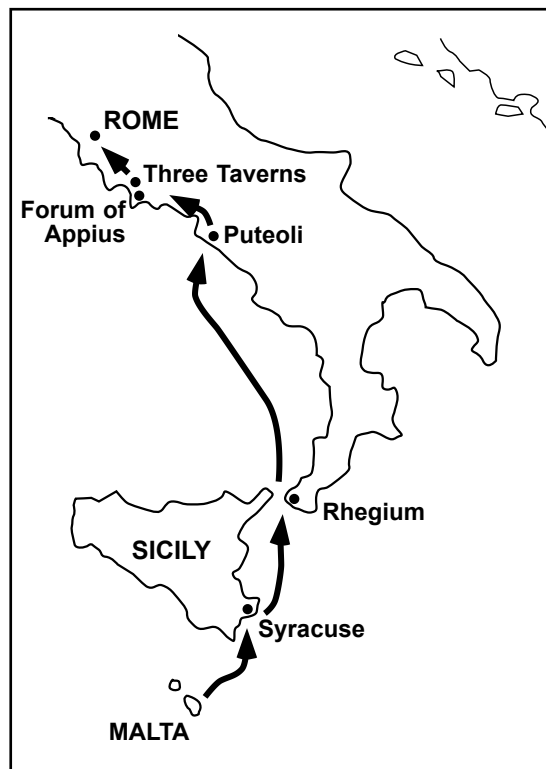
From Malta to Italy

Thus, after a stay of three months, the 276 who were shipwrecked set sail in the *Castor and Pollux*. However, before we say farewell to Malta, we take note of Cadbury's tribute to Luke's account: "It would be difficult to find a scene more full of the viewpoint of antiquity than this at Malta. The ancient Greek writer shows his own background in every line. Not only is the language idiomatic, but if one may say so, the ideas are idiomatic too".³

2. *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, Whiston's translation, section 3.

* Quotations from Acts 28 are from the RV.

3. H. J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History*, London, 1955, pp. 24-5.



Paul's journey to Rome: the final stages.



The theatre at ancient Syracuse.

Picture: iStockphoto.com/Bart Parren

Their first port of call after leaving Malta was Syracuse, on the eastern shore of Sicily. [A map](#) shows that this is only slightly east of north from Malta, and there they remained for three days, doubtless awaiting a favourable wind. However, we cannot rule out the possibility of the landing of some of the ship's cargo and of taking on board some Sicilian products. Arnold Betz mentions the fact that, at the time of Paul's visit, "Syracuse was still a very prosperous city", and he quotes Cicero, who "calls it the richest and fairest city in all Sicily".⁴ The route taken deals yet another blow to the thesis propounded by Warnecke, that the shipwreck island was off the Balkan Peninsula, as considered in the [previous article](#) ([Feb. 2008, p. 480](#)), and it becomes increasingly difficult to understand how a German university could honour its author.

So the vessel set sail once more, and Luke records, "And from thence we made a circuit, and arrived at Rhegium" (v. 13), on the toe of Italy. The Greek corresponding to "made a circuit" has given some difficulty. Ramsay in his translation of the passage renders this by the term "tacking",⁵ and he may well be right. On leaving Syracuse, and sailing northwards, they had to sail through the Strait of Messina, notorious for the danger presented to ancient shipping. An article by Wineland has the double advantage of shedding light upon the hazard represented by the Strait and of giving information concerning Castor and Pollux:

"The Strait of Messina, which separates Sicily and Italy, is only ca.7 miles wide near Rhegium . . . The Alexandrian ship which carried Paul to Rhegium had a carved figure of the heads of the 'Twin Gods' (v. 11). Rhegium, as found on coins of the city, was noted for the worship of the Dioscuri, namely Castor and Polydeuces or Pollux, who were the sons of Zeus and patron deities of sailors. Rhegium is near two infamous sailing hazards which may have fostered this devotion to the 'Twin Gods'. These hazards are located just to the N of Rhegium at either side of the Strait of Messina and were identified in Greek mythology with two sisters, Scylla and Charybdis. The dangerous whirlpool of Charybdis was located on the Sicily side of the Strait of Messina, while the threatening rock of Scylla was on the Italian side".⁶

