

God Protects Paul's Life

(Acts 22:30—23:35)

Introduction

We have been learning a lot about the Holy Spirit through our journey in the book of Acts, haven't we?

What are some things you have learned that the Holy Spirit does for us? [Teacher, lead the student to remember some of the following.]

He's our helper, counselor, comforter, teacher and guide; He tells us the future and reminds us of what God's word says. He gives us the words we need when we are telling people about God. He is the revealer of all truth and He always glorifies God.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives you the power to obey God; that is, to say *No* to sin and *Yes* to God's way. It is the Holy Spirit that helps you to be brave in difficult situations; to stand up and do the right thing, or say the right thing, even when everyone else is doing the wrong thing.

When you are naughty, it is the Holy Spirit that convicts you that you have sinned and need to confess your sin to God. After your sin is forgiven, it is the Holy Spirit that fills your heart with peace and joy because you know that your relationship with God has been made right again.

Although the Holy Spirit is invisible, He is always at work in our lives leading us and guiding us and telling us how to live our lives in a way that pleases God.

God has a plan and a purpose for each one of our lives. And, He will do everything He can to protect you and enable you to fulfill His plan.

We have an exciting lesson today, so pay attention to how the Holy Spirit leads Paul and protects him from being harmed. We will learn that God has a plan for Paul's life and nothing can stop God's plan!

Opening Prayer

Father, it is a comfort to know that we are in Your plan and that nothing can stop You from using us in your grand plan for life. Sometimes it may get messy or scary, but we can trust You with our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

For You are my rock and my fortress; Therefore, for Your name's sake, Lead me and guide me. (Psalms 31:3 NKJ)

Lesson

As Paul was traveling towards Jerusalem, he had been clearly warned that trouble was ahead for him. Sure enough, when he got there, he was arrested because the Jews started a huge riot. They thought Paul had been teaching people to ignore God's laws so they wanted to kill him.

The Jews caused such unrest, the Roman commander was about to have Paul whipped and thrown into the barracks. Who remembers what stopped him from doing that?

When the commander learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, he stopped the soldiers from beating him because it was illegal to punish a Roman citizen before proving he committed a crime. Instead, the commander decided to let the Jewish religious leaders deal with Paul.

So, we pick up the story of Paul's arrest with the last verse of chapter 22.

Acts 22:30

The next day the commander ordered the leading priests into session with the Jewish high council. He wanted to find out what the trouble was all about, so he released Paul to have him stand before them.

The commander wanted to figure out what crime Paul had committed to cause the Jews to want to kill him, so he gathered the Jewish religious leaders and had Paul brought before them.

The Holy Spirit enabled Paul not to be frightened by the religious leaders that he stood before. He gave Paul courage. He wasn't worried or scared of these powerful religious leaders.

Acts 23:1

Gazing intently at the high council, Paul began: "Brothers, I have always lived before God with a clear conscience!"

He knew that he had always lived a godly life. He believed that he had been obedient to all that God had asked him to do. But when the high priest heard Paul say that, he ordered someone standing next to Paul to slap him in the face.

Acts 23:2-3

Instantly Ananias the high priest commanded those close to Paul to slap him on the mouth. (3) But Paul said to him, "God will slap you, you corrupt hypocrite! What kind of judge are you to break the law yourself by ordering me struck like that?"

Paul was saying, "You sit here to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck." You see, it was against God's law to strike a person who had not been proven guilty of breaking any law.

Acts 23:4-5

Those standing near Paul said to him, "Do you dare to insult God's high priest?" (5) "I'm sorry, brothers. I didn't realize he was the high priest," Paul replied, "for the Scriptures say, 'You must not speak evil of any of your rulers.'"

Evidently, Paul did not realize that this was the high priest that commanded Paul be slapped on the mouth. He was instantly sorry he had been disrespectful to the high priest. He knew that God wants us to show respect those who are in authority over us.

But watch how the Holy Spirit gives Paul wisdom at this point: The council of religious leaders (the Sanhedrin) was made up of two groups: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. These groups had very

different views about spiritual matters. The Pharisees believed in the resurrection of the dead. They believed in heaven and the possibility of spending eternity with God. The Sadducees, on the other hand, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. They rejected the idea of an afterlife in heaven with God.

Let's see how Paul, who was brought up as a Pharisee, took advantage of this difference between these two groups in the Jewish high council.

