

# *The Bible Standard*



WHOLE NUMBER 812

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# Mission in Malta

## ACTS 28: 1-11

### *New International Version*

1. Once safely on shore, we found out that the island was called Malta.
2. The islanders showed us unusual kindness. They built a fire and welcomed us all because it was raining and cold.
3. Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire, a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand.
4. When the islanders saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, "This man must be a murderer; for though he escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live."
5. But Paul shook the snake off into the fire and suffered no ill effects.
6. The people expected him to swell up or suddenly fall dead, but after waiting a long time and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.
7. There was an estate nearby that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us to his home and for three days entertained us hospitably.
8. His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him.
9. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.
10. They honored us in many ways and when we were ready to sail, they furnished us with the supplies we needed.
11. After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.

**THE SHIP THAT SHATTERED** on the rocks of the island of Malta was no ordinary vessel. It carried the Apostle Paul, a prisoner, on his way to Rome to appeal against his arrest in Jerusalem as a revolutionary. He was about to make a lengthy and unplanned stop on a foreign shore.

As shown in our July 2003 issue, the occupants of that ship were under the benefit of Divine protection because of their special passenger. The promise had been made to Paul in a night vision that none of the crew or passengers would suffer harm if they remained on board and awaited Paul's direction. The time for action came when the ship began to break up on the rocky coast.

In this we find our first lesson: God's providential leading does not always deflect the trial, but rather leads us safely through it. Without this remarkable incident, those travelling with the Apostle could not have seen the miracles of God firsthand.

### BEACHED

Along with the flotsam and jetsam, the ship's occupants were washed up on the shore, one by one, assisted by the furious wind. The inhabitants of the island, no doubt accustomed to such occurrences, effected a rescue and brought the cold and exhausted castaways to warm fires, food, and shelter from the driving rain.

In the account, the islanders are marked out as barbarians. The fact that Luke (the chronicler) records this fact suggests that he might not have expected such assistance from them as the hapless castaways received.

The islanders' compassionate response indicates that the people were civilized and — contrary to the usual Jewish view of such people — noble. He notes their "unusual kindness" — the people went out of their way to be of assistance. The Maltese were obviously a gracious and hospitable folk.

### The Second Miracle

The remarkable deliverance of all the ship's passengers must have impressed itself on the minds of all concerned

*All Scriptures quoted are from the King James Version, unless indicated otherwise.*

## "Lift up a standard for the people" — Isa. 62: 10

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*Although occupying eleven short verses, this narrative, relating to Paul's unplanned stay on the Mediterranean island, is most instructive and highlights important aspects of God's dealings with His people and the world at large.*

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once they had time to collect their wits. It must have been obvious to them that this was no mere coincidence — it was, in fact, a miraculous rescue. The threads of God's providence are woven throughout the account.

It would have taken several hours to collect and care for the large number of crew and passengers. All 276 had been washed up safely, according to the promise by Paul. Several fires had been lit, and they needed to be fed. The able among the company searched for firewood. The Apostle Paul, always ready to be of assistance, was wood-gathering and was about to release a pile into the fire when a viper, finding its resting place suddenly disturbed, lunged forward and buried its fangs in Paul's hand. Apparently it hung there for some little time, for Luke seems to linger on this point.

Paul nonchalantly shook off the creature.<sup>1</sup> The islanders were well aware of the danger of such a snake and took the Apostle to be a vile criminal, perhaps a fugitive murderer whom the Fates had now punished. Expectantly, they waited for the usual effects of such a bite: the swelling of the limbs or the victim's collapse. When no ill effects followed they reversed their opinion and declared Paul to be a god.

### A CURIOUS COMPANY

We arrest the scene for a while and study the tableau, as the company is picked out by the light of the campfire.

#### *The Seafarers*

Over here are the rough mariners, most likely the swearers and spitters of society, less-than-scrupulous adventurers, exploiters, uneducated, and unwashed. The captain of the ship was no doubt equally rough, but tougher — he would have to be to keep a fractious crew in line and to see that his will was carried out. Mutiny was always a danger, especially on long and dangerous journeys. The whole body of men — master and crew — hazarded their lives on a daily basis and were a fearless breed, not easily impressed.

#### *The Centurion*

The centurion Julius, Paul's intimate guard, was apparently a noble man, according to a close reading of Acts 27 and 28. A member of Augustus' band,<sup>2</sup> he had been

selected by the Roman authorities for this task, and was duty bound to see that Paul reached Rome safely.

Apparently, he was in no hurry, for he and the soldiers with him tarried in the island for three months. The difficulty of the shipwreck, the amazing deliverance from it, and now the obvious invulnerability of Paul to harm must have bewildered this apparently thoughtful man, and no doubt convinced him that he had here no ordinary prisoner — that Paul was no rebel or criminal. Perhaps he was tempted to “lose” his prisoner accidentally, to fabricate some story that

his charge had drowned or been killed by murderous robbers. But he was a conscientious officer of Rome and had a duty to perform. Not only so, but failure in his mission may have meant his disgrace or his death.

