

## Shipwrecked!

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by Wayne Goff

The story of Paul's ship being wrecked in the book of Acts has always intrigued me (Acts 27-28). The historical accuracy of Luke's account is impressive. The skill required of the sailors in a tempestuous sea is also noteworthy. Paul had tried to get the centurion on the ship to delay sailing from Fair Havens (27:8-10). But the helmsman and ship's owner persuaded him to sail onward. (Translation? "Money talks.")

Caught in a horrific storm at sea, the sailors first let the ship go with the wind (27:15). Then under the shelter of the island Clauda, they secured the skiff with difficulty (27:16). Cables were used to undergird the ship (27:17). As the storm raged on, the sailors began throwing things overboard to lighten the ship (27:18). Finally, on the third day, they threw the ship's tackle overboard (27:19). Luke recorded next that *"when neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small tempest beat on us, all hope that we would be saved was finally given up"* (27:20). Go back and read the text several times, imagining you are in that ship, and ask yourself how terrified you would be. Ships are large, strong and fairly secure, but the horrific storms that often come up on the vast, seemingly endless sea are incomparable to anything on land. Water is powerful! The ocean is massively overpowering!

But in the darkest hour of human life aboard that ship, the calm voice of the apostle Paul said, *"And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me"* (27:22-25). Comforting words, to say the least, **if you believe them**. Hardened soldiers and sailors could easily have said to themselves, "Well, here's another one of those religious nuts who thinks he's going to save the world!" But it seems to me that those in charge did believe Paul. After all, he was the one who warned them not to leave the safe harbor in the first place!

But even in this circumstance, God's salvation of the people aboard that ship was **conditional!** First, some sailors tried to sneak overboard on the skiff (27:30). Paul told the soldiers that if they did not all remain on board, together, there was no guarantee of their own salvation (27:31). Second, Paul admonished all onboard to eat some food (27:33). God could not help them if they did not strengthen themselves for the battle against the waves. After Paul prayed publicly for the food, they all felt encouraged and ate. Third, the sailors lightened the ship as much as possible by throwing everything with weight overboard and sailing for shore (27:39-41). They did all they could do to help, but when the ship ran aground, it was left up to God. Fourth, the soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, but the centurion prevented them from doing so in order to save Paul's life (27:42-43). **Having observed all of these conditions, all two hundred and seventy-six persons on board were saved, and no prisoners escaped (27:37, 44)!**

So the question remains: "Couldn't God have saved all 276 passengers **unconditionally?**" Yes, He could have, but He chose not to. God helps those who help themselves. God helps those who believe in Him and obey. God's actions on this occasion show both His absolute power and His conditional mercy. It is the same today in the realm of our **spiritual** salvation. When your life becomes "shipwrecked" in the "storms" that engulf you, then trust and obey Him. He cares for you.

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