

Acts 23:1-35: Do You Know That God Intervenes in Your Life All the Time?

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I. Introduction

Have you ever been stuck, looking for a way out, and then somehow, out of nowhere you get the help you needed? Have you ever been looking for an answer, you're racking your brain for a solution then suddenly a thought pops into your head which solves your problem? Do you see these as coincidences? Is it possible that God is always there, working on our behalf, waiting to intervene, especially when dealing with a crisis?

II. Acts 23:1-35: Does God Intervene in Our Lives Every Day?

23:1-10, Paul failed to persuade the mob who wanted to kill him in the temple, so the Roman commander Claudius Lysias, still unaware why they wanted Paul dead, took him into custody and planned to torture him to get to the truth. But since Paul was a Roman citizen, he couldn't. So he convened the entire Sanhedrin to see if he could find out for certain the accusations against Paul. He set Paul before them and Paul began his defense. Paul makes an interesting statement; he says that everything he's done up to this point has been in good conscience before God (even when he was killing Christians, Paul thought he was doing God's work). Suddenly, the high priest Ananias ordered him to be struck on the mouth. This wasn't surprising; Ananias was insolent, profane, greedy, cruel and violent. He was assassinated for his pro-Roman policy. Jewish historian Josephus wrote that he was dragged out of an aqueduct and killed along with his brother Hezekiah. Paul calls him a whitewashed wall, i.e., a hypocrite: he was the high priest of God so he seemed godly, but under that whitewash he was thoroughly corrupt. He's supposed to stand for the Law, yet he had Paul struck contrary to Jewish Law (Leviticus 19:15). Those near Paul rebuke him for speaking against the high priest. Paul didn't know it was the high priest, so he apologizes for disrespecting a ruler of God's people (Exodus 22:28).

Paul knowing that he's not going to get a fair hearing and knowing the division that exists between the Sadducees and Pharisees regarding their beliefs, especially on resurrection, states that he's a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee who's on trial for his hope in the resurrection. This drove a giant wedge between the Sadducees and Pharisees, in fact the Pharisees began defending Paul. They state that perhaps God spoke to Paul through a spirit or angel. Claudius, fearing for Paul's safety, ordered his soldiers to take him by force back to the barracks.

23:11, in the midst of all this chaos, the Lord Jesus Christ appears to Paul for a fourth time (Acts 9:5; 18:9-10; 22:17-21) and basically makes him bullet proof, i.e., He guarantees his safety all the way to Rome. Why does Jesus do this now? We discover why as another plot to kill Paul unfolds.

23:12-15, over 40 individuals took an oath to neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. The entire Sanhedrin (the chief priests are the Sadducees and the elders are the Pharisees) agreed to convince Claudius to bring Paul down with the pretense of investigating his case further, but in reality the assassins would lie in wait to kill him. The assassins failed (in fact Paul would live another 9 years). So did they starve to death? Not likely. There was a way out: the Mishna addressed such a case. Jewish law forbade breaking such a vow, but suicide was also illegal. So the individual who made such a vow was to go to the Rabbis who would find a way out of the vow.

23:16-22, those who view the universe as random see what happens next as a great stroke of luck for Paul. As it happens, Paul's nephew finds out about the plot against him and informs him. Paul then sends him to Claudius, who instructs the young man not to tell anyone that he's revealed this to him. Of all the people to find out about this plot, why Paul's nephew? Was this coincidence or the Lord moving in Paul's life to protect him as He promised? How do you see the "coincidences" in your life? Do you believe God intervenes in your life? Does He only do it for VIPs like Paul (He does it for all, even a helpless man and a dress-maker: Aeneas and Tabitha in Acts 9:32-43)?

23:23-30, Claudius then told two centurions to take Paul with 470 soldiers at night (9:00 pm) to Felix the governor in Caesarea (there were 200 heavily armed men, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen). Caesarea was the capital city and military headquarters of Judea Province. Governor Felix was born a slave, but later set free by Claudius Caesar, his childhood friend. Claudius made him governor of Judea in 53 AD. He was cruel, extremely corrupt and famous for his lust. Claudius Lysias also sent a letter which explained everything to Felix. However, Claudius lied in the letter to protect himself. He said that he rescued Paul from the mob when he learned that he was a Roman citizen. When in fact, he jailed Paul and almost tortured him before finding out he was a citizen. The letter also clearly states that Paul broke no Roman law.

23:31-35, the soldiers took Paul to Antipatris a Roman military base 35 miles northwest of Jerusalem and 27 miles from Caesarea. The next day the 400 soldiers return to Jerusalem and the 70 horsemen take Paul the rest of the way to Caesarea. They present the letter and Paul to Felix who read the letter and asked Paul which province he was from. When he learned he was from Cilicia, he said he'd hear his case when his accusers arrived. He also commanded that he be kept in Herod's palace. Felix may've been trying to pass this case on to someone else, as Pontius Pilate did (Luke 23:6-7). However, Cilicia was not a full province but under the jurisdiction of Syria. Felix as governor of Judea and deputy of the legate of Syria was legally bound to hear his case.

Does God intervene in our lives, if so, how? God is everywhere and knows everything all the time. He's so close to us, that we cannot exist without Him (Acts 17:27-28). And for those who are His children, His presence is inseparable from them (Galatians 4:6):

- God knows everything, including your every thought (2 Chronicles 16:9; Psalm 33:13-19; 139:2-4, 16; Proverbs 3:19; Isaiah 46:9-10; Matthew 9:4; John 4:18; Hebrews 4:13; 1 John 3:20).
- God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7-12; Jeremiah 23:24; Matthew 18:20; Acts 17:27-28).
- God is in you and His desire is for you and Him to walk through life hand-in-hand (John 17:20-26; Galatians 4:6; Psalm 139:16).

Therefore, God is always there waiting to intercede in your life....if you would only let Him, if you would only hear His voice when He cries out to you through what you see as "coincidences."



III. Conclusion

But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome." And when it was day, some of the Jews banded together and bound themselves under an oath, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. Now there were more than forty who had formed this conspiracy. They came to the chief priests and elders, and said, "We have bound ourselves under a great oath that we will eat nothing until we have killed Paul. Now you, therefore, together with the council, suggest to the commander that he be brought down to you tomorrow, as though you were going to make further inquiries concerning him; but we are ready to kill him before he comes near." So when Paul's sister's son heard of their ambush, he went and entered the barracks and told Paul.