Paul Survives a Shipwreck

Scripture Reference: Acts 27:1 through 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.
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 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 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, Julias 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.
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 storm 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, Paul was 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!
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 Apostle Paul was a prisoner who was 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 him 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.

The Roman officials did not like it when people caused trouble so they arrested Paul. Over 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 a law. Still, they kept him in prison.

As time passed Paul knew that he would never get a fair trial. But Paul knew that there
was a 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 that 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 he 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 was becoming nervous. Some on board began to think that they should stop the ship in a harbour somewhere and wait until the winter storms had passed.

Finally the ship made it to a place called “Fair Havens”. Paul thought that this 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 owner of the ship, the pilot and others agreed that they should try and sail to another port nearby 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.

A hurricane struck and the winds became very strong. It was so strong 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 they 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 go down 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 had 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 Julias, the centurion soldier, knew Paul would not escape. Paul had been trying to help them all along. Julias 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. Even after the terrible storm and all of the dangers, everyone was safe. 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 poisonous 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 did other miracles in the name of Jesus. He healed an official’s father from a fever and cured many other people from their illnesses. Through all of this everyone got to hear about Jesus and know that he is the Son of God.
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 had been 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.

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.

Click here to download the slideshow or click here for the printable illustrations. Be selective. Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling 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.

Or use the following video.

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.

- To review, either 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 and/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.

- Alternatively, 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.
• Click here for the 16 lessons about the Life of Paul grouped together as a set.

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 grey 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

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

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
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)