Paul Survives a Shipwreck

Scripture Reference: Acts 27-28:16

Suggested Emphasis: God protected Paul and gave him strength. When we trust him he will do the same for us.

Memory Verse: “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13, NIV

Story Overview:

Paul, having been falsely accused and imprisoned, was transported by ship to Rome under military escort. 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 having survived both a storm, a shipwreck and a snake bite.
Background Study:

Click here for an overview of the Book of Acts

Over two years had passed since Paul had first been arrested by Roman soldiers in Jerusalem (see Paul Goes to Jerusalem). Jewish leaders had falsely accused him of inciting riots and showing disrespect towards the Jewish temple. They demanded his death but Paul’s Roman citizenship required Roman officials to carefully follow the proceedings of Roman law and provide protection and a fair hearing. When Paul’s Nephew Uncovered a Plot against Paul’s life the Roman commander in charge of him transported him, under guard, from Jerusalem to Caesarea Maritima where Roman officials could try him.

Even though Paul Was on Trial and appeared in court a number of times over a period of two years the Jews were not able to substantiate their accusations. Finally, Paul invoked his right as a Roman citizen and requested to appear before the Emperor Caesar’s highest Roman court in Rome.

It is important to note God’s providence in all of these events. Paul finds himself protected from the Jews by Roman officials and preparing to travel by sea to Rome. This turn of events fulfils the words Jesus had spoken to Paul in an earlier appearance in Jerusalem.

“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, ‘Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.’” Acts 23:11, NIV

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 in the first port.

For the first time since Paul’s earlier arrival in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-18) Luke, the writer of the book of Acts (see Acts 1:1), begins to include himself once again as a companion of Paul when he records, “We boarded a ship from ...” Acts 27:2. In addition to Luke, Aristarchus joins Paul on the ship. Aristarchus was from Macedonia and had been with Paul on his 3rd Missionary journey in Ephesus (Acts
19:29) and Macedonia (Acts 20:2-4). Later, when Paul writes letters from prison in Rome he will mention Aristarchus in two of them (Colossians 4:10 and Philemon 24).

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 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 notes 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 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.

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 were thrown overboard to stay afloat. The storms made the usual navigation by stars impossible so it was a relief when the ship finally approached what turned out to be 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 in 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 of the provisions they needed for the journey. Upon arrival in Rome, allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.

Again, it is good to note the providence of God and the care he showed to Paul as he made his way to Rome. Since the time Jesus had told him he would be going to Rome Paul had been:

- Protected from an angry mob
- Whisked away by night when there was a plot against him
- Received 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!

- 🔗 What happened before this story?
- 🦖 What happens after this story?
- 🌏 List of all Bible stories and themes on this website.
Way to Introduce the Story:

Share with the class a time when you (or someone else) were very frightened about something. Perhaps there was a time when you were afraid of a storm. Tell the class if you prayed 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 Jewish people who did not believe in Jesus did not like Paul. Some of them told lies about Paul and said that he should be put in prison. Even though no one could prove that he had done anything wrong, he had to stay in prison a long time. Finally, Paul said he wanted to go to the city of Rome, Italy and tell his story to the Ruler of Rome–Caesar. Paul thought that Caesar would listen to his story and let him go free.

Rome, Italy was a long way from the city of Caesarea where Paul had been kept prisoner. Paul had to sail in a ship. A special Roman guard named Julius had to stay with Paul at all times. Julius was very nice to Paul and when the ship would stop at ports, he would let Paul visit friends.

Bad storms made the trip very hard. Paul told the captain and the owner of the ship that it was very dangerous and that they should wait until the winter was over before they continued the voyage. The captain and the owner did not listen to Paul. They probably thought that Paul didn’t know anything because he was just a prisoner.

Soon everyone wished they had listened to Paul because the storms grew even worse. The captain tried to dock the ship at an island called Crete but the wind was too hard and blew the ship out to sea again. The sailors on the ship were so afraid
that the ship would fall apart that they tied a rope around it to hold it together. The storm kept blowing day after day. It was so bad that Paul and the rest of the people on the ship could not even see the sun during the day or the stars at night. It seemed like the ship was going to sink so they threw everything on the ship into the sea. They even had to throw out most of their food. Of course everyone on the ship was scared and hungry.