In any case, Paul himself would never have consented to “escape” — nothing would deter him from going to Rome. If Julius had not taken him, he would have gone by himself, for it was the right time to do this. God's providence had directed him this far, confirming his destiny. As with his Lord, Paul had been appointed for such a

time as this. He had been commissioned to speak the Gospel message before the Gentiles and their kings (Acts 9: 15). And so it must be.

#### *The Maltese*

The noble people of this beautiful Mediterranean island, though accustomed to trade with other nations, embraced an unsophisticated theology. They reacted to nature and drew their ideas from it. They held to the notion of justice — at least of the retributive sort — suggested by their remarks on seeing Paul attacked by the snake.

The plight of such people as this, Gentiles, Barbarians,<sup>3</sup> long ignored by the Jewish nation, was due to change. Paul's visit was about to turn their world upside down. He himself had told the Athenians that God had made “of one blood” all men to dwell on the face of the earth, and that the opportunity for repentance was at hand (Acts 17: 26). He had challenged Peter's temporizing course when faced with a choice between Gentile or Jewish fellowship (Gal. 2: 11-14), and he had solemnly proclaimed to the raucous crowd of Jews in Antioch in Pisidia that “we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:

<sup>1</sup>Matthew Henry suggests in his commentary that Paul recognized immediately that this incident might have been caused by God to further demonstrate His power to protect and to mark out the Apostle as His ambassador.

<sup>2</sup>Augustus' Band was the Imperial Guard, the elite corps employed as the emperor's bodyguard.

<sup>3</sup>“In the Acts the inhabitants of the island are called barbarians because they were neither Greeks nor Romans” (*The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*).

45-49).<sup>4</sup> And here he was now, faced with a golden opportunity to prove his mission. The gracious islanders were to be rewarded according to their kindness.

*Doctor, Doctor*

And there was Luke, faithful companion, the Gentile — the physician now himself receiving care — without whose diligent diary notations we would have little knowledge of Paul's life. Here and there in Pauline epistles, we glimpse the real Paul — we see there something of his weaknesses, fears, mistakes — but the book of Acts really makes him human for us. Luke did not record everything he saw and heard — only the things he deemed to be the most important. It is doubtful that he looked down the eons of time and knew what he ought to record — this prescience was of the holy spirit. But what has come down to us is evidently sufficient for us.

Here our fireside companions sit, about to be launched into an unforgettable series of events that would shape their lives and the future of the island.

### NO HURRY . . .

It was to be a quarter of a year before Paul's ministry on the island would be done. God is never in a hurry. No matter how long it takes for the varied experiences of our lives to play out, the Lord will take us where we need to go. Difficulties, delays, deferments, are blessings in disguise and we should enter into them with vigor. *Caesar can wait.*

In addition to that of Providence, another thread that runs through the account of Paul's Malta mission is that of hospitality. The Maltese were a generous, sociable people, and entertaining strangers was apparently a trait which they had cultivated to a high degree. This brings to mind another hospitable personage thousands of years prior to the time of our story . . .

### ANGELS UNAWARES

As Abraham gazed across the plains of Mamre in the mid-day heat, he saw three men approaching (Gen. 18: 1, 2). In keeping with the traditions of his day, and eager to serve, he had a meal prepared for them, little knowing that one of the three was the Angel of the Lord, who, with His two companions, angelic messengers, had come to pronounce judgment on Sodom.

Their visit to Abraham's tent was no mere *en route* coincidence. "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" said Jehovah Himself (Gen. 18: 17). That Abraham's nephew, Lot, lived in the city was of no small consequence

to Abraham personally, but the implications of this heavenly conference went far beyond family interests.

It was on this occasion that the Angel of the Lord (the Voice, *Logos*, of God), declared that Abraham and Sarah would have a son, Isaac — the start of the fulfillment of God's earlier promise that Abraham's offspring would ultimately bless all families of the earth (Gen. 12: 3). The most complete fulfillment of this promise is still future, when Christ Jesus and His Church, as the "seed of Abraham," reign in Millennial glory to bring restitution and recovery to the world of mankind (Gal. 3: 7-9, 28, 29).

### Don't Talk to Strangers?

In an allusion to the Gen. 18 account, the Apostle Paul encourages the brethren to be friendly and hospitable — perhaps, he reasons, that you may thereby be doing good to God's messengers (Heb. 13: 2). But in our day, with its crime and violence, and the unease that these create, many — including Christians — are not always inclined to be helpful to strangers. Regardless of that, it is encouraging to see that so many people, in spite of their fears of assault or terrorism, maintain a relatively sunny and optimistic disposition, ready to be unsuspectingly helpful to others in need.

This noble quality unconsciously pays tribute to the God who made us. It is He who has built the sociable and gregarious qualities into us, and although we do not see these qualities working perfectly or completely, due to the fall of man, we expect that in the perfect world to come, good will from and toward all will be the order of the day.

### The Responsive Heart

God's love is expressed through others, be it a friend, a mother, a spouse, other Christian brethren. In the account of Paul's kindly reception by the Maltese we see this principle at work. More importantly, we recognize God's providence directing the matter for the blessing of all concerned.

