

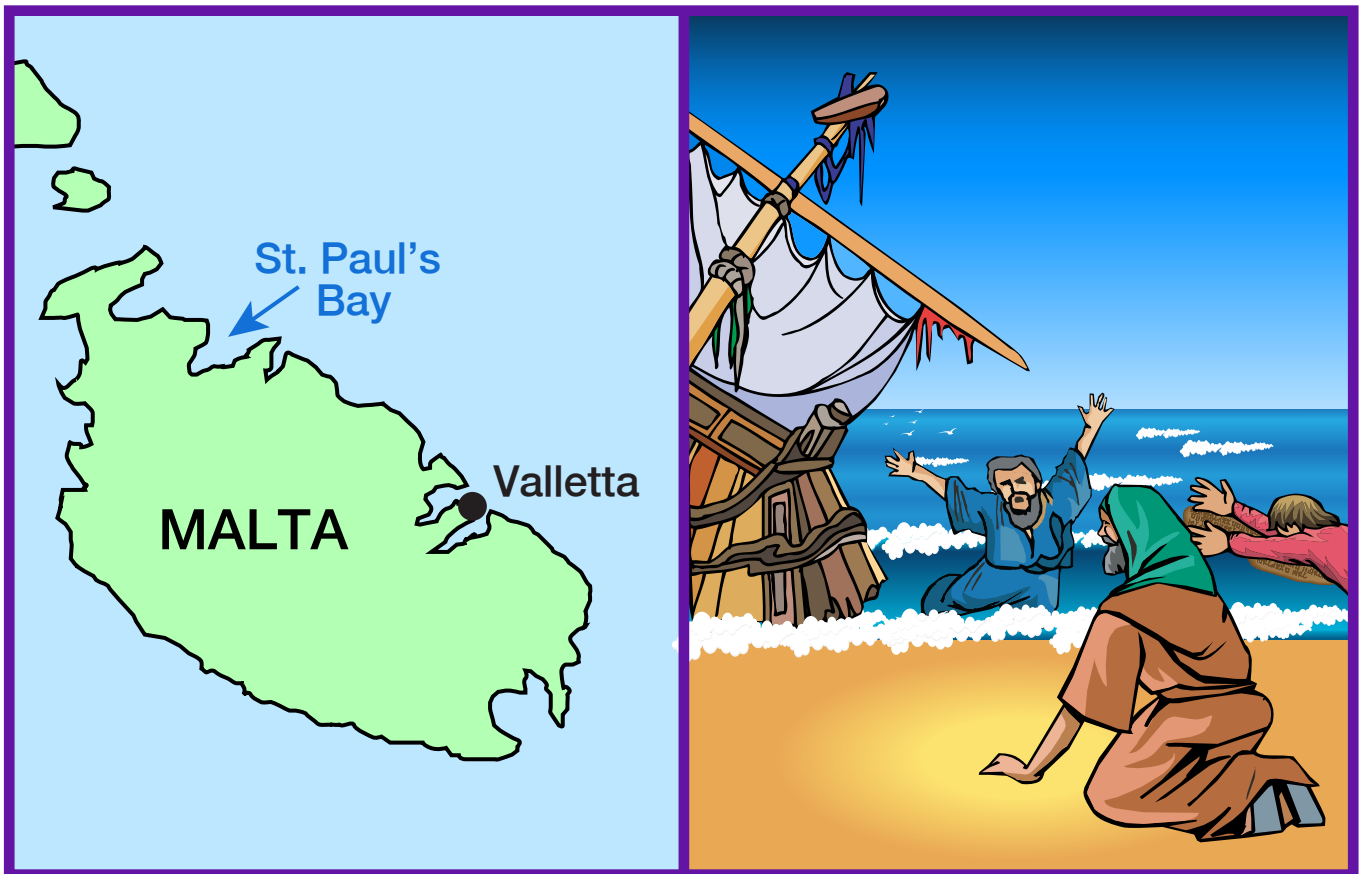
Tour of the Holy Lands - Malta



Our next stop is the island of Malta. Look at your map and find the “boot” of Italy. Do you see the boot’s toe and heel? It looks like the boot is about to kick the island of Sicily, doesn’t it? Now look below, or south, of Sicily—there’s Malta.



