The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V28 N43 November 1, 2026

UNHINDERED

"The God Who Goes Before"

Acts 23:12-22

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

PERSONAL GOD

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? 2 My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.."

Psalm 121:1-2

Q?

How was divine providence at work in Paul's rescue?

Paul undoubtedly had a personal relationship to the one true *personal* God through faith in Jesus Christ. That relationship included the following *defining* traits. Paul was born again as are other Christians; Paul was indwelt by the Holy Spirit as are other Christians. He was in the process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ as are other Christians. God was sovereignly at work behind the scenes to accomplish the purposes he had for Paul as he is in the lives of other Christians. Other examples of the traits of Paul's personal relationship to God could be cited—e.g. forgiveness, justification, etc. Of course, other Christians share the same type of relationship to the same one true *personal* God. They have the same kind of relationship to God with the same defining traits as the apostle. You might say that the "upper story" of Paul's life is the "upper story" of their lives too.

Paul's personal relationship with God manifested or expressed itself in *associated* traits of his personal life—personal experiences that belonged to him alone. He was born again like other Christians, but his experience of the new birth on the road to Damascus, following his history of actively persecuting the church, was unique to him. This is true in part because these associated traits were all informed by where he was born, how he was brought up, and by whom he was educated. In other words, his personal relationship to God was experienced in the context of his unique family relationships, religious upbringing, and personal education, that is, his unique cultural context—little of which, if anything at all, is shared with other Christians, especially contemporary ones—not to mention he was an apostle. More importantly, that suggests the outworking of God's providence in his life was his alone. The "lower story" of Paul's life belongs to him alone; it's not the "lower story" of other Christians. Each one has their own "lower story." And so, the fact that God works providentially in the lives of all Christians is a *defining* trait of their relationship to God, but the *associated* traits or details of God's providential working are unique to each and every believer. Events in the life of Paul rooted in the "upper story" of his life are applicable to all Christians, that is, those who share the defining traits of his relationship to God, not so with regard to the events in his life rooted in his "lower story." These may be informative, but they are not directly applicable.

The story of Paul's final trip to Jerusalem is the story of how God providentially worked in his life to send him "far away to the Gentiles" (Ac 22:21; 23:11), namely, to Rome. Regarding the narrative beginning in 21:17 and ending in 23:22, one commentator writes: "In sum this passage is rooted in God's providence, which moves to protect God's children, although the means are not always known as they are here. God works behind-the-scenes here. Stephen's martyrdom shows that providence also does not always mean physical rescue as here with Paul. Paul is assured that he will reach Rome (23:11). It is ironic that Roman justice will bring him there as a prisoner so that Paul will arrive safely and immediately be speaking to the highest level of Roman society. It is unlikely that if Paul journeyed as part of a missionary outreach to Rome on his own, such a high-level audience would be possible. It is one of the mysteries of God and his providence that many times we cannot see why things are happening as they are. Yet God is surely at work in ways we could not have planned for ourselves" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 678-79). The same providence of God at work in Paul's life is at work in the lives of other Christians, too, but in different ways unique to each one.

1 EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read Acts 23:12-22

12 When it was day, the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 There were more than forty who made this conspiracy. 14 They went to the chief priests and elders and said, "We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath to taste no food till we have killed Paul. 15 Now therefore you, along with the council, give notice to the tribune to bring him down to you, as though you were going to determine his case more exactly. And we are ready to kill him before he comes near."

16 Now the son of Paul's sister heard of their ambush, so he went and entered the barracks and told Paul. 17 Paul called one of the centurions and said, "Take this young man to the tribune, for he has something to tell him." 18 So he took him and brought him to the tribune and said, "Paul the prisoner called me and asked me to bring this young man to you, as he has something to say to you." 19 The tribune took him by the hand, and going aside asked him privately, "What is it that you have to tell me?" 20 And he said, "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. 21 But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent." 22 So the tribune dismissed the young man, charging him, "Tell no one that you have informed me of these things."

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Bracket "When it was day" in v. 12.
- Circle "the Jews" in v. 12.
- Circle "plot" in v. 12.
- Circle "oath" in vv. 12, 14, 21.
- Circle "the council" in vv. 15, 20.
- Bracket "son of Paul's sister" in v. 16.
- Underline "tribune" in vv. 15, 17, 18, 19, 22.
- Circle "the barracks" in v. 16.
- Circle "young man" in vv. 17, 18, 22.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."

2 DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. What do you infer about Paul's adversaries from how Luke describes them in verses 12 and 13?

2. The conspirators seek the cooperation of the chief priests and elders in their murderous conspiracy. Where do you see the irony in that?

3. Describe what they wanted the council to do and why.

4. Identify and describe the whistleblower who revealed their conspiracy to the tribune.

5. The introduction of this unnamed character raises some interesting question. What questions did it raise for you?

6. How was it that this person could visit Paul in custody?

7. His description of the conspiracy is more detailed than the conspirators' description to the council. *How* so and *why* so?

