



Message #52
“PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION”
(Acts 23:12-35)

Acts 23 Overview:

In chapter 23 we continue to see how God uses Paul’s circumstances to enable him to preach the gospel in Jerusalem and, ultimately, be taken to Rome. First, he is on trial before the chief priests (v 1-10), who end up being interrogated themselves by the gospel, thanks to Paul’s “strategic” redirection of proceedings.

Next, after God visits the apostle with words of comfort and encouragement overnight (v 11), a plot against Paul leads to his being taken to the Roman governor. There is a serious conspiracy to kill him (v 12-15), which the Roman commander hears about (v 16-22). Recognizing that he must get Paul out of Jerusalem before he is murdered, the commander hatches a plan to get Paul to Felix, the governor, in Caesarea (v 23-35). Paul is escorted out of Jerusalem by armed guards.

God’s plan, despite enormous opposition and persecution, is falling into place.

Look back at Acts 23:11.

God directly speaks to Paul to outline His plans for him: to testify about Him in Jerusalem and in Rome.

Think about all the ways/things that have contributed to the fulfillment of these plans.

- **Paul’s obedience in going to Jerusalem (20:16)**

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- **Paul’s background and history.**

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- **Paul’s faithfulness to the truth, even when it causes him persecution.**

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- **Paul’s responses to the Sanhedrin.**

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- **The plot against Paul.**
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While the details of Acts 23:11 were specific to Paul, how does what it reveals about God encourage you today toward continuing to seek to share the gospel with those around you?

So, Paul is being held in prison for his own protection. But the Jews do not give up easily, and there is a group of at least 40 fanatics who take an oath to abstain from eating and drinking until after they have killed Paul. Ananias (the High Priest) and the Sanhedrin obviously have no scruples when it comes to protecting their own interests and are happy to collude with this fanatical “Hebrew hit squad”!

Somehow Paul’s nephew has acquired detailed information about the plot.

This is the only clear reference in the NT about Paul’s family.

In its isolation, this verse raises many questions that we would love to be able to answer.....

- What was Paul’s nephew doing in Jerusalem?
- Was he following in his uncle’s footsteps and training to be a rabbi?

- Since Paul's family had apparently disinherited him when he became a believer (Phil.3:8), why did the nephew care what happened to Paul?
- Had Paul's sister, or nephew, become Christians?
- How did the nephew hear of the plot?

Yes, there are many unanswerable questions here in this loaded verse.

Another one is just how old was this "young man"? Jewish custom regarded a boy passed into manhood at the age of 13....so it is conceivable that he could have even been a young teenager.

But one thing we do know is that he knew what was the right thing to do....and he did it.

He visited with Paul in prison and told him about the fanatical group who were plotting to kill him. Paul told him to take this knowledge to the commander, Claudius Lysias, which he did.

Jesus had promised Paul that he is going to Rome and this incident reveals how Jesus was fulfilling His word. We could call this – PROVIDENTIAL PROTECTION.

God's providence is His sovereign control over the ordering of natural circumstances to accomplish His will.

This is a wonderful example of this....a human agent discovers the plot, but we can hardly fail to see the Divine Hand behind it. It takes nearly three years from this point for Paul to finally get to Rome – through many additional crises – but God is faithful to His word.

Can you think of specific times of difficulty in your life when God has helped you to be faithful to Him, and has even worked through you to impact the lives of others?

Do you think someone's age, or stage, determines whether God can use them? If not, what does?

This young, un-named, nephew of Paul did what was right, even though it carried some risk.

Sometimes that is the same for us. Christians are called to live right in a wrong world. We are called to take a stand for righteousness; to live to a godly standard in our lives.

In what aspect/sphere of life do you find it hardest to live a godly life and example?

in what areas of our modern world do you think it is most difficult for Christians to maintain a godly integrity and lifestyle?

So, Lysias makes plans to immediately get Paul out of Jerusalem and to send him to Governor Felix in Caesarea (about 100kms from Jerusalem). Paul is escorted by nearly 500 soldiers! Lysias was ensuring nothing happened to Paul (the Roman citizen) under his watch! Paul would never see Jerusalem again.

As was the practice when a Roman officer sent a prisoner to a superior, Lysias Wrote a letter of introduction/explanation to Governor Felix. It was a rather embellished account, with Lysias distorting the sequence of events and omitting some facts (Paul in chains, nearly being flogged) from the letter. Obviously, he, like most officers, was concerned about his own advancement in the ranks.

Is it legitimate to paint ourselves in a good light? On an application form? In an interview? At what point does this become dishonest?

This chapter reminds us of some of the main themes of the book of Acts: The Place of Suffering; The Sovereignty of God; The Jewish Reaction to the Gospel; The Legal Status of Christianity.

It also reminds us of this key point: **If we stand up for God, He will not forsake us.** We can trust God, for He is totally trustworthy.

Does trusting God come easily for you? Why? Why not?



