Paul Survives a Shipwreck



Scripture Reference: Acts 27:1 through 28:16

Suggested Theme: We can ask for God's protection when we are in danger.

Memory Verse: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13, ICB

Story Overview:

Paul, having been falsely accused and imprisoned, was transported by ship to Rome under military escort. During storms, an angel appeared to Paul to tell him that he and every man on board would be saved. Heavy storms blew the ship off course and caused it to break up near the island of Malta. God's protection meant Paul finally arrived in Rome after having survived a storm, a shipwreck, and even a snake bite.

Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

Paul had been falsely accused by the Jews of causing trouble. The Roman courts did not find Paul guilty, but Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen and requested to appear before Emperor Caesar's highest Roman court in Rome.

It is important to note God's providence in all of these events. When the Jews had falsely accused Paul, Jesus appeared to him and told Paul what would happen.

> "The next night the Lord came and stood by Paul. He said, 'Be brave! You have told people in Jerusalem about me. You must do the same in Rome also.'" Acts 23:11, ICB

The Roman centurion, Julius, was responsible for delivering this prisoner and would have been required to guard him with his life. In fact, Julius treated Paul kindly and even allowed him to see his friends when the ship stopped at the first port. Others that accompanied Paul were Luke (Acts 27:2) and Aristarchus.

The Mediterranean Sea is rough in the winter, and the ship Paul and the others first boarded left late in the safe season. In Myra, they were transferred to another larger ship.

Stormy weather meant that the ship was not able to take a direct route, so the pilot sailed on the east and south sides of Crete and took shelter in a southern port, Fair Havens.

In Acts 27:9, Luke writes that it is now "after the Fast," which refers to the Jewish Day of Atonement held in September or October. It was now time for the ship to take refuge for the winter. Although Paul warned the centurion that they should stay in Fair Havens, Julius listened to the ship's pilot. The decision was made to try to sail further along the southern coast of Crete and winter in the more suitable port of Phoenix.

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But the ship never made it to Phoenix. Storms pushed it well off course and further into the Mediterranean. The situation became so desperate that cargo and eventually even the ship's tackle was thrown overboard to stay afloat. The storm made the usual navigation by stars impossible, so it was a relief when the ship finally approached the island of Malta.

An angel appeared to Paul, and he was able to give everyone on board the word from God that all lives would be spared. This time, they listened to him. When the ship hit a sandbar and began to break up, all 276 passengers and crew on board made it safely to shore by swimming or floating on boards from the ship. It was just as Paul had said.

Paul would have gained respect among the crew, but the islanders were also impressed by him when he survived a snake bite from a snake that emerged from some firewood on the beach. After healing the father of one of the chief officials on the island, people began to bring others to Paul to be healed. After three months on the island (and after the stormy winter had passed), Paul's group boarded another ship and made their way to Rome. The people of Malta provided all the provisions they needed for the journey.

Upon arrival in Rome, Paul was allowed to live alone, with a soldier to guard him.



Maps from https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/paul-rome/

Again, it is good to note the providence of God in protecting Paul as he made his way to Rome. Paul had been:

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- Protected from an angry mob
- Whisked away by night when there was a plot against him
- The recipient of special treatment while being held prisoner in Herod's Palace
- Treated with kindness by the centurion that guarded his life
- Listened to by the crew on an Egyptian ship
- Respected by islanders and the chief Roman official of Malta, and
- Provided with supplies for the remainder of his journey.

It is no wonder that Paul felt confidence in God's strength!

Way to Introduce the Story:

Share about a time when you (or someone you know) were very frightened about something. Perhaps there was a time when you were afraid of a storm. Did you pray to God when you were afraid? Paul was often in situations where he was probably very scared. (Review some of the times from past lessons.) Even when he was afraid, Paul knew that God would take care of him. He knew that he could do anything if God was with him.

The Story:

The Apostle Paul was a prisoner guarded by soldiers. Even though he was a prisoner, Paul was not actually guilty of breaking any law. He was in trouble because some people did not like his teaching about Jesus. Some Jewish leaders in Jerusalem had become so angry about this that they told lies about Paul and even tried to kill him. They called Paul a troublemaker.

After two years of being a prisoner in the city of Caesarea and appearing before two different governors and even a king, no one could find Paul guilty of breaking the law. Still, he was kept in prison.

As time passed, Paul knew he would never get a fair trial. But Paul also knew of the special law that said a Roman citizen who thought they were having an unfair trial could ask to travel to Rome and appear in court before the Emperor of Rome, Caesar. Then Caesar could decide what was fair.

The time had come for Paul to use his right as a Roman citizen. Even though the trip would be dangerous, Paul told the governor he wanted to go to Rome and appear before Caesar.