As Christians, we must expect that God *will* direct our paths. He will often bring within our orbit those who need the message of faith and comfort that we have to give — or those who have blessings *to bring to us*. In proportion as we are willing to give spiritual refreshment to others, in that proportion we will be blessed — and rewarded (Matt. 10: 40-42). The people of Malta were about to be rewarded for their unselfish kindness to Paul and Luke, messengers from God.

### A PROPHET'S REWARD

The Roman governor of the island, Publius, invited Paul and Luke, presumably Julius and others, to lodge and dine

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<sup>4</sup>This singular action by the Apostle Paul (and Barnabas, who was with him on this occasion), triggered a string of conversions among the Gentiles and shifted the emphasis of Paul's ministry away from the Jews. Although he continued to preach in the synagogues, the die had been cast. Ironically, it was the riot instigated by the Jews in Jerusalem that led to the series of events that brought Paul to Malta. The "official" opening of the Gospel ministry to the Gentiles is recorded in Acts 10. It was Peter, not Paul, on that occasion who had the privilege of ministering to Cornelius (another Roman centurion) and his household. This event, and Paul's subsequent ministry, was the sea change in the proclamation of Christianity that would eventually carry the message of Christ crucified around the globe.



with him. Possibly the captain and crew of the shipwrecked vessel had dispersed or departed the island. The sea was their stock in trade, and it is unlikely that they would have remained idle for long.

It so happened that the father of Publius was ill and feverish and Paul cured him. We can only guess at the gratitude felt by Publius, the hospitable overseer of this hospitable people. Before long, the population brought their sick and dying to Paul and he healed all of them, blessing them with his gifts in the same generosity of spirit as they had ministered to him in his need.

What a beautiful lesson we see here! We who have received the blessings of heaven — the enlightenment of God's Word, the faculty of faith, and, especially, *the forgiveness of our sins through Christ* — we who have been so kindly treated by our Heavenly Father and our Savior ought to treat others in the same spirit. Of all people, our hearts should overflow with gratitude to God and good will to our fellow men, ready to render material and spiritual assistance as the opportunities arise.

Paul entered this (unexpected) mission with joy and zeal. No doubt he relished this opportunity to minister to these Gentiles, these much-maligned "barbarians." He most certainly preached Christ crucified to them, for he was single in this purpose and would not miss any chance to bless any with the Truth.

#### OUR MISSION IN LIFE

The Christian should proclaim Christ at every opportunity. This does not mean that we intrude the message at inappropriate times. But if we stay close to the Lord, our judgment on such things will become increasingly reliable and we will be able to recognize His leadings. We may not find ourselves with such an eager audience as Paul found on Malta, but we will, if the love of Christ is uppermost in our hearts, if He is our "first love" — we will be swift to use the opportunities

which come our way. God will open an avenue for us to speak a word here or there.

The Lord has not given to us the ability to miraculously heal the body, but we have been given the Word of comfort and consolation for the wounded heart — the "words of eternal life" (John 6: 68, 69). These blessings we dispense, not from a lofty height, but from empathy with those around us. This is the greatest sort of hospitality we can show.

#### THE JOURNEY CONTINUES

That this sojourn of Paul's was more than an incidental detour, we have no doubt; the Apostle's time was too valuable to be thrown away on a mere protracted social engagement. No, the benefits he bestowed were substantial and permanent. The narrative does not tell us how many of the islanders were converted to Christianity. How many of those islanders carried their new-found faith to the mainland and beyond? We are not told, but we may be sure that God's methods in this instance bore fruit.

This was one missionary journey that Paul did not plan — we may call it his unofficial fourth. But his greatest witness was yet to come, when before Caesar and in Rome itself — the heart of the empire — he would proclaim the message of Christ.

After three months, Paul's stay on the island came to an end. The company boarded a ship bound for Syracuse, in Sicily, north of the island. The vessel that had wintered in the island and carried them out of Malta was named after two gods, Castor and Pollux. The names denote Two Brothers. It is perhaps an interesting irony that Paul and Luke left behind new Christian brothers. It is pleasant to think that, perhaps, in Julius, Roman centurion of the Imperial Guard, they had found another.

\* \* \*

#### FOR GOD WAS WITH HIM

**Fourteen days and nights** scudding before a terrific storm brought St. Paul and the ship's company of 276 souls to where the trained ears of the seamen in the night caught the sounds of the surf, they knew not where. Four anchors were cast out of the stern of the vessel and they waited for morning. St. Paul, the Jew Prisoner, by this time had risen in the estimation of all on board the ship — "For God was with him." Throughout the storm all had lost courage and hope but him, and this was due to his submission to God's will and partly to the fact that in a vision the Lord showed him that he should yet preach the Gospel at Rome and that, for his sake, Divine Providence would care for every life on board the ship. A heart at peace with God and instructed through His Word is prepared for what may come, of joy or sorrow. The Apostle exhorted his dejected companions to be of good cheer. He reminded them of his vision and assured them of his absolute faith therein. He urged them to take food that they might be strengthened for the strenuous exertions of the coming day. His cheerfulness and example were contagious. As the light of the Lord was his peace and joy, so he in turn was the light of that ship and its comfort. He illustrated what he taught — that God's people should do good unto all men as they have opportunity, especially to the household of faith. He exemplified his own words of 2 Corinthians 1: 4 — "God comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." . . . His confidence in God's promise did not lead him to be slack as respects the proper use of earthly means. There is a lesson here for God's people. While praying and trusting, let us not slack our hands.

