

Episode: One-Hit Wonders No. 13

Narrator: Pilot

Primary Scriptures: Acts 27:1-28:16

Story Summary: Paul is shipwrecked on the way to his trial in Rome

Location: Mediterranean Sea

Time: Circa 60 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Acts 27:24

Sailing in New Testament times was a dangerous proposition. In 2 Corinthians 11:5, Paul says he has been shipwrecked three times. He was shipwrecked at least one other time as described in Acts 27 and 28.

Ships were only capable of sailing with the wind. In the Mediterranean Sea, the wind generally was from the south in the summer and from the north in the winter. So the great grain ships that supplied Rome left in the spring to go to Africa and returned as soon as possible. During the winter months, winds were so unpredictable that it was dangerous after mid-September, and impossible after early November.

There is no way to date Paul's actions accurately, but some experts believe he was imprisoned in Caesarea starting June 57 AD and sent to Rome two years later in the fall of 59 AD. The scriptures make it clear it was the very end of sailing season. Paul, the centurion, and the soldiers must have been very unhappy about being sent to Rome at that time of year.

As they approached the sailing vessel, they would have seen sailors worshipping and sacrificing to false gods in hopes of sailing safely. The centurion most likely would have been authorized to buy food, along with ropes to tie themselves to the deck in case of bad weather.

Even if the centurion had absolutely believed Paul's prophecy of their upcoming shipwreck, he would have been obligated to board the ship if the owner chose to sail. Apparently, the owner was greedy and reckless, so the ship sailed in the hope of obtaining the last favorable winds of the season.

The ship and its pilot were helpless once the winds turned against them. When faced with the violent gales, the sailors and captain did all they could just to save the ship from capsizing, breaking up, or hitting a shoal or rocks.

Paul's new prophecy that God was going to spare all of their lives must have been hard to believe. When things started happening as Paul said, the centurion made sure Paul's conditions were met, but he took a huge chance in doing so. Standard practice would have been for the soldiers to kill all the prisoners so none of them would escape.

The shipwreck had many beneficial effects. The people on Malta were evangelized, the soldiers and sailors must have spread their story about God saving them, and Christians throughout the Empire were encouraged that God had saved Paul once again.