Acts 23:6-8

Paul realized that some members of the high council were Sadducees and some were Pharisees, so he shouted, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, as were my ancestors! And I am on trial because my hope is in the resurrection of the dead!" (7) This divided the council--the Pharisees against the Sadducees-- (8) for the Sadducees say there is no resurrection or angels or spirits, but the Pharisees believe in all of these.

An argument broke out between these two groups and suddenly the focus was not on Paul, but on their different opinion about the afterlife.

Acts 23:9-10

*So there was a great uproar. Some of the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees jumped up and began to argue forcefully. "We see nothing wrong with him," they shouted. "Perhaps a spirit or an angel spoke to him." (10) As the conflict grew more violent, **the commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart**. So he ordered his soldiers to go and rescue him by force and take him back to the fortress.*

The two groups argued and became so violent that the Roman army commander was afraid they would tear Paul into pieces. So, he ordered soldiers to take Paul away from the religious leaders by force.

So, can you see God's hand in this? God used the Roman soldiers to protect Paul and he was taken to the barracks where he was safe from the angry Jewish religious leaders.

Acts 23:11

That night the Lord appeared to Paul and said, "Be encouraged, Paul. Just as you have been a witness to me here in Jerusalem, you must preach the Good News in Rome as well."

The Holy Spirit is faithful to comfort us and help us when we face difficult circumstances. That night He appeared to Paul and encouraged him by telling him He had a plan and a purpose in allowing Paul to go through this trial.

But wait! There's more excitement about to happen! While Paul was safe in the barracks, unbelieving Jews were plotting evil against Paul.

Acts 23:12-15

*The next morning a group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an **oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul**. (13) There were more than forty of them in the conspiracy. (14) They went to the leading priests and elders and told them, "We have bound ourselves with an oath to eat nothing until we have killed Paul. (15) **So you and the high council should ask the commander to bring Paul back to the council again. Pretend you want to examine his case more fully. We will kill him on the way.**"*

More than forty unbelieving Jews came up with a plan to end Paul's life. First, they threatened to not eat or drink anything until Paul was killed. Then they told the religious leaders to ask the commander to bring Paul back to the council again to ask him more questions. Their plan was to ambush Paul on his way to the council.

But as these men were plotting to kill Paul, his young nephew just happened to overhear their conversation.

Acts 23:16-17

But Paul's nephew—his sister's son—heard of their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul. (17) Paul called for one of the Roman officers and said, "Take this young man to the commander. He has something important to tell him."

Do you see God's hand in this? There are no coincidences for God's children. God placed Paul's nephew at the right place at the right time for an important purpose.

Acts 23:18-22

So the officer did, explaining, "Paul, the prisoner, called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you because he has something to tell you." (19) The commander took his hand, led him aside, and asked, "What is it you want to tell me?" (20) Paul's nephew told him, "Some Jews are going to ask you to bring Paul before the high council tomorrow, pretending they want to get some more information. (21) But don't do it! There are more than forty men hiding along the way ready to ambush him. They have vowed not to eat or drink anything until they have killed him. They are ready now, just waiting for your consent." (22) "Don't let anyone know you told me this," the commander warned the young man.

Ask: What risk did Paul's nephew take? (They could have killed him.)

If you heard that someone was planning to hurt someone else, would you have the courage to do what you know is right? The Holy Spirit will give you courage if you ask Him for it.

God used Paul's nephew to protect Paul from being killed. The commander listened to this boy and prepared 470 soldiers to take Paul to safety.

Acts 23:23-24

Then the commander called two of his officers and ordered, "Get 200 soldiers ready to leave for Caesarea at nine o'clock tonight. Also take 200 spearmen and 70 mounted troops. (24) Provide horses for Paul to ride, and get him safely to Governor Felix."

The commander wrote a letter to the governor explaining why he was sending Paul to him.

Acts 23:27-30

“This man was seized by some Jews, and they were about to kill him when I arrived with the troops. When I learned that he was a Roman citizen, I removed him to safety. (28) Then I took him to their high council to try to learn the basis of the accusations against him. (29) I soon discovered the charge was something regarding their religious law—certainly nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. (30) But when I was informed of a plot to kill him, I immediately sent him on to you. I have told his accusers to bring their charges before you.”

Paul arrived safely in Caesarea with the letter to Felix.

Acts 23:33

When they arrived in Caesarea, they presented Paul and the letter to Governor Felix.

After Felix read the letter from the Roman commander, he said that until those who were accusing Paul of committing a crime came, he would be guarded by soldiers in King Herod's palace.