8. Their plot *could* have worked, perhaps *would* have worked. Explain why it didn't.

9. This episode has an "upper story"—God is up to something. What is it?

10. **Discussion:** Divine providence is evident in Paul's life throughout Luke's description of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem. Talk about divine providence at work in the life of all believers.

3 EXPLORE RESOURCES

Commentary On The Text

Acts 23:12-22 is part of Luke's extended narrative describing Paul's final visit to Jerusalem that begins in Acts 21:17 and ends in 23:35. The key to understanding the "upper story" of this narrative, namely, what God was doing through the twists and turns of the plot, is found in Acts 22:21 and 23:11. The first reads, "And he said to me 'Go for I will send you far away to the Gentiles,'" —Paul referring to what the Lord had told him in the temple following his conversion. The second reads, "Take courage, for as you have testified to the facts about me in Jerusalem, so you must testify also in Rome" — Luke referring to what the Lord told Paul while in protective custody, following his appearance before the Sanhedrin (23:1-10). Because God had plans for Paul, rather than frustrate them, all human efforts to do away with the apostle merely aided in their accomplishment.

The story is about God's providential fulfillment of the purposes he had for his apostle. In this particular episode, God uses the conspiracy concocted by forty especially zealous enemies of Paul to move him out of Jerusalem and on to Caesarea, a step closer to Rome. The verses are divided into two paragraphs in the ESV. Verses 12-14 describe the plot the conspirators brought to the Sanhedrin accompanied by instructions regarding how the council might join with them as coconspirators. Verses 15-22 describe the exposing and foiling of the conspiracy by Paul's young nephew with the cooperation of Lysias, the Roman tribune.

The plot was a simple one. Here's what the conspirators told the chief priest and elders they want the Sanhedrin to do: "Now then, you and the Sanhedrin petition the commander to bring him before you on the pretext of wanting more accurate information about his case. We are ready to kill him before he gets here" (vv. 14-15 NIV). The plot is described in more detail when Paul's nephew reveals it to the tribune, because in the first instance the conspirators are only seeking the Sanhedrin's cooperation. Here's what he told Lysias: "The Jews have agreed to ask you to bring Paul down to the council tomorrow, as though they were going to inquire somewhat more closely about him. But do not be persuaded by them, for more than forty of their men are lying in ambush for him, who have bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they have killed him. And now they are ready, waiting for your consent" (vv. 20-21 NIV). The tribune had to have additional details in order to foil their conspiracy.

Paul's nephew appears out-of-the-blue to save the day. Luke tells his readers nothing more about the young man other than he is the "son of Paul's sister" (v. 16). According to one commentator, "How Paul's nephew learned of the plot is anybody's guess" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 472-73). The answer to that question remains hidden behind the veil of divine providence. "His accessibility to Paul was not unusual. Prisoners of high rank, such as Paul with his Roman citizenship, were often given a great deal of liberty for visits from family and friends" (Polhill, 473). Hearing the plot, Lysias acted decisively telling Paul's nephew to keep the matter to himself and by arranging to have Paul moved to Caesarea, out of harm's way and one step closer to Rome. His decisiveness has worked to Paul's benefit three times: when Lysias intervened with his troops as Paul was attached in the temple (21:31-36), when he again intervened as the Sanhedrin hearing broke into riotous discord (23:10), and in response to the plot on Paul's life.

By way of summary, one literary critic writes: "The narrative is interested not only in vividly portraying the threat but also in giving a detailed account of how Paul escaped. It was not by his own heroic action. Paul himself does very little. His nephew takes the initiative, bringing word to Paul, and Paul simply asks a centurion to take his nephew to the tribune. Most of the action swirls around Paul, carrying him along, while minor characters in the overall narrative become the chief actors in this episode. Nor did Paul escape by the amazing intervention of some nonhuman force, as in previous prison rescues The narrative concentrates on the plot of Paul's enemies and the countermoves of a youth and Roman tribune. To be sure, the vision that precedes this episode in 23:11 may suggest that the Lord's purpose of bringing Paul to Rome is somehow being realized through these events. However, this purpose is being realized through the clash of human action and counteraction among persons who know nothing of the Lord's purpose for Paul" (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 293). So it is that divine providence works.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 12 ***When it was day*** Paul was placed in protective custody to prevent him from being "torn to pieces" by a faction of the dissenting Pharisees and Sadducees on the council (v. 10). During the night that followed, the Lord assured Paul that as he had testified in Jerusalem, he would also testify in Rome (v. 11).

v. 12 ***the Jews*** "The Lord's assuring vision to Paul was timely, for his troubles were far from over. 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)" (John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 472). "Although the reference to 'Jews' is vague, the point is that some but not all Jews are very hostile toward Paul and are trying to do something to remove him from the scene. From a narrative standpoint, the effort to take matters into their own hands files in the face of God's program as revealed in Acts 23:11 . . . They irony is that they take an oath before God that actually violates God's standards and will" (Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 677).

v. 12 ***plot*** Cf. "The next morning some Jews formed a *conspiracy* and bound themselves with an *oath* not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul" (NIV).