Luke, in one of his occasional mentions of time, records, "and after one day [at Rhegium] a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli" (v. 13). Thus, once the Strait had been negotiated safely, it was all plain sailing. It is

4. Article "Syracuse" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6 (Doubleday, 1992).
5. *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen*, ninth edition, 1907, p. 344.
6. Article 'Rhegium' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5.

difficult to relive the sense of relief experienced by Paul and the other travellers. They were now on *terra firma*. In the case of the passengers on the ship tied up for the winter months at Malta, there was joy for the journey to be over. As for those who, with Paul and Luke, had experienced the shipwreck, there would be a feeling of immense relief. For the apostle, who had not wavered in his faith that his Lord's words would be vindicated

that he would testify to him in Rome, there would be nevertheless a feeling of profound gratitude that Rome was now not far away. Moreover, for one for whom fellowship in the Lord was so precious, there was the opportunity to enjoy the company of the members of the ecclesia in Puteoli, and of this we intend speaking in our [next article](#).

[\(To be continued\)](#)

A new look at a Minor Prophet

John Nicholls

Joel: Teeth in the Wind, Brother Peter Robinson, 2006.

99 pages.

Available from the author, 3256 Palmer Drive, Burlington, Ontario L7M 1M1, Canada;

email: robinsonpj@hotmail.com

Price: \$5 US (not Canadian), postage not known.

Also available via CSSS, Australia

THIS BOOK is a useful addition to the expositions of the prophecy of Joel already published in the Brotherhood.¹ We can all benefit from a fresh look at prophecy as the years go by and the world political situation develops. Styles of presentation change, and it helps younger brothers and sisters to appreciate our expositions of the prophecies and the Scriptural reasons for them. The greater our understanding of the prophecies, the clearer our preaching will be, and we will have stronger convictions of what will happen when our beloved Lord returns. An understanding of prophecy thus helps to develop faith.

The exposition under review is a home-produced hardback that is stimulating and sometimes unconventional, as for example his interpretation of the Lord's army of Joel 2:11. Above all, it is soundly based on Scripture, and attempts to integrate Joel's predictions with those of other scriptures.

The basic approach is essentially verse-by-verse, but there are several lengthy digressions. There is one on "the day of the LORD", which includes seven examples of how the faithful saints have been removed from suffering the

judgements that have taken place in various past 'days of the Lord'. There is another on partial and complete fulfilments of prophecies, and another very lengthy one on the sequence of events from Jesus' return to the beginning of his millennial reign. The book is worth reading for this latter digression alone, in my opinion. He suggests that there are three key points in establishing this sequence:

"1. How Christ's second coming is described both as a 'thief in the night', and as lightning that 'shineth from one end of heaven to the other'.

2. That there is BOTH a grain and grape harvest upon Christ's return.

3. The 'Marriage of the Lamb', the 'Marriage Supper' and the 'Supper of the Great God'".

Brother Robinson establishes his key events and then attempts to fit other prophecies in to make a coherent whole, with much success in the opinion of the reviewer. In all, he makes an eighteen-point sequence, and it is a joy to dwell on these things and think about all that is to take place when our dear Saviour appears and takes us to himself, that where he is we may be also (Jno. 14:3).

There is another splendid section on the reaction of world leaders to the presence of the Lord Jesus, with comments from Psalms 2 and 48,

1. *Joel*, Carl Parry (1977), Christadelphian Scripture Study Service, *The Prophecy Given Through Joel*, H. A. Whitaker (1989), *Biblia*, and *Joel: Prophet of Gloom and Glory*, E. M. Spongberg, Logos Publications, date unknown, deal exclusively with Joel. A recent addition is *An Exposition of Joel*, Chris Maddocks (advertised [Dec. 2007, p. 405](#)). Sections on Joel can be found in *From Hosea to Zephaniah: The Minor Prophets Before The Exile*, Fred Pearce (1979) (pp. 19-40), *The Christadelphian*, and *Eureka*, Vol. 1, John Thomas, pp. 44-5.