What is the significance of Malta in the Bible?

Malta (also called Melita) is a rocky island located sixty-two miles south of Sicily in the Mediterranean Sea. The island is about seventeen miles long and nine wide. It is mentioned in Scripture as the place where Paul was shipwrecked on his journey to Rome (Acts 28:1). At the time of Paul's visit, Malta was part of the Roman Empire and overseen by an official named Publius (verse 7).

Malta is significant in the Bible because God used a shipwreck and Paul's status as a Roman prisoner to bring the gospel to a people who would have otherwise never heard it. Luke records the shipwreck in great detail in Acts 28 and says that the islanders were kind and friendly to the shipwrecked crew and passengers, giving them shelter, food, and hospitality when they washed up on the shore. The bay on the east side of Malta where Paul's ship ran aground is now called the "Bay of Paul" or "St. Paul's Bay."

The night of the shipwreck on Malta, Paul was gathering a bunch of sticks for a fire on the beach. As he threw the sticks into the fire, a deadly viper bit his hand (Acts 28:1-3). The islanders who saw it declared that the gods must be punishing Paul for murder or some such crime (verse 4), but, when Paul suffered no harm, they decided he must be a god (verses 5-6). The chief official of Malta then took care of Paul and his friends for three days. While staying in his home, Paul had the opportunity to heal the official's father, who was sick with fever and dysentery. Soon, the rest of the islanders brought their sick for Paul to heal (verses 7-10).

Paul, still technically a Roman prisoner, stayed on Malta for three months before another ship could take them all to Rome. The miracles Paul performed earned the respect

of the Maltese people, and the gospel was uplifted. The relationship between Paul and the people of Malta was so friendly that, by the time another ship was ready to transport them on to Rome, the people loaded the missionaries down with supplies and bid them a good journey (Acts 28:10).

What happened in Malta is important because it showcases another example of God using disasters to bring about His plan. Paul had been arrested. He was a prisoner. Then the ship on which he was being transported was caught in a terrible storm. For two weeks the sailors fought the storm, barely eating or sleeping (Acts 27:14-20). Then the ship ran aground and broke apart. Everyone on board had to swim for the shore. None of those events were good in themselves. But as Paul had written earlier, "In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). The shoreline the refugees found was that of Malta. The people of Malta had never heard the gospel. God in His wisdom had arranged for His premier evangelist to wash up on their shore with no way to leave until the whole island had heard the good news.

On Malta, Paul was bitten by a venomous snake. The island official's father was deathly ill (Acts 28:3, 8). Both of these tragic events became opportunities for God to show Himself strong and reveal Himself to those who had no knowledge of Him. God used imprisonment, shipwreck, snakebite, and illness to accomplish His good plan. Through it all, God's message to Paul was "Do not be afraid" (Acts 27:24).

To paraphrase Joseph's words in Genesis 50:20, "What Satan intended for evil, God intended for good, for the salvation of many." Many on Malta believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. God still uses tragedies in our lives to bring about His good plan. When our

lives are surrendered to Him, no event is wasted. No heartache, no disappointment, no pain is meaningless when we entrust it to the One who knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:9-11). Malta reminds us of that promise.