



DEVOTIONAL

“What rotten luck I’ve been having lately!” “I’m having a bad day!” “Oh, well, whatever will be will be, and there’s nothing that we can do about it!”

You’ve probably heard people say all of the above. Perhaps you’ve even said or thought something similar yourself at times. But all of those declarations are at odds with biblical truth, because each statement goes against the truth of God’s providence. There is no such thing as luck or pure chance. If we have a bad day, it is because the Lord ordained these circumstances for our benefit. Bad days don’t just happen! “Whatever will be will be” reflects a view of our circumstances as being caused by impersonal fate.

The Bible often teaches and illustrates the doctrine of God’s providence and it should be a source of great comfort and instruction for every believer. It means that God is not distant, passive, or unconcerned with the daily events in our lives. Rather, as our loving and caring Heavenly Father, He actively governs the daily events of our lives, usually behind the scenes, without in any way robbing us of the duty of making responsible choices.

The story before us contains no exposition of biblical doctrine, no exhortations, and no commands. Rather, it illustrates for us the doctrine taught and illustrated elsewhere of God’s providence. The governing verse for this and all of the events before Paul reaches Rome is verse 11, where the Lord promises Paul that he must witness at Rome also. God has declared His sovereign purpose, and we will see it unfold in the chapters ahead. Here, we learn that ...

When we face trials and opposition in our service for the Lord, we should trust Him to protect us by His providence and to work out His sovereign plan for our lives.

God declares that Paul will bear witness for Him in Rome. Over 40 Jewish terrorists determine that even if they die in the process, they will not eat or drink until they assassinate Paul. Guess who prevails? It just “so happens” that Paul’s nephew gets wind of the plot and tells Paul, who sends him to the commander, who is willing to listen to the boy’s story and act on it. He calls together 470 armed troops to escort Paul safely to the Roman governor, Felix, at Caesarea. **God wins!**¹

¹ Sermon by Steve Cole found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-61-god-s-providential-protection-acts-2312-35>

OPEN IT

1. Our text tells us of men who gave up food and drink as an oath. What food or drink would you struggle to give up?

READ IT

Acts 23:12–35

EXPLORE IT

2. What was the conspiracy against Paul?
3. What oath did the conspirators make?
4. Who made Paul aware of the conspiracy?
5. What did the Roman Tribune do to address the problem?
6. When Paul's nephew heard about the plot, what did he do?

APPLY IT

DO SOMETHING, GOD!!!

The names of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit aren't mentioned in these verses—it's a notable absence that reminds me of the book of Esther. In that book, too, the name of God is missing, but His fingerprints are everywhere within the story. God works in various ways to accomplish His purposes, even when we can't see Him. In this passage the same Lord who promised that Paul would get to Rome works through people and circumstances to accomplish His agenda (cf. v. 11). We sometimes think God isn't working when we don't see visible signs of His sovereignty. But never mistake the lack of the spectacular for the inactivity of God. His quiet, invisible hand is always at work.²

7. **In what ways was God working behind the scenes to protect Paul throughout our text? Was Paul aware of any of these in the moment?**

8. **Why does God choose to keep so much of His work hidden from our sight? How can not knowing the plans of God be good for us?**

9. **What things hamper our seeing God work in our day-to-day activities? How can we better recognize the hand of God upon our lives?**

Even when you don't feel like God is around, the truth is that He has been deeply involved in your life since your birth. He's walked with you each step of the way and has sent His angels down to protect you more times than you will ever realize. None of us can ever know how many people God has brought into our life as a way to influence us and help us. All the events in your life, good and bad, God has used as opportunities to bring you to Him. Everything we go through has a purpose.³

10. **When have you seen God clearly moving in your own life? Was it clear to you in the moment? How does this experience give you greater faith?**

² Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Acts (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)* (Kindle Locations 7855-7856). Holman Reference. Kindle Edition.

³ Devotional by Megan Bailey entitled "How God is Working Behind the Scenes For You" found @<https://www.beliefnet.com/inspiration/how-god-is-working-behind-the-scenes-for-you.aspx>

11. What is the relationship between verse 11 and the rest of the chapter? What does verse 11 guarantee, and what does it not guarantee?

Do we have anything like the guarantee or promise that Paul was given?

12. The Lord prepared Paul for the challenging moments he would soon face with words of encouragement. What specific encouragements can we draw from Christ and His Word that will enable us to stand strong when future troubles come our way?

LET'S GET HIM OR DIE TRYING!!!