vv. 12, 14, 21 ***oath*** "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 . . . '" (Polhill, 472). "The rabbis allowed four types of vows to be broken: 'vows of incitement, vows of exaggeration, vows made in error, and vows that cannot be fulfilled by reason of constraint' (*M Nedarim* 3.1-3)—exclusions allowing for almost any contingency" (Richard N. Longenecker, "The Acts of the Apostles," in *John-Acts*, vol. 9, EBC, 533).

vv. 15, 20 ***the council*** I.e., the Sanhedrin. "The Sanhedrin was to call a session and have the tribune deliver Paul to them under the pretense of giving him a further hearing (v. 14-15). On the way between Antonia and the council chamber, they would ambush and kill Paul" (Polhill, 472). "The complicity of the chief priests and elders in this plot reveals both their lack of a legitimate case against Paul and their base characters" (Stanley D. Toussaint, "Acts," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 420).

v. 16 ***son of Paul's sister*** "We have no knowledge about Paul's sister and his nephew, or of how the young man learned of the plot. In this letters Paul says nothing of his immediate family, and this is Luke's only reference to any of Paul's relatives . . . From Philippians 3:8 where Paul speaks of having 'lost all things' for the sake of Christ, many have supposed that he was disinherited by his family for accepting and proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. Such a supposition seems likely" (Longenecker, 534).

v. 16 ***the barracks*** Referred to frequently in Acts 21-23. In the book of Acts, "the barracks" refers to the Antonia Fortress, a major Roman military stronghold located at the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. It apparently accommodated military personnel and provided a place to detain prisoners (cf. 21:24, 37; 22:24; 23:10, 16, 32).

vv. 15 et al. ***tribune*** "The tribune Claudius Lysias [23:26] is an important figure in 23:12-35. His decisive response to information from Paul's nephew saves Paul from the ambush. The narrator tells enough about Lysias' words and actions to provide an interesting characterization that shows both consistency and development. Lysias is a man of decisive action" (Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts*, vol. 2, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 294).

vv. 17, 18, 22 ***young man*** "The detail implies that he was still relatively youthful (23:19), but with enough boldness to advise the tribune (23:21)—the initial Greek term itself (23:17) would cover anyone from twenty to forty years of age" (James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 307)—he was probably closer to twenty than to forty but certainly not a teenager. "Many unsolved questions come to mind. Was Paul's nephew a Cristian? How did he secure this information? Did Paul's sister live in Jerusalem? If Paul had relatives living in Jerusalem, why did he not stay with them? (Toussaint, 420).

4 APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

The Lord providentially orchestrates the "lower story" events of believers' lives so that he might accomplish his "upper story" purposes for them as he did in Paul's life.



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?

PARENT CONNECTION

How do you handle situations when things aren't going as you expected? Do you get angry and pout, doom-spiral, retreat and cocoon? Being a little bit of a control freak (or lot of bit…) I get pretty unsettled and anxious. What I forget to remember is that while I feel out of control because things aren't going the way I expected, God is always in control. He is exercising His sovereignty, working out every detail behind the scenes, and inviting me to trust Him in faith. These things are happening on a regular basis as an adult—job, finances, relationships, etc. What perfect discipleship opportunities for our kids! Our kids are watching us, taking mental notes, and modeling our behavior. Knowing this, I'm reminded to practice what I preach. If I want them to handle difficult situations in prayer, I'd better model that for them on my knees. If I want them to be faithful adults who trust Jesus no matter the circumstances, I'd better help them practice that while they are young by inviting them into my experience. Where is God challenging you to trust Him today? How are you reacting when hiccups threaten your trust and faith? What needs to change in your personal walk with God that will help you exercise faith and trust? How will you teach your kids to run to the cross when things don't work out as expected? We aren't walking out our faith by ourselves. Our kids are part of our community and need us to lead them in a trusting relationship with the Lord. We're praying for you!

What Does The Bible Say?	What Do You Think?	What Do You Do?
Read Acts 23:12-22 1. What did the Jewish leaders plan to do to Paul? 2. Who told Paul about the plan? 3. How did the tribune respond to the boy?	Do you think Paul's nephew was afraid to tell the Romans about the plan?	Standing up for what is right can be hard. This week, look for opportunities to stand up for what is right.

CORE COMPETENCY: Personal God

I believe God cares about everything in my life.

MEMORY VERSE: Colossians 3:17

"*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*"

KidPIXCOUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week. Questions: **kids@wearecentral.org**

_____ I completed my Bible Study
_____ I memorized this week's verse
_____ I brought my Bible to church
_____ I brought a friend

CHILD'S NAME _____ GRADE _____ PARENT SIGNATURE _____

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.
Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.
Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.
The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.
Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.
Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.
Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.
Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.
Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.
Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.
Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.
Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.
Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.
Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others
Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.
Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.
Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.
Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.
Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.
Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.

CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.
Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.
Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.
Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.
Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.
Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.
Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.
Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.
Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.
Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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OUR MISSION
Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.