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Paul was Protected by Roman Law 22: 22-29

57 AD

Paul was protected by Roman Law DIG: What was it that turned the crowd against Paul? What does throwing off their cloaks and throwing dust into the air mean? How serious was the flogging that Paul was about to receive? Why was Paul's Roman citizen considered superior to that of the Roman commander Lysias? How was Paul's status as a Roman citizen an asset in his ministry to the Gentiles in verses 25-29 (also 16:37-38)?

REFLECT: How is your citizenship an asset for spreading the gospel? How can you better use this asset? Think of someone (or perhaps several people) whose salvation has been the cry of your heart for a long time. How does their continued refusal to receive Messiah affect you? How do you personally judge the success of any undertaking – spiritual or otherwise? Why are end results often a poor judge of that?

On a human scale we cannot judge **Paul's** visit to **Jerusalem** a success. Perhaps **his** experiences in places like **Athens** (**to see link clkci Cb – An Unknown God in Athens**) and **Yerushalayim** will teach us to think differently about success and failure. Hopefully, we will come to understand that in our lives in service to **Messiah**, success is obedience to **Him**, not results we can measure.

I'm sure **Paul** wanted to bear fruit in **Yerushalayim** more than any other place on earth. Yet we see **him** face greater opposition and struggle in **Jerusalem** than virtually anywhere in **his** ministry. In **the Holy City, Paul** was forced to measure **his** ministry strictly on **his** obedience to **the Spirit**, not outward results. Unfortunately, **the Jews** didn't think much of **Paul's** purpose on this earth. Once **he** acknowledged the importance of **the Gentiles** to **God** (see **Cp – Paul's Testimony on the Temple Steps**), **he** lost **his** audience. Sadly, **their** personal need to feel superior exceeded **their** desire to **be a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3b)**.

Paul desperately wanted **the Jews** to receive **Christ**. Was **he** a failure because **they** rejected **him**? Was **his** testimony shared in vain? Absolutely not. **God** had compelled **Paul** to go to **Jerusalem** (see **Ck – Paul Went on to Jerusalem Despite Warnings**). **He** had warned **him** of hardships. **He** had given **Paul** an opportunity to share **his** testimony with the very **crowd** who had just tried to kill **him**. Did **they** hear **Paul's** message? Oh, yes. Otherwise, **they** would not have responded so emotionally. Few of those in hearing distance that day forgot **Paul's** testimony. We cannot judge effectiveness from immediate results. According to **John 14:26, the Holy Spirit** can remind a person of truth taught long ago. When we obey **God**, we find great comfort in leaving the consequences up to **Him**.

Paul avoided **a flogging** because **God** equipped him with **Roman** citizenship even before **his** birth. **God** used every ounce and detail of **Paul's** past, even **his** unique citizenship. I want **God** to use every ounce of me too. **Paul** poured **himself** out like a drink offering in **Jerusalem**. **He** received little encouragement to preach while **he** was there – but **he** continued. **Paul's** certainty of what **he** had been called to do was exceeded only by **his** certainty of who called. **Paul** considered **Him** who called, worth it all.[527]

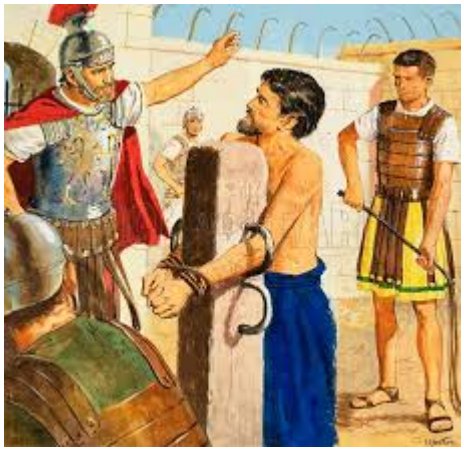
The anger of the mob: Up to the point when **Paul** said: **For I will send you far away to the Gentiles** (see **Co – Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem**)**, the Jews** kept on **listened to him.** But the very mention of **Gentiles** stopped **Paul's** speech because **the Jews** objected to the idea that **Gentiles** being granted equality with **Jews**. In **their** eyes, proselytism (making **Gentiles** into **Jews**) was fine; but evangelism (Making **Gentiles** into believers without first making them **Jews**) was an abomination.[528] So, **they raised their voices,** saying: **Away from the earth with this fellow! For he's not fit to live! They** wanted to kill **him (22:22)**. In the period leading up to the Revolt (66-70 AD), **the Zealots** took the law into **their** own hands in increasingly violent ways, executing actual, or even potential collaborators with **Rome** without consulting or being authorized by **the Great Sanhedrin**.

