

negatives

How much can a small boy between eight and ten years old actually do? Paul's nephew was able to do something really important. However, the key thing to notice in this is that he did not do it by himself. Paul told him what to do and what to say. And the chief captain did so as well (23:22).

True, the nephew probably heard about the plot and went to tell Paul about it without anyone telling him to do so (23:16). But informing Paul also shows that the lad was unable to do much else by himself.

Mostly, the boy was a lowly messenger. He is not the main character in the passage by any means. Moreover, if Paul's nephew were really important, wouldn't we be told more about him and his connection with Paul? And wouldn't he have appeared again later somewhere else in the Bible?

Some believe that the nephew may be named later in Paul's greetings in Rom. 16:7, 11, or 21. But the individuals in these few verses may only have been fellow Jewish believers rather than relatives.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Paul's nephew is only in one chapter.
A-1	() He is not named.
A-2	() He is only found in Acts 23.
A-3	() We don't know what became of him.
B	() He was only a boy.
B-1	() He was led by the hand (23:19).
B-2	() We don't know how old he was.
B-3	() He had to be told what to do (23:16, 22).
B-4	() He could not go to the chief captain by himself.
C	() He was only a messenger.
C-1	() His message was not very long (23:20-21).
C-2	() He only said what he was told to say (23:16, 20-21).
C-3	() The chief captain feared that he might talk too much (23:22).

positives

Despite the various negative suggestions made on the previous page, there is no denying that Paul's nephew was used by God to help spare the apostle's life. And since Paul's ministry was very important, so too was what his much-younger nephew did, even though he was "just a child."

Speaking of children, a good way to appreciate Paul's nephew is to compare him with other children in the Bible. For instance, how was he like the girl who told Naaman's wife about Elisha in 2 Kings 5:1-4?

Better still, how was he like the unnamed boy who gave up his lunch so that Jesus could use it to feed over five thousand people in John 6:8-14? Sunday school children are often told the story of the lad in John chapter six, but far more is recorded about Paul's nephew than about the boy with the lunch.

Probably the most important question about Paul's nephew is, "Why is what he did reported in such detail?" As pointed out earlier, the basic story could have been summarized in a single verse.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

D	() Paul's nephew was in God's plan.
D-1	() He helped save Paul's life.
D-2	() He heard about the plot by chance (23:16).
D-3	() God delights in using the weak to defeat the strong.
E	() He was <i>probably</i> in God's family.
E-1	() He was trusted by Paul.
E-2	() He was Paul's sister's son.
E-3	() He was not one of the plotters.
E-4	() He acted like a believer would act.
F	() He is in God's Book.
F-1	() He is like the little girl in 2 Kings 5:1-4.
F-2	() He is like the boy who shared his lunch in John 6:9.
F-3	() He is in the Bible to help us appreciate God's protection.

conclusions

worksheet answers

Nearly all the lines are correct or partly correct. In fact, the only one that is obviously wrong is line D-2. Paul’s nephew did not hear about the plot by chance. Though superficially it may have appeared to have involved luck, we know that it was part of God’s plan from the beginning (D). We know this, thanks to verse eleven. It was God’s will for the apostle to testify for Jesus in Rome rather than to be assassinated in Jerusalem.

Along the same line, one of the most important worksheet lines is F-3 which correctly states that the nephew is in the Bible to help us appreciate God’s protection. The Lord used a centurion (23:17), the chief captain (23:18-24), and hundreds of other Roman soldiers (23:23) to protect Paul from the 40 plus would-be assassins. But the key person in it all was just a child who was probably less than 12 years old (B-2). God delights in using the weak to defeat the strong (D-3). (See 1 Cor. 1:27-29.)

Several lines, including B-2, B-3, C, C-2, F-1, and F-2, probably should be marked as partly correct.

So what?

Are we living in the will of God? If so—in light of Acts 23:11 and the rest of the passage that follows—we should be of good cheer even if we face intense opposition and many troubles.

The longer story of deliverance at sea in chapter 27 makes the same point. Notice the striking similarity between God’s message of encouragement to Paul in 23:11 and the one given to him (and others through him) during the great storm in 27:22-23. The Lord stood by the apostle on both occasions because he was in God’s will.

Though evil men such as King Herod are sometimes allowed to kill God’s servants (as in 12:1-4), God is still in charge. This is clearly seen by how Peter was delivered from Herod’s hands (12:5-11) and how Paul was delivered from the would-be assassins (23:11-24).

In chapter 12, God used an angel, but in chapter 23 he chose to use a child, one so young that the chief captain led him by the hand (23:19). So let us rejoice; God still protects and uses the lowly for his glory.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most needful.

Epaphroditus - a second chance to serve

Philippians 2:23-30

2:23 Him [Timothy] therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. **2:24** But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you **Epaphroditus**, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. **2:26** For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. **2:27** For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. **2:28** I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful. **2:29** Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation: **2:30** Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

Philippians 4:16-19

4:16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. **4:17** Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. **4:18** But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of **Epaphroditus** the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God. **4:19** But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

courier and fellow soldier

Perhaps the most memorable thing about Epaphroditus is the fact that he became seriously ill and nearly died (2:27, 30) while helping Paul who was a prisoner (probably) in Rome.

Epaphroditus willingly risked his life by being the main courier who brought a large sum of money the considerable distance from Philippi to Rome (4:18). Moreover the long-distance travel and working with Paul in a prison setting was not great for his health. There was danger because of the violence of robbers, but the danger was probably even greater in that age because of disease. Both of these things are probably reflected in the "fellow soldier" title that Paul gave his helper (2:25).

Throughout history the number of soldiers who have died from disease has often outnumbered those who died from wounds. (This was especially so in the past compared to today.) The same is true of those like Epaphroditus who have engaged in missionary work. The more he traveled, the more he was exposed to dangerous diseases. In that sense, it would have been far safer for him to have stayed home.

Epaphroditus did not stay home however. Though he nearly died in the process, he was greatly used of the Lord. The gift that he brought to Paul was a great blessing at the time, and the Letter that he took back to Philippi is still a great blessing to us today.