

# "Preparing for Shipwreck"

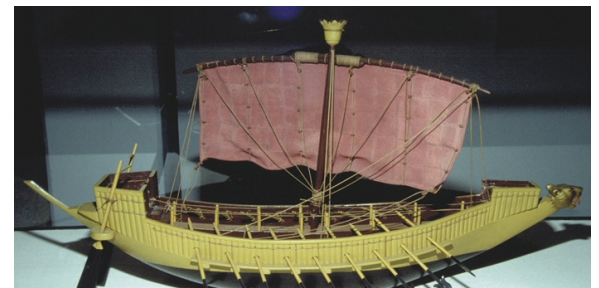
by Doug Hamilton

It was an early winter day of 60 AD and the location was a port at Fair Havens, the southern side of Crete in the Mediterranean Sea. 276 passengers, most of them Imperial prisoners, were aboard an Alexandrian grain ship headed for Italy (Acts 27:6) through the boisterous and treacherous body of water. They had refuge in this small bay, considering whether to press on to a larger port or to wait out the winter where they were at.



The modern day port of Fair Havens

One of the prisoners, a man named the Apostle Paul, offered his common sense advice, (Acts 27:10) *"Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives."* Ignoring the true danger of being swept out to sea, the centurion in charge was more persuaded by the confident and prideful owners of the ship, giving permission to continue on (27:11).



An ancient Egyptian cargo ship

Being on that body of water during the winter season was one of the most brave or stupid concepts, for the winds blew contrary, the waves were high and the air was filled with a thick mist. Many of ships that traveled this part of the world during winter found themselves on the bottom of the sea with no survivors. The sea was so dangerous to merchant ships that the Emperor would actually fully warranty the potential loss at sea just to make sure his precious cargo could be delivered to Rome. This was likely one of those ships.



The wayward path of the ship

Heading out of the port, the captain tightly hugged the shoreline for fear that the wind would sweep them out into open sea. It wasn't long until the worst case scenario became reality, for a violent wind rushed down the mountainous terrain of the island and pushed them far out from shore (14-15). It was not long before they were driven along, being pushed by high winds and battered by enormous waves. As land began to disappear from sight, they lost hope of survival, for they were

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destined for shipwreck at sea.

Over the next two week's they were battered by waves, extremely sea-sick, without appetite and without hope of survival. There was no sight of land and it was the bleakest of times. They were hundreds of miles off course (see map above), could not see past the fog and thought they would never reach land alive (27:20). In the end it turned out fine and all 276 passengers made it safely. *Acts 28:1-2 When they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. <sup>2</sup> The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all.*

It would be too easy just to press on in the text, being satisfied with the outcome, but it was the steps of preparation for the shipwreck that are so important. Things did not simply fall into place, but certain actions were taken that made survival of a ship wreck possible.

### Preparations for a Looming Shipwreck

#### 1) Damage Control

Acts 27:16-19

- "ship's boat...hoisted it up"
- "undergirding the ship"
- "let down the sea anchor"
- "being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo"
- "on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard"

When they saw that danger was eminent, certain initial steps of caution were taken to stabilize the situation from making things even worse. They were attempting to move into damage control mode.

- The "ship's boat", the small vessel towed behind the ship, was pulled in and hoisted up to prevent it from becoming a battering ram.
- "Undergirding the ship" was the process of running ropes under the ship and tightening them in order to strengthen and hold it together. The battering waves were so strong that they were afraid it would actually split the hull and sink them all.
- The "let down the sea anchor" to act as a brake, hopefully keeping keep them from drifting too far out to sea. The anchor was lowered at the back of the boat and would make it possible to face the waves, which was the least dangerous position to be in.

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- "Jettison of the cargo" referred to throwing over the side of the heavy, superfluous cargo. The same concept applied to some of the less important "ship's tackle". Often there was about three or four times the amount of the ropes and gear as needed on a ship, the "just in case" material that weighed it down. By doing all this, the hope was to ride the waves instead of being pounded by them.

What do we as Christians do when there is an approaching shipwreck?

- What if there has just been an unexpected budget busting scenario that is looming on the horizon?
- What if we just found out that we might be at risk of being laid off or furloughed from our job?

We need to be immediately taking those common sense actions of stabilizing, like eliminating those "eating out at the restaurants" experiences and those "special buying purchases that we really do not need; perhaps consider selling a few items that we really did not have to have. If there is a financial storm brewing and our ship is about to be wrecked, then act like it by taking some actions of stabilization to be in the best shape possible. Be in a position of pro-activity instead of in-activity is always the best first step. It is no different than facing bad weather on a highway by slowing down, paying greater attention to the road and turning the flashers on. Take the initial steps of stabilization.

### 2) Keep a Positive Attitude

Acts 27:22-25 "Yet now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. <sup>23</sup> "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, <sup>24</sup> saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' <sup>25</sup> "Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God that it will turn out exactly as I have been told.