— *Selected*

## MALTA: PAUL'S ISLAND

### Its Geography<sup>1</sup>

Malta consists of a group of five islands in the Mediterranean south of Sicily; the group takes the name of Malta from the largest island. Malta's position in the Mediterranean — 58 miles south of Sicily, 180 miles north of Libya, and 180 miles east of Tunisia — makes it strategically important. The land area of the islands is around 122 square miles.

A long escarpment divides the island from west to east. The highest areas of the island are of coralline limestone forming a triangular plateau. On the north of the island the escarpment is steep and broken up by deep, recessed bays. In the south of the island the highland plateau descends gradually to lowlands about 400 feet high. The western coastline is generally harborless due to the high rocky cliffs. On the east coast Mount Sciebberras forms a promontory separating the bays of Marsamxett and Grand Harbour which provide natural deep-water harbors. These are a major factor in Malta's strategic importance.

Until the mid-19th century the population lived mainly in small scattered farming communities, villages, and hamlets. As the Dockyard developed during the 1800s new settlements grew up around Grand Harbour. During the 20th century the Sliema metropolitan area became the most fashionable part of Malta. Increasing industrialization has brought higher living standards resulting in residential development throughout the island. The central and northwest areas are now densely populated and overbuilding has become a major concern.

The languages are English and Maltese, which is related to Arabic, but has ancient Phoenician survivals, and has been much influenced by Italian. (*Hutchinson's New 20th Century Encyclopedia*, 1967.)

### Its History<sup>2</sup>

There is evidence of human settlement in Malta as far back as 5000 B.C. These early settlers probably came from Sicily. Some of the oldest megaliths in the world can be seen on the islands; archaeologists date these from about 5200 B.C. Various migrating peoples from around the Mediterranean succeeded the early settlers until about 800 B.C. when the Phoenicians settled in the islands. They called the main island "Malat" which means "safe haven."

Throughout the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., the Carthaginians occupied Malta and their rule lasted into the

3rd century, when they used the island as a naval base while fighting against the Romans in the Punic wars. The Romans then ruled Malta from around 218 B.C. until the Roman Empire declined during the 5th century. Malta then came under the domination of the Vandals and Visigoths, and later, Justinian, as he tried to regain control of parts of the lost Roman Empire. The Muslims raided the island more and more frequently during this period, finally conquering it in A.D. 870. They used Malta's harbors as a haven for their ships, fortified the city of Mdina, and built a fort at the present site of Fort St. Angelo. Arab rule lasted until around 1090, when the Norman kings of Sicily became rulers.

During the Middle Ages Malta became little more than a pawn in the battles for control of land around the Mediterranean, between Christians and Muslims or between German, French, and Spanish royal families. Usually it seemed that whoever gained control of Sicily also controlled Malta. Finally, seeing a growing threat from the Ottoman Turks, Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, gave Malta to the Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem for the yearly rent of a Maltese Falcon.

The Knights Templar, as they were known, were a militant monastic order. They became a major influence in Mediterranean politics during the 15th and 16th centuries. They fortified the islands extensively, especially the Grand Harbour at Valletta and successfully repelled Muslim raiders and a siege by the Ottoman Turks.

In 1798 Napoleon conquered the islands, but the Maltese rebelled against the religious insensitivity and economic exploitation of French rule. The English took the islands from the French in 1800.

In 1814 the Treaty of Paris recognized British Sovereignty over Malta, which became an important British naval base during the days of the British Empire, and this role continued through the two World Wars. Because of the island's strategic importance it was subject to heavy bombing raids from Italy and Germany during World War II.

In 1964 Malta gained independence but remained within the Commonwealth. In 1974 Malta became a Republic and in 1979 proclaimed its neutrality, thus ending its dependence on England. Today, Malta is a parliamentary democracy. The government is led by the prime minister and the president is the official head of state. On March 8, 2003, there was a referendum and Malta voted to join the European Union.



<sup>1</sup> References mostly from 1994-2000 *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*

<sup>2</sup> References mostly from [www.hmml.org/centers/malta/history.html](http://www.hmml.org/centers/malta/history.html) and [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_Malta](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Malta)

## Culture At the Time of Paul

The Romans introduced their political and military organization to the islands. They built a fortified capital on the site of present day Mdina and Rabat and developed a port in the Marsa area. Excavations at Ghajn Tuffieha have uncovered fairly well preserved Roman baths. Roman occupation brought prosperity to the islands and Malta became known as a producer of quality textiles. The Maltese were granted Roman citizenship in the first century.<sup>3</sup>

“At the time of St. Paul’s shipwreck, after nearly two hundred and seventy years of Roman rule, the Maltese spoke neither Greek nor Latin. It is possible that the Maltese continued to speak a dialect of the Phoenician language until the Arab conquest in 870 CE, long after the Roman economic and political influence subsided. Roman culture did not leave a lasting mark on Malta.”<sup>4</sup>