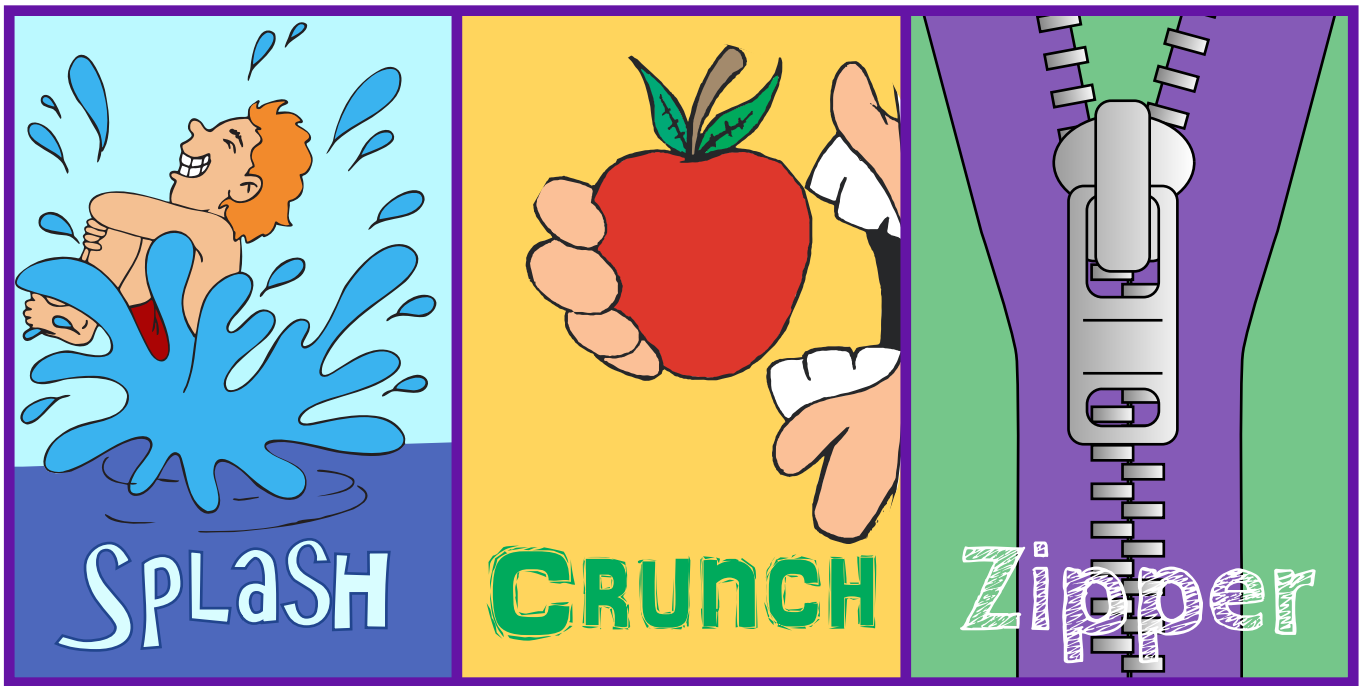
Quite unexpectedly, Paul spent three months in Malta. He wasn't intending to go there, but a storm tossed him into the sea and he washed up on the shores of the small island. We have found Paul in so many different places! And he's blessed all of them by sharing Christ Jesus' teachings and starting churches wherever he could.



How do we know about this fierce storm? From the Bible, of course! Luke has written down the story, and we can find it in the book of Acts in the Bible. He describes the moment they reached land:

When we were safely ashore, we realized we had all made it, just as God had promised. We landed in St Paul's Bay, about 8 miles NW of Valletta on the island of Malta.

The Bible calls the island "Melita" (Mel' i-ta), which is a Canaanite (cay'nan-ite) or Semitic (se-mi'tik) word for "refuge." The island was small, just 8 miles wide and 18 miles around. Phoenicians were the first settlers in about 1000 B.C.E. Many ships would stop there on their way to Rome.



The island people spoke a foreign language, so they were called “barbarous” (bar’bar-us) because each word they spoke sounded like “bar bar bar.” Can you think of a word that sounds like its meaning? How about “splash” or “crunch” or “zipper”? Listen as you say these words, and you’ll be able to hear just what they mean! There’s a very long English word for words that sound like what they mean—it’s “onomatopoeia” (ah’nah-mah’tah-pee’ah). That’s a mouthful, isn’t it? But it’s fun to say!



Luke continues to describe life on Malta. He writes:

The natives went out of their way to be friendly. After all, we were strangers to them and spoke a different language. They might have beaten us off, thinking we were bad guys. They never even asked where we were from or what gods we believed in. Instead, they built a bonfire on the beach and made room for us since it was cold and raining harder than ever. The October low temperatures on Malta were in the 50's, and as much as 12 days of rain could be expected. The people gave both comfort and companionship.



Even though Paul was still a prisoner, he was given permission to move around freely. His goal was to see Caesar, so he had no desire to run away—and nowhere to go or to hide on the island. Instead, Paul made himself useful in any way he could. One day he was gathering an armful of dry branches to add to a fire. Suddenly one of the sticks that was stiff from the cold turned out to be a poisonous snake. Roused by the heat of the flames, it sank its fangs into Paul's hand and held on.

The other men did not seem surprised by a snake hanging from Paul's hand. Instantly, they decided he was a murderer. He must have done something to deserve the snake bite. They figured that even though Paul had escaped the rough sea, the goddess of Vengeance was not going to let him live. They believed the viper was sent by the gods to kill Paul, proving that he was guilty of a serious crime.



But Paul was not afraid. He stayed calm as he shook the viper into the fire without any drama or injury to himself. He completely trusted God to keep him safe, and that trust cast out all fear.