Rome was in Italy and was a long way from the city of Caesarea, where Paul had been kept prisoner. Paul would have to go by ship. Since Paul was a prisoner, a Roman centurion soldier had to guard him at all times. The centurion assigned to Paul was called Julius, and Julius would be travelling with Paul on the ship.

One of the first stops along the way was a place called Myra. In Myra, Paul and his centurion guard changed to a different ship. Soon after this, the seas became very rough, and everyone became nervous. Some on board thought they should stop the ship in a harbour somewhere and wait until the winter storms had passed.

Finally, the ship reached Fair Havens. Paul thought this would be a good place to stop and spend the winter. It would be dangerous for everyone on board if they continued.

Even though Paul warned everyone that going on would be a disaster, no one listened. After all, Paul was not in charge of the ship. He was just a prisoner. The ship's owner, the pilot, and others agreed that they should try to sail to another nearby port called Phoenix. They thought the ship could make it through the storms, so they set off.

But soon, everything began to go wrong, just like Paul had warned.

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When a hurricane struck, the winds became very strong. They were so strong that the sailors on the ship thought the boat might blow over and sink. They tried tying ropes around the boat to keep it from breaking apart. They threw all of the cargo overboard to make the ship lighter.

As a last resort, they even collected all the ropes and parts that made the ship work and threw them into the sea, too. This was a disaster. As the storm continued for many days and nights, almost everyone on the ship thought the ship would sink into the sea and everyone would die.

But there was one person on the ship who had hope, and that person was Paul. Paul knew the truth from God because an angel had come to him with a message.

After they had gone many days without food, Paul said to everyone on the ship, “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail. I told you there would be disaster. But don’t worry. Keep up your courage. Last night an angel came to me and told me that not one person on this ship will be lost. Only the ship will be destroyed. The ship will have to run aground on an island but no one aboard will die.”

Paul continued, “The angel told me that I should not be afraid because God will keep me safe all the way to Rome. And believe me, what God says through an angel is true. We can always trust God.”

But some of the sailors did not believe Paul. When they saw an island in the distance, they tried to take the lifeboat and sneak away with it.

Paul saw what was happening and told his guards that if the sailors left, then no one could be saved. So, when the sailors lifted the lifeboat over the side of the ship, the soldiers cut all the ropes and let the lifeboat fall into the sea.

Through all of this, Paul continued to trust God. There was a little food left on the ship, so Paul gathered everyone together and told them that he would pray, and then they should all eat together. Finally, everyone began to listen to Paul.

The next morning, everyone could see some land in the distance. They did not know it, but the land was the island of Malta.

When the ship hit a sandbar and began to break apart, everyone panicked. Some of the soldiers even wanted to kill Paul and the other prisoners so they would not escape. But Julius, the centurion soldier, knew Paul would not escape. Paul had been trying to help them all along. Julius stopped the soldiers and kept Paul safe.

Paul told everyone to stay calm. He reminded them that God would keep them safe.
So those who could swim jumped in the water and swam for shore. Those who could not swim grabbed onto floating wood from the ship and held onto it until they reached the shore.

And things happened just as Paul had said. The angel was right. Not one person from the ship died. Everyone was safe, even after the terrible storm and all the dangers. Not one person drowned.

But the amazing events did not stop there. Everyone was cold, so they began gathering wood and building a fire on the beach. When Paul reached for one piece of wood, he did not know that a venomous snake was underneath it. The snake bit Paul, and he shook it off into the fire.

The people kept watching Paul because they thought he would die from the snake’s deadly venom. That is what had always happened when people on the island were bitten by this type of snake. But Paul did not die. He was not even sick. Everyone was amazed at this miracle.

The people on the island of Malta took care of Paul and everyone on the ship for three months. During that time, Paul performed other miracles in the name of Jesus. He healed an official’s father from a fever and cured many other people of their illnesses. Through all of this, everyone heard about Jesus and knew that he was the Son of God.

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Finally, the time came for the centurion and Paul to leave the island of Malta and head for Rome. The people of Malta gave them food and supplies and said goodbye.

An angel told Paul that he would arrive in Rome safely, but the angel was not the first to say this. Almost three years earlier, Jesus himself had come to Paul's prison cell in the night to tell Paul that he would be going to Rome to tell the people there the good news of Jesus.

After stopping in a few more places, Paul finally arrived in Rome. The trip was very long and dangerous, but Paul trusted what Jesus had told him. Paul remained strong and had always known that he would make it to Rome safely. And he did.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- Why did Paul sail to Rome? (To go to a trial with Caesar as the judge)
- What happened to the ship Paul was on? (It went through storms and then crashed into the rocks near an island)
- What did the angel who appeared to Paul on the ship say? (No one on the ship would die)
- How many people who were on the ship died? (Not one person!)
- What do you think the people on the ship learned/thought about God from this experience?
- When Paul was gathering firewood on the island, what happened to him? (A venomous snake bit him, but he did not die)
- Who did Paul heal while on the island of Malta? (Publius' father and others on the island)
- How did the people from Malta treat Paul and the others who were shipwrecked? (They were very kind to them, gave them many honours, and gave Paul and the others all the supplies they needed for their journey to Rome)

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- What did this story show you about God/Jesus?
- What did you this story show you about people?