Acts 23:34-35

He read it and then asked Paul what province he was from. “Cilicia,” Paul answered. (35) “I will hear your case myself when your accusers arrive,” the governor told him. Then the governor ordered him kept in the prison at Herod's headquarters.

Paul's enemies plotted to end his life. But God is in control and had a plan and a purpose for Paul. No one was going to end Paul's life until God's purposes for him were complete.

God has a plan and a purpose for your life, as well. If you have put your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit will give you courage, wisdom and protection as you live your life for Him.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You that You have a plan and a purpose for our lives. Help us to have confidence as we walk in obedience to Your word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

GAME CENTER

Tic-Tac-Toe

Draw a large tic-tac-toe grid on the chalkboard. Write the following names or words on the grid, one word per square: **Ananias, Paul's nephew, Sanhedrin, rescue, commander, plans, Paul, the Lord, and plot.**

Divide the class into two teams (the **X**'s and the **O**'s). A player on the first team will select a square. If the player correctly answers a question about the person or thing named in that square, the player's team gets to mark its letter (**X** or **O**) in the square. If the player cannot answer the question, play passes to the other team; a player on the second team can choose the same square or another square. The first team to get three **X**s or **O**s in a row wins.

Questions of Tic-Tac-Toe:

- **Ananias:** What was Ananias position (that is, who was Ananias)? (He was the High priest. Vs 2)
- **Paul's nephew:** What did the commander do to Paul's nephew after the centurion presented the boy to him? (The commander took his hand, led him aside. Vs 19)
- **Sanhedrin:** When Paul stood before the Sanhedrin, what made the high priest angry? (After he ordered Paul to be slapped, Paul insulted him by calling him a “*corrupt hypocrite.*” Vs 3)

- **Rescue:** How did the Holy Spirit use the commander to rescue Paul? (The commander ordered his soldiers to go and rescue him by force. Vs 10)
- **Commander:** Where did the commander tell his men to take Paul when they rescued him from the Sanhedrin? (To take him back to the fortress. Vs 10)
- **Plans:** When a group of Jews laid out plans against Paul, what did they say they would NOT do until they had killed Paul? (A group of Jews got together and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. Vs 12)
- **Paul:** What verdict did Paul receive from the Pharisees? (Not guilty, "We find nothing wrong with this man." Vs 9)
- **The Lord:** When the Lord stood near Paul during the night, what were His first words to Paul? ("Take courage!" Vs 11)
- **Plot:** How many men were involved in the plot to kill Paul? (There were more than forty of them in the conspiracy. Vs 13)

Or, use the following questions in another game or discussion.

1. Why did the Roman commander want the Jewish religious leaders to examine Paul? (Vs 22:30. The commander assumed the issue was about the Jewish religion and he wanted to find out what the trouble was all about, so he released Paul to have him stand before them.)
2. Why did Paul tell the High Priest that God would strike him? (Vs 3. Paul knew it was illegal to slap a man before proving he had committed a crime. Paul was saying, "You sit here to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck.")
3. How did Paul respond when he realized he spoke harshly to the high priest? (Vs 5. Paul repented because he knew it was against God's law to speak evil of rules.)
4. What belief of Paul caused the strong argument between the Pharisees and the Sadducees? (Paul declared himself to be a Pharisee, believing in the resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees said they found no fault with Paul, but the Sadducees argued against that verdict because they did not believe in the resurrection, angels, or spirits.)
5. Why did the commander order his soldier to put Paul in the barracks? (Vs 10. The commander was afraid they would tear Paul apart.)
6. How did God comfort and encourage Paul in the barracks? (Vs 11. God assured him that He had a plan; Paul must preach the Good News in Rome.)
7. What did the unbelieving Jews say they wouldn't do until Paul was killed? (Vs 12. They bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.)
8. What was their plan to kill Paul? (Vs 15. They told the religious leaders to ask the commander to bring Paul back to the council again to examine his case more fully. Then they planned to kill him on his way to the council.)
9. Who stopped their evil plot? (Vs 16. Paul's nephew heard their plan and went to the fortress and told Paul.)
10. Why was it a big risk for Paul's nephew to go to the barracks? (He risked being seen by the conspirators; and, the Romans might not have believed him.)
11. What did the commander do to protect Paul? (Vs 24. The commander got Paul safely to Governor Felix in Caesarea. And he sent a letter to explain the situation.)

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