- God sent an encouraging message to Paul by the lips of an angel. The message was the most positive encouragement that he could have been assured with. Even though Paul was in the most difficult of situations, God was determined to keep Paul's spirit high. He had made a promise that he would appear before Caesar in Rome.
- It was not enough that Paul knew he was going to make it, but that all on the ship were going to do the same. He shared that information with them for the purpose to encourage. Even if they did not believe it, Paul did and felt obligated to share it with the others. He was being positive in a negative environment.

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Brothers and sisters, when you know that there is a shipwreck about to occur in the near future, we must stay positive.

- You have not been feeling well for quite some time and went in for some tests. What do you do when the doctor says I have some bad news for you?
- You are on your vacation with the family and the car's engine decides to go on vacation from you, we must stay positive!

John Maxwell, a famous motivational speaker, once wrote in his book The Success Journey: *"A dream without a positive attitude produces a daydreamer. A positive attitude without a dream produces a pleasant person who can't progress. A dream together with a positive attitude produces a person with unlimited possibilities and potential."* A Christian, when they realize their unlimited possibilities in Christ, can have the same attitude. We are more than conquerors through Christ! Must I remind you?

- Jeremiah 29:11 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.'
- Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me!
- Hebrews 13:6 So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"
- 1 John 4:4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.
- Nahum 1:7 The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.
- Psalm 34:7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.
- Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

A positive mental attitude is crucial if you are going to survive the shipwrecks of life. If at any time our attitude becomes negative, we will likely perish at sea.

### Be Positive!

A shipwrecked man was once washed ashore on an uninhabited island. Using the few things he managed to salvage from the wreck and from whatever he could find on the island, he painstakingly built himself a hut. That little hut was the only protection he had from the harsh elements and the only place he could safeguard his meager possessions.

One morning he went out on a lengthy search for food. When he returned in the evening

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he was shocked to find the hut engulfed in flames. The loss of his hut devastated him. He spent that night despondent, sleeping on the sand.

The next morning he awoke early and to his surprise, saw a ship anchored off the island. Shortly a crew member was rowed to the island, he stepped ashore and told the man, "We saw your smoke signal and came to rescue you!"

Closing

We have covered two of the five recommendations from this first lesson, Damage Control and Keeping a Positive Mental Attitude. In the second lesson we will cover the remaining three.

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## Part 2 "Preparing for Shipwreck"

### Opening Story

David Harrell wrote a book telling the story of his father, Edgar Harrell. Edgar was one of the 300 survivors of the sinking of the USS Indianapolis, the last US ship sunk by enemy contact in WW2. 600 of the 900 men who survived the ship's sinking were stranded in the water for five days - many with only a life vest - all facing thirst, hunger, injuries, dehydration and sharks. They all came face to face with fear and their own mortality.



USS Indianapolis

Edgar testifies of those days alone in the ocean, "Clearly there were no atheists in the water that day. Gone was that damnable attitude of pride that deceives men into thinking that there is no God, or if there is, they don't need Him. When a man is confronted with death, it is the face of Almighty God he sees, not his own. We were all acutely aware of our Creator during those days and nights."

### Opening statement for part 2

In the above story we find even the most stringent atheists can be affected during a shipwreck at sea. If an atheist could be affected, what could happen to the faith of the Christian in troubling times? In examining the shipwreck of Paul from Acts 27, we can find some important concepts to help us in our struggle of this life. We have already covered two steps in preparation for the shipwrecks of our lives, damage control and keeping a positive attitude. In this lesson we will add three more concepts to survive the spiritual shipwrecks that we might suffer.

### 3) Build Your Strength

In Acts 27:33-38 they had already been tossed in the sea for nearly two weeks. They had not eaten naturally due to sea sickness and for some a condition of fasting. They were near the end of their ordeal, for land was near. What does Paul recommend for them to do? *Verse 34 "Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation, for not a hair from the head of any of you will perish."* Paul knew that what they were about to face was going to require the energy to reach the shoreline. They could not accomplish the task at hand if they did not have the physical strength to do so.

When we are facing the shipwrecks of our life, we must make sure that we are fully nourished, not with food for the physical, but the word of God for the spiritual. We must be able to fill up on God's words so as to have the strength to venture into the unknown.

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- Psalm 119: 103 How sweet are Your words to my taste! *Yes, sweeter* than honey to my mouth!
- Proverbs 24:14 Know *that* wisdom is thus for your soul; If you find *it*, then there will be a future, And your hope will not be cut off.
- 1 Peter 2:2 "...long for the pure milk of the word..."
- John 6:51 "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh."

We must build up our strength in God through meditation on His word. We want to make sure when the ship breaks apart that we will have the power to make it to our destination in the end. Consume the word of God regularly, for our survival depends on it.

