

Backstabbers

How God Protects You from Plots You Never Knew About Acts 23:12–35

Focus: More than 40 men conspire to kill Paul, but God uses an unexpected messenger to expose the plot. This lesson emphasizes divine protection, hidden intercessors, and God's sovereignty over the plans of the wicked.

I. Why This Study?

A. Objective:

1. To examine how God protects Paul from a deadly conspiracy through unseen means.
2. To explore the role of divine providence in thwarting enemy plans.
3. To recognize how God uses ordinary people and quiet interventions to accomplish extraordinary protection.

B. Relevance:

1. Many believers live with anxiety about unseen opposition— _____, _____, or _____ behind the scenes.
2. This passage offers assurance that God sees what we cannot and works through surprising channels to _____ His people.
3. Learning to trust divine sovereignty when we're unaware of the dangers around us builds _____.

II. Context of Acts 23:12–35

A. The Background of the Plot Against Paul:

1. After Paul's appearance before the Sanhedrin causes division, more than forty Jewish men form a conspiracy to kill him. These men take a solemn vow—what Luke calls a "swearing together"—indicating a _____ and deadly pact of secrecy.
2. They approach the chief priests and elders with a deceptive plan: have Paul summoned again under false pretenses so they can _____ and _____ him.
3. Paul's nephew overhears the plot and informs Paul, who calls on a centurion to bring the boy to the Roman commander, Claudius Lysias.

4. Lysias takes the threat _____. That same night, he organizes a massive military escort—200 foot soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen—to transport Paul safely to Caesarea.
5. A letter is sent to Governor Felix explaining the situation and affirming Paul's _____ citizenship and _____ standing.
6. Paul arrives safely at the governor's palace, where he is kept under guard until a formal hearing.

B. Historical and Cultural Insight:

1. The vow taken by the conspirators likely invoked a form of self-cursing if they failed—an “_____” vow common in ancient Jewish oaths. It reveals how religious _____, when corrupted, can justify even murderous intent.
2. Their request to involve the Sanhedrin indicates a disturbing _____ between violence and religious authority.
3. The use of nearly half the Roman garrison to protect Paul shows both the seriousness of the threat and the _____ his Roman citizenship carried.
4. Caesarea was the administrative capital of Judea and Felix's headquarters—a move from _____ danger to _____ jurisdiction.

C. Key Takeaway:

God is always working—often through unseen, _____ people—to dismantle schemes and secure your _____.

III. What Happens When God Shields You from What You Didn't See Coming?

A. 1. The Enemy Works in Secret—but So Does God (vv. 12–15)

1. Key Verses:
“They went to the chief priests and elders and said, ‘We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul.’”
2. Key Lessons:

- a) *More than forty men formed a sworn pact—a “conspiracy” that, in the original language, implies a tightly bound oath of secrecy and shared intent.*
- b) *Their plot wasn’t public—it was _____ wrapped, _____, and _____.*
- c) *Evil does not need truth to act. It only needs _____ from those who fear losing power.*
- d) *Dr. Mitri Raheb notes: “Political and religious violence often walks hand in hand, especially when fear replaces faith.” (Faith in the Face of Empire)*

B. God Uses the Overlooked to Expose the Enemy (vv. 16–22)

1. Key Verses:

“But when the son of Paul’s sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.”

2. Key Lessons:

- a) *Paul’s nephew—an otherwise unknown figure—plays a _____ role in stopping an assassination plot.*
- b) *There are no “_____” people in God’s plan. Those with no title or power may be holding the key to your protection.*
- c) *Luke highlights that this boy had access to both dangerous information and the Roman military compound—an intersection of _____ and _____.*
- d) *Dr. Esau McCaulley observes: “Deliverance often comes not through force but through information, and God often entrusts that knowledge to those we overlook.” (Reading While Black)*

C. 3. When God Protects You, He Overrides Systems and Scales Up Security (vv. 23–24)

1. Key Verses:

“Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen to go to Caesarea at nine tonight.”

2. Key Lessons:

- a) *The Roman commander does not hesitate—he deploys overwhelming protection.*
- b) *The order uses military terms associated with full readiness. Paul is not being _____ moved—he is being _____ escorted under armed guard.*
- c) *Protection doesn't always come quietly. Sometimes, God will make a _____ of His covering over your life.*
- d) *Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale reminds us: “When the threat is high, God doesn't whisper—He secures. And often, He does it in ways that confuse your enemies.” (Faithful and Focused)*

D. 4. God's Providence Goes Before You and Rewrites the Narrative (vv. 25–35)

1. Key Verses:

“I found that the accusation had to do with questions about their law, but there was no charge that deserved death or imprisonment.”

2. Key Lessons:

- a) *Claudius Lysias writes a formal letter not only to explain Paul's situation but also to legally _____ him.*
- b) *He _____ the entire incident: Paul is not a criminal, but a Roman citizen caught in a religious dispute.*
- c) *This is divine editing—where God not only protects your body but your _____ .*
- d) *Dr. Craig Keener writes: “Luke shows us how legal and imperial systems can become vessels of divine justice—even when they're unaware.” (Acts: An Exegetical Commentary)*

IV. IV. Scholars' and Theological Insights on Divine Protection

A. St. Irenaeus: “The invisible hand of God weaves what is seen and unseen into the tapestry of salvation.”

B. Rev. Dr. Cynthia Hale: “You may never know all that God has kept you from—but grace builds a fence before the attack even forms.”

C. Dr. Esau McCaulley: “Deliverance often comes quietly, through people who do not carry the weight of titles but carry the Word’s assignment.”

D. Dr. Craig Keener: “God’s sovereignty does not always feel miraculous, but the ordinary details—letters, nephews, soldiers—form the matrix of divine deliverance.”

E. Dr. Mitri Raheb: “In the context of empire, God’s protection is not the absence of danger but the presence of purpose and provision.”

V. V. Prayer Focus

1. Thank God for the dangers He’s protected you from—especially the ones you never knew about.
2. Pray for trust in the quiet work of God when the threat is loud but the answer hasn’t come.
3. Ask God to help you discern and appreciate the “nephews” in your life—the overlooked instruments of deliverance.
4. Intercede for those living under threat, injustice, or silent attack.

VI. Key Takeaway

God sees every scheme and answers with strategy. He may not always cancel the threat, but He will always cover His purpose.