The men had seen what happened to someone who was bitten by a snake. They waited for Paul to swell up or drop dead. But after a long time of seeing nothing unusual happen, they decided that Paul must be a god. An ordinary man couldn't have a viper hanging from his hand and not fall sick and die. Paul's faith in God saved his life.



Several miles south of the bonfire, there was an estate belonging to the governor of the island, a man named Publius. He invited Paul and his companions to be his guests in his home. For three days, Publius treated them like very important people. He had a large estate and a large heart.

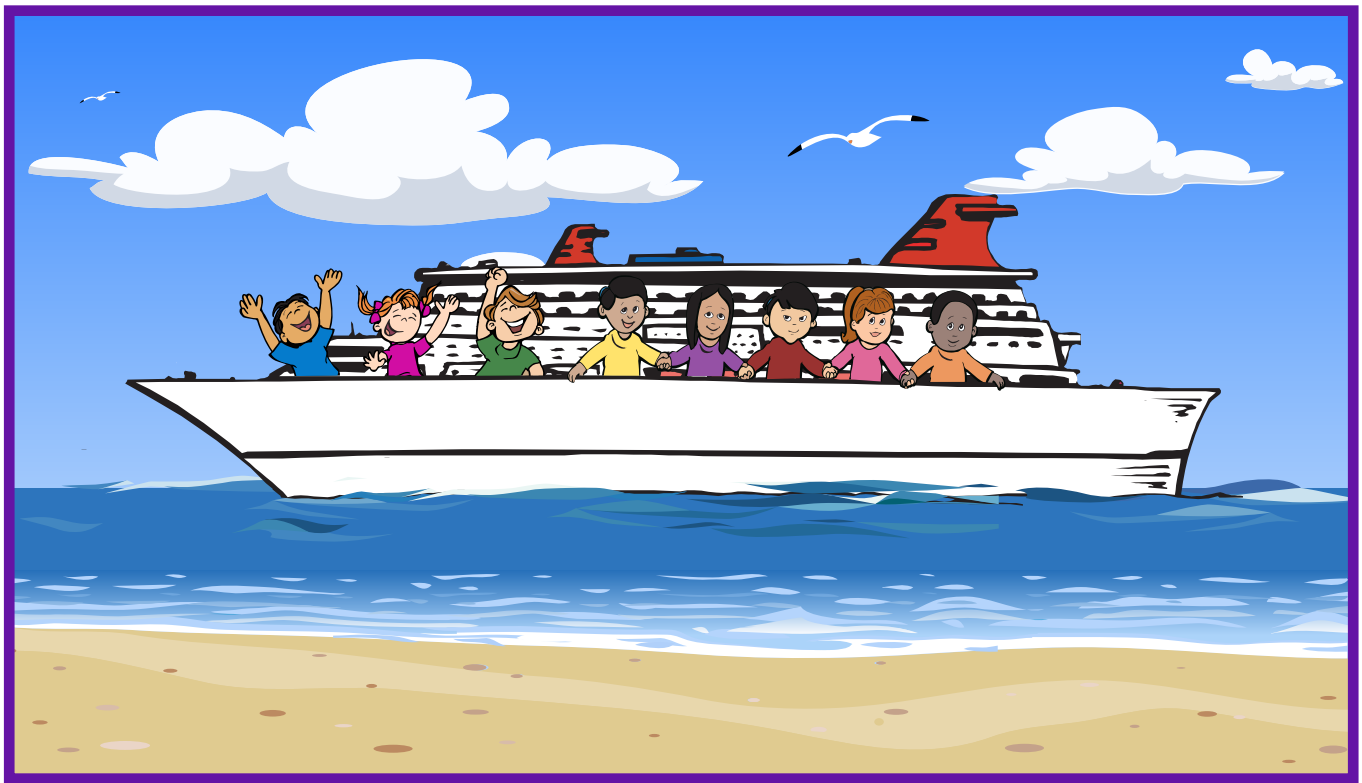


While Paul was there, he learned that Publius' father was suffering from attacks of a long-lasting fever. Paul entered the father's room, prayed, laid his hands on him, and healed him instantly. This sounds just like Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law, doesn't it? Paul's ministry was growing, even while he was a prisoner headed for a hearing before Caesar.



Word of Paul's healing work traveled fast, and soon everyone on the island who was sick came to him to be healed. He soon had a lot of patients.

Paul and his companions spent a wonderful three months on Malta. The people who were healed rewarded the men generously with many gifts. A ship was loaded with everything they had lost in the shipwreck and everything they needed for the rest of the journey.



For years after they left Malta, people told stories about Paul's time on the island – about all the healings that took place, including the story of the viper bite. The beginnings of the Christian church at Malta grew out of Paul's memorable visit while he was a prisoner on his way to meet Caesar. Thanks to Paul's determination, Christianity was growing.

Since we want to catch up to Paul in Rome, let's get going!