

Message based in part on the book,

## The Lost Shipwreck of Paul, by Robert Cornuke

Acts 27

Paul was shipwrecked on an Alexandrian grain ship.

These ships were large, fast and well-maintained. They were owned by the state (Rome) and were used to transport grain to feed Rome. Rome imported 150,000 tons of grain each year.

The grain came from southern Russia, Egypt and northern Africa.

Grain was to the ancient world what oil is to ours. It was a very important commodity.

A second-century man named Lucian penned a description of one of these grain freighters which had been driven off course by a storm and came to port at Athens.

What a size the ship was! One hundred and 80 feet in length; the ship's carpenter told me. The beam (width) more than a quarter of that (45'-50' wide) and 45' from the deck to the bottom. The crew must have been as big as an army. They told me she carried so much grain that it would be enough to feed every mouth in Athens for a year.

Josephus tells of being shipwrecked on a grain freighter which carried 600 passengers of which only 80 survived.

3. (13) But when I was in the twenty-sixth year of my age, it happened that I took a voyage to Rome; and this on the occasion which I shall now describe. At the time when Felix was procurator of Judea, there were certain priests of my acquaintance, and very excellent persons they were, whom on a small and trifling occasion he had put into bonds, and sent to Rome to plead their cause before Caesar. (14) These I was desirous to procure deliverance for; and that especially because I was informed that they were not unmindful of piety towards God, even

under their afflictions; but supported themselves with figs and nuts. Accordingly I came to Rome, though it were through a great number of hazards, by sea; (15) for, as our ship was drowned in the Adriatic Sea, we that were in it, being about six hundred in number, swam for our lives all the night; when, upon the first appearance of the day, and upon our sight of a ship of Cyrene, I and some others, eighty in all, by God's providence, prevented the rest, and were taken up into the other ship<sup>1</sup>

"Bruce" writes,

The transport of grain from Egypt, the chief granary of Rome, was of the highest importance: The shipping fleet devoted to it was organized for the service of the Roman state as early as the Ptolemaic Period.

Lionel Casson writes,

The Alexandrian freighters that were assigned the overwhelming task of feeding Rome had to be the biggest, safest and fastest ships of their day. An elite class all their own. The ancient historian Philo wrote of the grand vessels, 'The ships are crack sailing craft, and their skippers the most experienced there are; they drive the vessels like race horses on an unswerving course that goes straight as a die.

In April 2000, Robert Cornuke was almost drowned in a shipwreck on Lake "Tana" in Ethiopia.

On the plane home, he began to think about shipwrecks recorded in the Bible.

He read Acts 27. As he did, he came to verse 29, "...they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak"<sup>2</sup>

Reading further, he was electrified to read in verse 40,

"And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea..."<sup>3</sup>

He thought,

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, Flavius, *The Works of Josephus*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

<sup>2</sup>*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

<sup>3</sup>*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

"Could those four anchors have survived all this time?"

"If so, could I find them?"

Cornuke began to pour over everything he could find about ancient shipping on the Mediterranean—

He read about Roman maritime history, ancient shipping practices, the Mediterranean and the Island of Malta.

He knew that the traditional site of St. Paul's shipwreck on Malta was St. Paul's Bay on the northeast side of Malta.

As he continued to read the research, he realized that there were discrepancies between St. Paul's Bay and Luke's description of the wreck.

In September 2002, Cornuke flew to Malta. He investigated the traditional site at St. Paul's Bay.

He found it did not match Luke's description.

In Acts 27:39 Luke writes,

...they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could<sup>4</sup>

St. Paul's Bay has only a tiny beach which is appo. two miles from the mouth of the harbor.

The sailors could not have seen it from the sea.

In verse 41 Luke gives another descriptive clue which does not fit St. Paul's Bay. Luke says, "But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground..."<sup>5</sup>

There is no such feature at St. Paul's Bay.

V. 39 says, "...they could not recognize the land..."<sup>6</sup>

In 59-60 AD (the time of the shipwreck), Malta was a Roman possession.

St. Paul's Bay was a well-known busy Roman harbor. The sailors would have been very familiar with its shoreline and land features.

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<sup>4</sup>*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

<sup>5</sup>*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

<sup>6</sup>*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

In v. 28 we are told that the sailors measured the depth of the water because they feared they were nearing land.

The ancients sounded with a concave, heavy half-ball—

Tar or Tallow was smeared inside the ball so it would catch some of the soil on the bottom so the sailors could examine it.

The ball was attached to a line which had a knot every six feet (fathom).

As the ball fell, the sailor counted the knots to get the depth in fathoms.

The first sounding was 120'.

A little later they sounded again and found it was 90'.

At this point, fearing they would run aground, they cast four anchors out of the stern.

As Cornuke asked questions and researched on Malta, God began to open doors. He talked to some local divers who 29 years before had been spear fishing off the Murnex Reef, which is appo. one mile off St. Thomas Bay and appo. ten miles south of St. Paul's Bay on Malta. It is on the southeast side of Malta. These divers are normally very reluctant to communicate with outsiders, but God allowed Cornuke to gain their confidence, and he learned that 29 years before they had located and brought to the surface the lead top of an ancient Roman anchor.