In his book, “In the Steps of St. Paul,” H. V. Morton notes the extensive Roman remains in Malta and draws the reader’s attention to the fact that Malta was on the Alexandrian grain route. He visited St. Paul’s Bay and mentions that the soundings in the bay “correspond with the conditions described in Acts.”<sup>5</sup>

### Pauline Traditions<sup>6</sup>

February 10th is observed as a national holiday in Malta, marking the shipwreck of Paul. Various traditions have grown up in the islands around the Apostle and his visit. These give a popular version of Paul’s shipwreck and the conversion of the islands to Christianity, illustrating the people’s basic belief in Paul’s shipwreck as told in Acts.

The following are a few examples of these traditions:

St. Paul’s Bay is pointed out as the bay in which the shipwreck occurred, and St. Paul’s Islets at the entrance to the bay are believed to be the place where the ship actually struck. The people of Naxxar believe they were the first to offer help to the shipwrecked men. The name of the village comes from the Maltese *naxar*, which means “to hang clothes to dry,” thus commemorating the place where Paul and his fellow travellers refreshed themselves after the storm. The coat of arms of this village bears the words *Prior credidi* — “I was the first to believe.” In St. Paul’s Bay stands a small church, which tradition holds was once called *Tal-Huggiega* (of the bonfire), because it was believed to mark the place where the Maltese kindled a fire to warm the shipwrecked company.

A statue of Paul which stands in front of the small church at San Pawl tat-Targa, on the outskirts of Naxxar, according to tradition marks the spot where Paul used to preach and it is said that from here his voice could be heard on the island of Gozo.

<sup>3</sup> [www.hmml.org/centers/malta/history.html](http://www.hmml.org/centers/malta/history.html)

<sup>4</sup> [www.hmml.org/centers/malta/history.html](http://www.hmml.org/centers/malta/history.html)

<sup>5</sup> *In the Steps of St. Paul*, H.V. Morton

<sup>6</sup> References mostly from Guze Cassar Pullicino, “Pauline Traditions,” at [www.aboutmalta.com/grazio/paulinetraditions.html](http://www.aboutmalta.com/grazio/paulinetraditions.html)

## THE VIPER

References to “viper” or as in literary references to “serpent” are often taken to mean the European viper or adder (*Vipera berus*). (1994-2000 *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*)

“A poisonous reptile, in Gr. eph’eh’, incidentally mentioned as found on the island of Melita (Acts 28: 3) and familiar to the Jews (Matt. 3: 7); probably the common viper (*Vipera communis* or *Pelias berus*), which is common on the Mediterranean coast.” (*The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*)

### Habitat

The European viper or adder may be found in a variety of habitats such as open woodland, hedgerows, commons, heath land, moor land, sand dunes, damp meadows, riverbanks, and bogs.

A viper can grow to a maximum of 30 inches (80 cm) and is usually grey with black zigzag markings along the back and black spots on the sides. (The Greensand Trust at [www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/bcnp/bedsbap/pdf/adder.pdf](http://www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/bcnp/bedsbap/pdf/adder.pdf) and 1994-2000 *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*)

### Dangers and Effects of Venom\*

It is generally agreed that the viper will only bite if provoked or disturbed. Like all poisonous snakes the viper uses venom (a special saliva) to stun or kill its prey. Venom is also used in self-defense when the snake feels threatened. The amount of venom injected is related to the effect of the poison. This depends on the size of the venom sacs, the amount of venom they contain (this may be little if the snake has bitten something else recently), and the amount of venom the creature decides or manages to inject. The nearness of the bite to main veins and arteries will have a bearing on the speed at which the venom takes effect.

In rare cases an individual will have a severe allergic reaction to a viper bite. Generally the effects of a bite are localized swelling, discoloration, and vomiting. Its bite is rarely fatal to humans.

### \* Various Sources:

[www.unimed.co.uk/health/leaflets/adder%20Bites.htm](http://www.unimed.co.uk/health/leaflets/adder%20Bites.htm)

[www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/animalsplants/data/m0019246.html](http://www.tiscali.co.uk/reference/dictionaries/animalsplants/data/m0019246.html)

[www.bugbog.com/travel\\_safety/dangerous\\_animals/snake\\_bites.html](http://www.bugbog.com/travel_safety/dangerous_animals/snake_bites.html)

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# BIBLE QUESTION BOX



**Q** Please explain Gal. 4: 12 where the Apostle Paul writes, “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.”

**A** In order to understand this verse, we need to consider the background and purpose for the Apostle’s writing this epistle. It was addressed, not to one, but to a group of churches in the Roman province of Galatia (1: 2), consisting mainly of Gentiles. We need to remember that the Jewish Christians had been released from both Adamic condemnation and the condemnation of the Law Covenant, and were no more under bondage to the Law. The Gentile Christians on the other hand had been released from Adamic condemnation, but never having been under the Law Covenant did not need to be released from its condemnation.