One day Paul stood up and said to everyone on the ship, “You should have listened to me before. Be sure and listen this time because I have good news. An angel came to me last night and gave me a special message from God. The angel said that none of us will die. The ship will crash on an island but none of us will die. I know now that God will take care of us. Everyone should cheer up because what the angel said is true.” This must have seemed impossible to the people on the ship.

Finally, after two weeks, the ship got close to an island. It was the island of Malta. Paul told everyone not to worry. He told them to eat so that they would all feel better. The captain tried to sail the ship to the beach but the ship crashed on some rocks. Everyone who could swim jumped into the water. Some of the people could not swim so they floated on boards and paddled to shore. Some people on the ship wanted to kill the prisoners so that they would not escape. Julius took care of Paul and told the men that none of the prisoners should be killed.

Remember how Paul had told the captain that the ship would crash but that no one would die? It happened just the way the angel told Paul it would happen. There were 276 people on the ship and not one of them drowned!

It was raining and very cold but the people of Malta began making a fire for the people from the ship. Paul wanted to help so he began collecting sticks to put on the fire. Once, when he bent down to put one of the sticks on the fire, a poisonous snake jumped out and bit him. Paul just shook the snake off and threw it into the fire. The island people could not believe what they saw! Anyone else who was bitten by a poisonous snake would die. Paul did not die! They thought he must be some kind of god.

Since the ship had wrecked, all of the passengers had to find places to stay until another ship could come. Paul went to the house of Publius who was an important
man on the island. Publius’ father was very sick but Paul prayed for him and the man’s sickness went away. The islanders thought Paul was wonderful. All the sick people on the island wanted to visit Paul so he could make them well. Paul and Julius stayed on the island three months until another ship came.

**Ways to Tell the Story:**

This story can be told using a variety of 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, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

**Review Questions:**

1. Why did Paul sail to Rome? To go to a trial with Caesar as the judge
2. What happened to the ship Paul was on? It crashed in the rocks near an island
3. How many people died on the ship? Not one person!
4. When Paul was gathering firewood on the island, what happened to him? A poisonous snake bit him but he did not die

**Song Suggestions:**

- [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 options.](#)
**Learning Activities and Crafts:**

*(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation)*

**Activities:**

- Interactive story-telling: Bring a blue bed-sheet or blue plastic tarp to class. Use a toy ship (if you have one) 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 the ship. Before you begin, guide the children in holding the edges of the sheet to practice creating first a “calm sea” and then a “storm” by lifting and shuffling the edges of the sheet around. Then, as you begin to tell the story gently slide the box into the calm “sea”. The children will 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 of the “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 class. 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.

**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 use gray and blue tempera paint to paint a storm and Paul’s ship.
- Make a relief map of Paul’s Journeys featuring the place in today’s story. If you are studying about Paul’s journeys over a few lessons then 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 http://www.squidoo.com/salt-dough-maps
- If you are teaching a series of lessons about Paul then you might draw an outline of him on a large poster or paper and then add descriptive words about him each time you study a new lesson (printable picture here). Alternatively, you might draw a new outline shape of him each week on a whiteboard or even with a stick in the sand (if you are outside) and guide children in adding descriptive words or events inside the outlined shape as a review. Lessons from the life of Paul are:

  - Saul (Paul) Becomes a Christian
  - The Antioch Church
  - Paul’s 1st Journey- Lystra
  - Paul’s 2nd Journey-Macedonian Vision
  - Lydia Becomes a Christian
  - A Jailer Becomes a Christian
  - The Noble Bereans
  - Paul Preaches in Athens-Mars Hill
  - Priscilla and Aquila
- Paul’s 3rd Journey- Ephesus
- Eutychus Falls from a Window
- Paul Goes to Jerusalem
- Paul’s Nephew Uncovers a Plot
- Paul’s Trial
- Paul’s Shipwreck
- Paul Writes Letters from Prison

Check the Teaching Ideas page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.

Click here for “Paul Survives a Shipwreck” printables to print (A4 paper)
Click here for “Paul Survives a Shipwreck” to print (Letter size-USA)

top

Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets- voyage to Rome (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and puzzle worksheets- shipwreck in Malta (Calvary Curriculum)
- A good selection of puzzles and games to print (gardenofpraise.com)
- 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 (sour worm 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- sour worm candy or play-doh (dltk-kids.com)
- Review: Create a “passport” that covers the life of Paul. Good visual ideas and activities. 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)