### 4) Aim for the Shore

In Acts 27:39-41 we are told that they finally could see land for the first time in fourteen days. Their long awaited goal was finally within sight. The last thing they needed was to passively approach it and be swept passed the shore and out into open sea again. The passage said "...they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could." They were fully determined to go full speed toward the beach before the opportunity would pass them up. This involved

- "casting off the anchors": This would make the ship as light as possible.
- "loosening the ropes of the rudders": This would eliminate resistance in the steering.
- "hoisting the foresail to the wind": This would use all the force of the wind to drive the ship toward the beach.

Their full intention was to drive as hard and as far as they could toward the beach, even knowing they would probably bottom out before reaching it. In the end they actually become stuck on a reef and the ship begins to break apart, but at least they are close enough to make a break for it.

There are many times when destined for a shipwreck we tend to see our hope before us, but are not willing to make a break for it.

- When someone loses their job and God is trying to lead them to a new one, they might sit on their unemployment check for a year and not really look for one.
- When a person has a marriage relationship on the rocks and God is putting before them a beach of refuge in His word and people, they won't budge. Sometimes they actually sit out in the bay and wait for a rescue ship to come out to them instead.

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- When a person has "...suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1Tim 1:19) through neglect and God has sent numerous lighthouses to direct them to safety, they tend to turn their heads in "ignorance".

Stop it! God is trying to bring us home to safety in the middle of danger and we decide to risk going down with the ship??? This makes no sense at all, but is done repeatedly.

- We as Christians must "cast off the anchors" of sin from our lives. *Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*
- We must "loosen the rudders" of trying to control our direction and let God take the wheel. *Psalms 55:22 Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.*
- We must "hoist the sail" and let yourself be driven to the beach by the power of God. *1 Peter 4:11 Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*



Ancient first-century anchor stone

### 5) Stick It Out Together

Acts 27:42-44 The soldiers' plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape;<sup>43</sup> but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land,<sup>44</sup> and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

- In that day if a prisoner were to escape from the custody of a soldier, the guard would receive the same punishment that the prisoner was potentially to receive. As the ship filled with prisoners was about to break apart near the shore, the guards worried about a potential escape and certain death for themselves once the word got out. They decided to kill the prisoners instead of risking it.



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- The leader of the guards, the centurion, must have finally decided to take the advice of Paul. He ordered them to not kill the prisoners, but rather to let those who knew to swim to do so and the others to attempt floating in on planks from the broken ship. In the end all 276 passengers on the ship made it to shore. It was always God's intention that all of them would make it together.

### The Buddy System???

A ship sinks and the two survivors were floating in a fragile one-passenger life raft. They were two friends that were facing the same scenario, being lost at sea and the raft was taking on water. To make matters worse there were sharks circling the raft for a meal. Something would have to be done. One of the men made the suggestion to use the "buddy system" to survive. The other man asked what the buddy system was. The first man threw his buddy out of the boat for the sharks.

Obviously that was a bad buddy system, not really resolving the problem. As ridiculous as that sounds, sometimes we do the same in the church. We forget that there are many others in the same boat as we at any one time. That is what Paul said concerning our struggles.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

God wants us to draw strength from others in the church whom are in the same boat. He designed us to work together in our moments of struggle. We are not to leave others behind, but to take them with us. We are not to give up or give in to people, but to empower them to reach the shore with us and celebrate survival in the name of the Lord. We use the real "Buddy System" of helping one another make it to heaven.

### The Rescued Rescuing the Shipwrecked:

Some years ago there was a shipwreck off the coast of the Pacific Northwest. A crowd of fishermen in a nearby village gathered to watch the ship as it was smashed on the rocks. A lifeboat was sent to the rescue, and after a terrific struggle the rescuers came back with all of the shipwrecked sailors but one. "There was no room in the lifeboat for him, so we told him to stay by the ship and someone would come back for him," shouted a young man. "Who will come with me?" shouted a young man. Just then a little old lady cried out, "Don't go. Jim, my boy. Don't go. You are all I have left. Your father was drowned in the sea; your brother William sailed away and we've never heard from him; and now if you are lost, I'll be left alone. Oh, Jim, please don't go." Jim listened

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patiently to his mother's pleading, then said, "Mother, I must go! It is my duty. I must go!" The onlookers watched as the men in the lifeboat fought their way toward the wreck. Anxiously Jim's mother wept and prayed. They saw the boat start back, a frail little shell tossed about by the angry waves. At last it came close enough to hear, and they shouted, "Did you get him?" And Jim shouted back, "Yes, and tell mother it's William!"

It is the duty of every Christian to not leave other shipwrecked Christians stranded on the hidden reefs of life. We do our best to bring them to safety no matter how difficult it might be.

### Closing

We have covered the shipwreck of Paul from Acts 27. He and all on the ship made it to dry land in the end. From it we can find five important concepts that are applied to the shipwrecked soul of the Christian.

1. Go into damage control mode.
2. Keep a positive mental attitude.
3. Build your strength.
4. Aim for the shore.
5. Stick it out together.