Reflection:

- How do you think Paul and the people on the ship felt when they finally reached land?
- What do you think Malta looked like?
- What is something you wonder about in this story?
- What do you think the snake that bit Paul looked or sounded like?
- Do you think any of the islanders or the sailors believed in Jesus after this?
- Why do you think God let so many troubles happen to Paul and the others if He wanted Paul to go to Rome?
- How did God protect Paul on his journey in the ship and on the island of Malta?
- What scares you? When you're afraid, what/how can you pray?
- Who around the world might be in danger right now? Let's pray for them together.
- What question do you have for God about this story?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- ABC: Jesus Died for You and Me Song
- J-E-S-U-S Song
- Our God is an Awesome God Song
- He's Still Working on Me Song
- He's Got the Whole World in His Hands Song
- I'm All Wrapped Up, Tied Up, Tangled Up Song
- My God is So Big
- Jesus Loves Me This I Know
- I Can Be a Missionary
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

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Activities:

- Interactive storytelling: Provide a blue bed sheet or plastic tarp. Use a toy ship or a small cardboard box (like a shoe box) to represent Paul's ship. As you tell the story, the blue sheet will represent the sea, and the box will represent the ship. Before you begin, guide the children in holding the edges of the sheet to practice creating a "calm sea" and then a "storm" by lifting and shuffling the edges around. Then, as you begin to tell the story, gently slide the box into the calm "sea". The children gently move the sheet so Paul's ship will "sail" from place to place as you tell the story. At the point in the story when you talk about the storm, be sure to remind the children that Paul's ship was tossed around but did not turn over (this should keep things from getting too wild).
- God's Protection Challenge: Use the same "sea" (bed sheet or tarp) and "ship" (shoe box) above, but place ping-pong balls or scrunched-up pieces of newspaper to represent the people in the boat. Children will enjoy creating a "storm" by lifting and shuffling the sheet and moving Paul's ship around, but not letting any "people" on board the ship fall overboard. Of course, the ship must crash in the end, but all of the "people" will "swim" to shore (off one edge of the sheet).
- Edible Activity: Make blue jelly (jello) in a clear plastic cup before you begin your teaching session. Make enough so each child can have one. As you review the story, distribute the cups to the children. Give them each a small piece of chocolate (or another appropriate food item) to represent the boat. In the review, when you get to the part about the storm clouds building up before the storm, dollop whipped cream on the top of the "water". When it is time for the storm, have the children stir it all together.
- To review, you or the children can draw a large outline of Paul on a whiteboard or piece of paper (even drawing with a stick in the sand works fine if you are outside). Then, after you have taught the lesson, ask the children to think about what they have just learned from the Bible. Have them write descriptive words or draw pictures inside and around the outlined illustration of Paul. When you see what the children are writing or drawing, you may be surprised or encouraged by what insights they have picked up from the story. This is also a good opportunity to correct or add to anything you might not have covered as well as you could have when you were teaching.



- If you prefer, you can download and print the illustration of Paul provided here and then have the children write and draw on it for the review.
- Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

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Crafts:

- Make a poster, refrigerator magnet, plaque or some other craft with the memory verse on it.
- Blue-tac a large piece of newsprint to the wall. Let the children paint a storm and Paul's ship with grey and blue tempera paint.
- Make a relief map of Paul's Journeys featuring the place in today's story. If you are studying Paul's journeys over a few lessons, you could add more details to the map each time you learn about another stop on the journey. Instructions on how to make a relief map at https://www.weirdunsocializedhomeschoolers.com/step-by-step-to-making-salt-dough-map/

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page with text (Ministry Spark)
- Craft: "Storm in a bag" and "storm in a bottle" crafts (bibleschoolteachers.blogspot.com)
- Craft: Simple sailboat craft (enchantedlearning.com)
- Craft: Simple printable boat pattern (dltk-kids.com)
- Craft: Adapt this boat made from a seashell (christiangamesandcrafts.com)
- Craft: Add a snake (sourworm candy or play-doh) to this campfire craft to remind them of the one that bit Paul in the story (dltk-kids.com)
- Craft: Cute smaller campfire craft. Add a snake- sourworm candy or play-doh (dltk-kids.com)
- Review: Create a "passport" that covers Paul's life. Good visual ideas and activities. It could be split up to go with several lessons or taught all together as a review of previous lessons concerning Paul (kidsbibledebjackson.blogspot.co.nz)

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