The Apostle Paul had founded these churches on his first missionary journey and revisited them on his second. When he last left them they seemed to be well grounded in the Gospel and doing well (3: 4; 5: 7). However, disturbing news had reached him — their attitude toward him had become negative, and they were turning away from the Gospel (3: 1).

What had happened? Certain Jews had come among the brethren, claiming to be teachers of the Gospel. Instead, they were attempting to amalgamate Christianity with the Jewish law, in spite of Paul’s (and Jesus’) teaching that Gentile Christians were not under the Law Covenant. Among their claims were that the brethren were obligated to practice circumcision and observe certain days, months, seasons, and years (6: 12, 13; 4: 10). In order for their errors to be believed, these false teachers sought to discredit the Apostle personally.

This development was alarming to Paul because these false teachings made void the foundation of the Gospel — justification by faith alone in the sacrifice of Christ. This had the potential to destroy the spiritual lives of the brethren.

## Paul’s Noble Defense

What was the Apostle to do? He responded by writing this epistle to counteract the influence of the false teachers, and to re-establish confidence in the Gospel message he had originally delivered to the Galatian brethren.

After expressing his surprise that the brethren could be so easily led astray (1: 6), Paul defended his appointment and qualifications as an Apostle (1: 11-2: 21).

He then referred to the false brethren who claimed to be part of — even teachers — in the Church, but who were really enemies of the Gospel. He next presented a well-reasoned argument defending the doctrine of justification by faith and refuted the error that obedience to the Law was necessary for salvation (3: 1-4: 31). He continued by exhorting the brethren to maintain their liberty in the freedom that Christ had given them, and not to place themselves under bondage to the Law or any other bondage (5: 1). He then went on to explain both the responsibility and the blessings of Christian liberty (5: 2-24).

Gal. 4: 12 comes immediately after the Apostle expressed concern for the brethren’s spiritual welfare, fearing that their present course would make his teaching and work on their behalf useless (4: 11).

## The Four Parts of Gal. 4: 12 Examined

The first part of the verse, “Brethren, I beseech you,” expresses Paul’s tender appeal to, and affection for, the brethren.

The next two clauses read: “Be as I am; for I am as ye are.” Keeping in mind that the Apostle is primarily addressing Gentile Christians, we suggest the following interpretations:

(1) For the first clause — “be as I am” — Paul is exhorting them to free themselves from the bondage of ordinances under which they have placed themselves, just as he is free. In the second clause — “for I am as ye are” — he is explaining that he was once in bondage to the Law, just as they had now become.

*The Emphatic Diaglott* by Benjamin Wilson offers a variation of the second clause: “For I am as you were.” Using this version, Paul is saying, “I am free from bondage, just as you once were, before you placed yourselves under bondage.”

The second interpretation is the following:

(2) For the first clause — “be as I am” — Paul is exhorting the brethren to set aside the errors and resentments they have taken on, but instead to regain proper views and the same feelings toward him as he has had toward them. In the second clause — “for I am as ye are” — Paul is explaining that he, as the *Apostle to the Gentiles*, had basically given up his Jewish customs and associations to become like, and live as a Gentile. (In that way, the Gentiles were better able to identify with him, and it made his preaching to them more effective.) In



essence, he is asking, “Will you then abandon me, seeing I have abandoned all, even my Jewish heritage, for you?” The *Knox* translation renders it: “Stand by me; I have taken my stand with you.”

In the fourth part of the verse, “Ye have not injured me at all,” Paul tenderly reassures the brethren that they have not offended him. Additionally, that his reproving them was not out of any sense of personal injury, but from a zeal for the purity of the Gospel, and for their spiritual welfare. To paraphrase, Paul is saying: “Brethren, return to the freedoms in Christ I first taught you about — the ones I enjoy and the ones you, too, used to enjoy. Those who are leading you astray do so for their own ends. I have no selfish reason for my entreaty — I want only what is best for you.”

**Q** Please explain Rom. 1: 14 where the Apostle Paul states: “I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise.”

**A** Paul wrote this epistle to the Romans, a church that consisted of both Jewish and Gentile believers, to which he expressed his intention to visit them soon. These brethren were still largely influenced by their former Jewish ideas and prejudices. Paul’s purpose in writing was to free them from these misconceptions, and lead them to confidence in Christ as putting an end of the Law to every one that accepted Him. Until that was accomplished, their growth in a knowledge of God’s Word and the Christian graces of character would be greatly hindered.

Before considering what our verse means for the Apostle to be a *debtor*, let us first determine who the Greeks, Barbarians, wise, and unwise are. The Greeks were Gentiles who either spoke, or followed, the Greek way of life. On the other hand, the Barbarians were Gentiles who neither spoke nor followed the Greek way of life. The Greeks saw themselves as having a corner on wisdom, for they were the center for learning and the arts at that time. They viewed the rest of the world as deficient in learning and the arts, compared with them. From this we see that the Greeks and the wise (educated, learned, cultured) in this verse are identical, and the Barbarians and the unwise (uneducated, simple, uncultured) refer to the other class.

