

God Helps Us More Than We Know

International Bible Lesson

Acts 27:1-2, 33-44

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“And the soldiers’ counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land” (Acts 27:42-43—KJV).

“The soldiers made a plan to kill all the prisoners, in order to keep them from swimming ashore and escaping. But the army officer wanted to save Paul, so he stopped them from doing this. Instead, he ordered everyone who could swim to jump overboard first and swim ashore” (Acts 27:42-43—GNB).

“The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none might swim away and escape; but the centurion, wishing to save Paul, kept them from carrying out their plan. He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for the land” (Acts 27:42-43—NRSV).

When God helps someone else primarily, we may receive many gifts from God secondarily. When God helps us primarily, He may help many others secondarily. We can watch for and give thanks to God for the many ways He helps so many.

Before Paul suffered shipwreck with two hundred seventy-six sailors, soldiers, and prisoners, he foretold that all of them would survive. He encouraged them to eat; he offered a prayer of thanksgiving before them all, and then he ate too (Acts 27:34-37). Yet, in spite of all the good that Paul had done, the soldiers wanted to kill all of the prisoners after their ship ran aground. If any of their prisoners escaped, the soldiers could receive severe punishment. However, Julius the centurion wanted to save Paul’s life; so, he forbade any killing. Therefore, in fulfillment of Paul’s prophecy, they all reached shore safely.

God primarily wanted to guarantee that Paul arrived safely in Rome, where he could teach thousands of people the good news about Jesus. While onboard the ship in good weather, Paul naturally taught about Jesus. And in a storm, he gave practical advice on how to survive a shipwreck. Since Luke recorded the name of the centurion, Julius, perhaps Julius wanted to save Paul’s life because he had become a follower of Jesus during the voyage. From Luke’s shipwreck story, we see how God wanted to save Paul so Paul could bless others; when saving Paul, God saved everyone’s life.— © Copyright 2012 L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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Thinking Further

1. Can you think of some reasons why God would want Paul to go to Rome as a prisoner?

2. Can you remember an incident or incidents in your life when something “bad” happened to you, but God worked it out for good for you and others? Would you like to share your experience with others in your group?

3. Can you remember a time when something unexpectedly “good” happened to you, and how God inspired you to use this experience to do more good for others than you might have done otherwise? Would you like to share your experience with others in your group?

4. Why do you think all of the apostles suffered such hardships during their ministries?

5. How did Paul respond to his hardships during the storm and shipwreck? In what ways does he serve as a good example for you?

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