They didn't realize what it was. They knew it was ancient and that there were laws on Malta against possessing ancient artifacts. It had been located by accident, but over the next couple of years three or four of the divers located and retrieved the other three anchors.

Cornuke was able to locate and see all four of the anchors while he was on Malta.

He had a very well-known expert on Roman shipping examine them and verify that they were indeed parts of ancient Roman anchors.

He told Cornuke they could well be from the first century and were exactly like the anchors an Alexandrian grain freighter carried.

While talking to the man who had found and shown him the fourth anchor, Bob was concerned to hear him say, "We found two more anchors in the rocky reef."

Bob thought this was too many anchors for Paul's ship.

Then he went back to the text...

In. v. 30 Luke says the sailors were attempting to escape in the boat, under pretext of laying anchors out from the bow!

Cornuke realized the fifth and sixth anchors were from the actual shipwreck on the rocks!

All the pieces fit together perfectly.

1. There is a sandy beach at St. Thomas Bay which is plainly visible from the rocky reef.
2. The depth of the water where the four anchors were found was 90', which matches Luke's description of the depth where the anchors were cast out.
3. The Murnex Reef is a ragged rocky outcropping appo. a mile from the beach. This fits Luke's description of the place where two seas meet. During storms, waters from the sea and the beach meet with violent churning. This is the only place on Malta where two seas come together like this.
4. It appears from Luke's description that the shipwrecked men had quite a piece to go to get to land.  
This fits the appo. one mile from the reef to the beach at St. Thomas Bay.
5. St. Thomas Bay would have been unfamiliar to the sailors as it was not used as a harbor in Roman times.
6. The two anchors found in the shallow waters of the rocky reef were exactly the same type as the four which were found at 90'.
7. It was not unusual for an Alexandrian grain freighter to carry six anchors.
8. No captain in his right mind would anchor his ship (by the rear—Most anchored by the front of the ship) right in front of a dangerous rocky reef. But it

fits perfectly with Luke's narrative. The boat was being driven toward the rocks. The depth was rapidly decreasing.

The boat had to be held till daybreak so they could see to steer it.

A normal front anchoring would have swung the back of the ship around so they could not steer it to land.

9. The captain would never have left four anchors in the sea if he was making a normal landing. He would have pulled them up and placed them on deck. This captain was desperately trying to steer his ship through the rocks to a crash landing on the beach. He knew the ship was doomed. He had no need for the anchors.

All these facts speak clearly for the fact that St. Thomas Bay was the site of Paul's shipwreck. They confirm the fact that the anchors the divers found are the anchors from Paul's shipwreck.

Three lessons—

1. God will carry us through the storms of life.

God has not promised to keep us from all harm/heartache—

Many of us have known, and may be going through heartache, but God has promised to go with us though the storm.

When the waves of despair beat upon our ship, we have nothing to fear. He who said, *Peace, be still*<sup>7</sup> is with us. God will carry us through life's storms.

2. Impact of our lives on others.

Paul made a favorable impact on the Roman centurion.

What impact do our lives make on those we live and work with?

Do they see Christ in us?

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<sup>7</sup> *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

What an incentive for us to live our lives in such a way that they will back up our witness.

What an incentive for us to witness to those we live and work with.

### 3. Confirmation of the Scriptures

What an incredible confirmation of Luke's careful writing.

What an incredible confirmation of God's Holy Word.

Luke said, "...they cast four anchors out of the stern..."<sup>8</sup>

Almost 2,000 years later there they were, silent witnesses to the authenticity of God's Holy Word.

I believe God will continue to reveal archaeological discoveries like this to confirm His Holy Word as we get closer to the end times.

We can truly anchor our faith on God's Holy Word. Our faith can hold through life's storms and heartaches.

God's Holy Word will truly stand the test of time.

The government of Malta uses a very sophisticated computer software program to assist in its search and rescue efforts in the Mediterranean. The software has the ability to determine the path of a vessel after data is inputted about it.

...the vessel type, size, last known location and wind and ocean current directions.

The Maltese military gave Mr. Cornuke permission to use the software.

After inputting all Luke's data, the major who was operating the computer made the observation that he was unsure if the computer would show the drift of the ship toward the south of Malta. He reminded Cornuke that the traditional site of the shipwreck is St. Paul's Bay, which would require a northerly drift.

Over the next half hour as the computer analyzed the data and printed out 48-hour segments on the ship's movements, the major said in amazement, "I never could have imagined that the vessel's drift would come from the south as you surmised." The computer showed the drift of the vessel to be from the south and

<sup>8</sup>*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

to strike the area of the Murnex Reef at St. Thomas Bay on the late evening or early morning of the 14th day.

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<sup>24</sup>The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: <sup>25</sup>The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: <sup>26</sup>The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.<sup>9</sup>

-Numbers 6:24-26 (KJV)

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<sup>9</sup>*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.