The Asian Jews had been frustrated in their attempts to lynch Paul, and the Sanhedrin had been unable to convict him of any offence. So now a group of more than forty Jewish men hatched a plot to murder him, binding themselves by oath to eat and drink nothing until they had succeeded. They then prevailed on the chief priests to persuade the Sanhedrin to petition the commander to cooperate with them. Their scheme was to have Paul brought back to court along narrow streets where he could easily be intercepted and killed. It seemed that everybody was now involved in the conspiracy and that Paul was in extreme danger.⁴

13. According to Acts 21:21–24, the Jews' racism against the Gentiles caused them to be undone and scheme to kill Paul. What is it about racism and its roots that lead people to such fits of anger and even hostility today?

The threat came from a group of forty zealous Jews who placed themselves under a vow to neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (vv. 12–13). The Greek word used to express their oath is particularly strong (*anathematiz*). They placed themselves under an anathema, a curse, probably in some such form as "May I be cursed/eternally damned if ... "One wonders if they died of hunger or thirst, for their vow was surely not fulfilled. Actually, the Jewish law provided for the release from a vow that was unfulfillable because of some unforeseen circumstance (Mishna, Nedarim 3.3). Paul's removal under heavy Roman guard would have qualified.⁵

⁴ Stott, John. *The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (Kindle Locations 6464–6468). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Polhill, John B. *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: 26 (The New American Commentary)* (p. 472). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

14. What does these men's oath reveal about them? What lessons can we learn from this situation when it comes to making outlandish oaths or statements today?

15. Luke gives us a contrast between Jesus and humanity; the former speaks softly and yet fulfills His promises completely, and the latter boasts loudly and fulfills nothing. How does a believer go about following the model of Jesus and not the 40 conspirators in everyday life?

CHILDREN ARE TO BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD—WRONG

Somehow news of it reached the ears of Paul's nephew. All attempts to learn more about this young man and how he got wind of what was happening are speculative, and we must be content to remain ignorant about Paul's family connections in Jerusalem. Certainly, there is no reason to pronounce the story of the boy impossible or even improbable. Some commentators find it strange that the boy was able to go directly to Paul in the barracks and tell him the story: if the boy could get in so easily, why not a conspirator also? But other references to prison conditions at the time suggest that prisoners were easily accessible to their friends, who would bring them food and other small comforts.

On receiving the boy's message, Paul naturally wished it to be communicated to the tribune and asked one of the centurions to take the boy to him....The fact that the tribune took the boy by the hand has also been the subject of scholarly sarcasm: 'Never was a tribune so amiable,' said Loisy. But the impression we get is rather that the lad was quite young, and the tribune's action is appropriate.⁶

16. God would use a young boy greatly in Paul's life. Who are some young people around you? In what ways is God using the young people to impact your life?

17. The age of Paul's nephew served as an advantage in helping to respond to this situation. How can a church create opportunities for the youngest to serve God and grow us?

⁶ Marshall, I. Howard. *Acts: 5 (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)* (p. 388). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

Paul's removal to Caesarea took the steam out of a problem that had created three days of high tension for the Jerusalem garrison. The commander's letter to the governor (Acts 23:26–30) followed the typical format of official first-century correspondence. **Like any good politician, the noble tribune gave a spin to the facts making him look slightly more knowledgeable and in charge than he really was. Still, give Tribune Claudius Lysias a medal for effective crowd control and riot dousing.**

Caesarea was about sixty miles (one hundred kilometers) northwest of Jerusalem. It was the governmental center of the province of Judea, and site of Herod's palace, which was occupied by Governor Marcus Antonius Felix. The military escort with Paul left Jerusalem about 9:00 P.M. and traveled thirty-seven miles by forced march, arriving at Antipatris before dawn. Next day the four hundred infantry and spearmen returned to Jerusalem. The cavalry took the prisoner the last twenty-seven miles.⁷

18. In what ways had Tribune Claudius Lysias spun the truth in order to make himself look good? Is it wrong for a Christian to do likewise? When, if ever, does this cross a line?

“But even the most careful and cunning of human plans cannot succeed if God opposes them. No weapon forged against him will prevail.”⁸

19. How does our passage this week show the above quote to be true? Where have you seen this quote to be true in your own life?

20. Where do you need God working behind the scenes for you today? What encouragement can you draw from this event in Paul's life?

⁷ Girard, Robert C. *The Book of Acts (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series)* (Kindle Locations 5109-5111). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁸ Stott, John. *The Message of Acts (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (Kindle Locations 6468-6469). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

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