It is true that many of the Gentile Christians that Paul ministered to conferred both temporal and spiritual blessings upon him. This verse though, does not refer to him as being a debtor to them because of something they had done for him. No, Paul was a debtor to — had an obligation to — the Greeks and Barbarians because God through Christ had done something for them. (See *RSV, NASB*; and compare Gal. 5: 3.) And Paul, as the servant of God, had been charged with the commission to preach the Gospel to them. That this is the proper thought can be seen by reading the following two verses:

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*Even though Paul suffered many things  
as a result of his ministry, he was  
neither an unhappy nor an unwilling  
debtor. Rather, he counted it a  
great joy and privilege to bless others  
with the Gospel that had so  
richly blessed him.*

---

“So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (vs. 15, 16).

#### **How Paul Carried Out His Commission**

Paul had received many blessings from the Lord that allowed him to embark on his mission of preaching the Gospel. As fully consecrated to the Lord, he had become a steward of all that he possessed — such as his great and varied talents — to be used in the Lord’s service. Furthermore, he was given the special office of being one of the 12 Apostles, with all the abilities and training needed to fulfill that office faithfully.

The Apostle used his office and talents wisely when preaching and writing to both classes of Gentiles — considering the capacity of his hearers so as to be the most effective. When ministering to the uneducated and plain, his discourses were more simple; with the educated and learned, they were more intellectual.

We pause to ask why Paul regarded himself as a debtor to Greeks and Barbarians (Gentiles), but not Jews? It is true that he was also commissioned to preach the Gospel to the Jews, but his particular sphere of activity was to be directed toward the Gentiles. We find proof of this in the following Scriptures: Acts 9: 15; 26: 16-18; Rom. 11: 13; and Gal. 2: 7, 8.

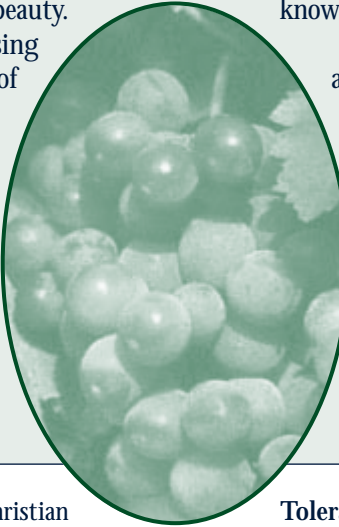
Another important consideration is that even though Paul suffered many things as a result of his ministry, he was neither an unhappy nor an unwilling debtor. Rather, he counted it a great joy and privilege to bless others with the Gospel that had so richly blessed him. In fact, he would have been in great distress were the privilege to have been withdrawn (1 Cor. 9: 16).

\* \* \*

# The Ripe Character

What are the distinguishing marks of a ripe character? One mark is beauty. Ripe fruit has its own perfect beauty. As the fruit ripens, the sun tints it with surpassing loveliness, and the colors deepen till the beauty of the fruit is equal to the beauty of the blossom, and in some respects superior. There is in ripe Christians the beauty of realized sanctification, which the Word of God knows by the name of "the beauty of holiness."

Another mark of ripeness is sweetness. Unripe fruit is sour. As we grow in grace we are sure to grow in charity, sympathy and love. We shall, as we ripen in grace, have greater sweetness



toward our fellow-Christians. Bitter spirited Christians may know a great deal, but they are immature.

Those who are quick to censure may be very acute in judgment, but they are as yet immature in heart. I know we who are young beginners in grace think ourselves qualified to reform the whole Christian church. We drag her before us and condemn her straightway; but when our virtues become more mature I trust we shall not be more tolerant of evil, but we shall be more tolerant of infirmity, more hopeful for the people of God, and certainly less arrogant in our criticisms.

— C.H. Spurgeon

**SOUR GRAPES** makes a miserable dessert for the Christian man and woman. On such a diet, not only is one's spiritual digestion put into great discomfort, but it is often difficult to hide from others the sudden grimace of dislike, animosity, or prejudice. The dry mouth, the teeth on edge — who among us has not been taken unawares by an unpleasant feeling of antipathy at the success or acceptance of someone we judge unworthy?

Ah! *We judge!* A hasty or over-critical assessment of the worth and rights of others is not a failing only of the newly fledged Christian. Even those long in the way may be guilty of misinterpreting others' motives, or even of bigotry, thereby sowing discord among the Lord's people.

## The Household of Faith

The nature of our fellowship is to be patterned on that found in a loving family. We belong together, bound by the ties of Christian love and shared ideals, the kindred mind that is the mind of Christ — the new mind, heart, and will that rises above the desires of the self, and seeks the will of God and the good of His people, our spiritual family.

We do not choose our natural brothers and sisters, and discord is a common experience in the natural family. Yet the ties of blood are strong, and an external threat may well reveal an unsuspected solidarity and a fierce loyalty.

Neither are we entrusted with the responsibility of choosing our brethren in the faith. And we are likely to find, whichever congregation we attend, that there are some we favor less than others. The differences among those called by God to share Christian fellowship are not really accidental. Rather, the diversities of talent, natural inclination, and personality are a means of developing each one of us in the graces of Christian character.

Those very attributes in a fellow Christian which annoy us may well be irritants which the Lord uses to remove our own sharp edges, our blemishes, and this "rubbing up the wrong way" makes us in time more polished characters. Furthermore, the buffeting we feel in the presence of our least favorite companions is probably their experience too, when in our company. And we have to learn to "rub along."

## Tolerance

Differences are inevitable. The preconceptions of early Jewish Christians were challenged when Gentile converts were welcomed into their midst. Partiality as to race, color, social status, manner of speech, education, political persuasion, or secular interests, is no part of the Christian ethic. As Paul wrote to the Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28).

Avoiding the company of any whose manners offend or whose faults irritate us, not only deprives them of the love and support they need, but betrays in us a lack of patient consideration. Christ died for the *ungodly*, and godliness is not a quality quickly developed. Tolerance implies a flexibility, a measure of liberality as to the infirmities of others. It does not condone sin, nor tolerate evil, but makes allowances for its victims. We ourselves have received of God's abounding grace, and the Apostle Paul, who was himself tested by the failings of others, exhorts us to "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. . . with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4: 1, 2).

## The Other's Viewpoint

Seldom is one unaware of *being* a trial to others. It is an uncomfortable plight, and some have turned away from Christ because of it. Others seem to take a perverse delight in testing the patient longsuffering of fellow Christians, and perhaps all their lifetime do not quite conquer their faults. Yet, seen from God's perspective, they may have done their very best.

Even the ripest fruit may have a sharp, refreshing flavor. So too, we find that some of the saintliest of men and women yet have a caustic turn of phrase that can sting the unwary and disturb an underlying complacency that no Christian can risk.

Our Heavenly Father desires our full maturity in Christlike character, our graces of the spirit fully developed, ripened, and preserved. "Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13: 20, 21).

\* \* \*



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## announcements

### MEMORIAL DATE FOR 2004

*Friday, April 2, after 6:00 p.m.*

Our Lord's Memorial falls on Friday, April 2, after 6:00 p.m. This is calculated as follows (all times are Universal Time, or Greenwich Mean Time): The vernal equinox is on March 20, 6:50 a.m.; the new moon nearest this equinox is on March 20, 10:42 p.m.; add to this, 2 hours 21 minutes to get Jerusalem time = March 21, 1:03 a.m.; so Nisan 1 is from 6:00 p.m. March 20, to 6:00 p.m. March 21; Nisan 14 begins 13 full days later, on Friday, April 2, 6:00 p.m., ending Saturday, April 3, 6:00 p.m. The Memorial should therefore be observed after 6:00 p.m. on Friday, April 2. May God bless all His consecrated people in this connection. We will be pleased to receive reports of your commemoration. (*Please note:* The vernal equinox and new moon nearest this equinox fall on the same date in 2004, a rare but occasional occurrence.)

### INCREASE IN COST OF SUBSCRIPTION

Due to a steady rise in the cost of printing and distributing our magazine, the rate of an annual subscription to *The Bible Standard* will be increased from \$7.00 to \$12.00, effective January 2004. If your current subscription runs into next year or beyond, you will not be charged the higher rate until you renew. (Your expiration date is shown above your address label.)

We will continue to provide qualifying subscriptions free of charge as previously. Discounts for long-term and gift subscriptions will be made available; details will follow in our December issue.

### GENERAL CONVENTIONS FOR 2003

*At-a-glance*

**Nigeria:** Danfodio Road Primary School, Aba, Abia State, November 28-30

**United States:** Oklahoma, November 7-9

*Details*

**United States**

Tulsa, Oklahoma, November 7-9 (Friday-Sunday)

*Site:* Sheraton Tulsa Hotel, 10918 E. 41st St., Tulsa Oklahoma 74146; telephone: (918) 627-5000. *Rates and Reservations:* \$70 (plus tax at 13%). Make enquiries to the class secretary: Mrs. Laverne Shaw, 1221 E. Forest Drive, Sand Springs, OK 74063.

### SERVICES BY VISITING MINISTERS

**Carl Seebald**

Tulsa Convention, November 7-9

**Ralph Herzig**

Springfield, Massachusetts, December 7

**Richard Blaine**

Tulsa Convention, November 7-9; Waycross, Georgia, December 14

**Leon Snyder**

Independence, Kansas, November 5; Tulsa Convention, November 7-9; Mustang, Oklahoma, November 12; Tulsa, Oklahoma, November 16

**Baron Duncan**

Pittsfield, Massachusetts, November 16

**Tom Cimbura**

Tulsa Convention, November 7-9

**Don Lewis**

Tulsa Convention, November 7-9

**James Shaw**

Tulsa Convention, November 7-9

**Marek Piotrowski**

Seattle, Washington, November 15, 16

**Evangelists' Services**

**Robert Branconnier**, New Haven, Connecticut, December 21

**Jon Hanning**, Beechgrove, Tennessee, November 15, 16

**Dan Herzig**, Auburn, Massachusetts, November 9

**Harold Solomon**, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, December 14

**Robert Steenrod**, Sand Ridge, West Virginia, December 13, 14

**Edward Tomkiewicz**, Muskegon, Michigan, November 1;  
Grand Rapids, Michigan, November 2

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