As they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and throwing dust into the air while demanding the blood of **Paul (22:23).** The reference to **throwing off their cloaks** seems to allude, as in **Stephen's** case **(7:57-58)**, to the removal of outer clothing in preparation for stoning. The action of **throwing dust into the air** is a mourning custom attested to when **Job's friends** arrive to comfort **him** over the deaths of **his** sons and daughters: **Each one tore his robe and threw dust into the air onto their heads. Then they sat with him on**

the ground for seven days and seven nights. No one spoke a word to him because they saw that his pain was very great (Job 2:12-13). Several biblical passages also suggest that people expressed their grief by **rolling in the dust (Jeremiah 6:26; Micah 1:10).**[529]

We must remember the volatile climate in **Yerushalayim** at that time (see **Cn – Paul's Advice from Jacob and the Elders at Jerusalem**), when there was no love lost for **the Goyim**, much less for a mission to **the Gentiles**. This would be especially true if **Paul** was suggesting that some **Gentiles** might be taking the place of some **Jews** (who rejected **Paul's** message) in the Kingdom of **God**. To them, **Paul** seemed to be disloyal to all that was **Jewish**.

The trump card of Paul: The commander had had enough! Although **Claudius Lysias** didn't understand **Paul's** speech because it was given in Hebrew, **he** knew hostile and violent reactions when **he** saw them, and was prepared to take drastic action to restore order. So, **the commander ordered Paul to be brought into headquarters** at Fortress Antonia**. His** assumption was that **Paul** was the obvious cause of the problem, and **he** was determined to get to the bottom of the matter very quickly.[530] **He said Paul should be examined by flogging** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lr – The Soldiers Mock Jesus**)**, so that he might find out why they were shouting against him so (22:24). The scourge** (Latin: *flagellum*) was a fearful instrument of torture, consisting of leather tongs, weighted with rough pieces of metal or bone, and attached to a stout wooden handle. This was a much more severe beating than was given to **him** with **rods** in **Philippi (16:22)**. If the man did not actually die under **the scourge**, he would certainly be crippled for life.[531] **The commander** still didn't know the reason for the uproar because **Paul's** speech was in **Hebrew** so **he** was determined to whip it out of **him**.



To get the truth in the shortest time possible, **the Romans** simply tied the hands of a prisoner around a stone pole with **straps** and literally whipped the prisoner until he either died or was willing to say whatever was necessary to get the torture to stop! **So, when they stretched him out with straps, Paul said,** almost sarcastically **to the centurion standing there, "Is it legal for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen without due process" (22:25)? He** did not flaunt **his Roman citizenship**, but only used it unless it was absolutely necessary. In this case . . . it was absolutely necessary! **Now when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it, saying** sharply**, "What are you going to do? For this man is Roman" (22:25-26).** Since **Paul** had not been charged, nor had **the commander** been informed of the grounds for a charge, **flogging him** prior to trial would have been a misuse of authority for which **the commander himself** would have been held responsible. By questioning **the flogging, Paul** was saving **the commander** as well as **himself**.[532]

By now **Lysias** must have been thoroughly confused about **Paul**. At first **he** mistook **him** for an Egyptian revolutionary. Then **he** learned that **he** was **a Jew** and a citizen of the important city of **Tarsus**, a man of some culture who spoke polished **Greek**. Then **he** learned **Paul** was **a Roman citizen**. But the surprises were not over. Soon **he** would learn that **Paul** was **born a Roman citizen**, an even higher status than **Lysias himself**![533]

The commander, being acutely aware that **he** was in trouble for having arrested and mistreated **a Roman citizen, came and said to Paul, "You? a Roman?" And Paul said, "Yes"** (**The commander** assumed this to be true because certain death awaited anyone falsely claiming **Roman citizenship**)**. The commander answered, "I bought my citizenship for a large sum" (22:27-28).** This was,

of course, not actually the case, because it was not legal to do so. What is meant is that through the paying of a bribe, **citizenship** had been illegally obtained. This was certainly possible, and in fact during the reign of **Claudius** there seems to have been considerable trafficking in citizenships. That **the commander** had the same name **Claudius**, points to **his** having obtained **his citizenship** during the reign of **Claudius**, for it was customary to take the name of one's sponsor or patron. Probably **Lysias** had worked **his** way up through the military ranks but would have been barred from the rank of **commander** because **he** was not **a Roman citizen**. Therefore, **he** solved **his** problem with a bribe![534] **Paul's** reply, however, came with quiet dignity: **But I was born one.** Unlike **Lysias, Paul** had not obtained **his citizenship** by **birth**. Not only had **he** violated **Roman** law, but had also abused a **Roman** of higher rank than **himself**! Again, **the commander** had badly misjudged **his Jewish** prisoner.

Earlier had told **the commander** that **he** was **a citizen** of **Tarsus**. But that alone didn't make **him** a **Roman citizen** because **Tarsus** was a free city, not a **Roman** colony like Philippi. So **Paul's** family obtained **citizenship** by some imperial decree and so **Paul was born one**. **Therefore, those who were about to interrogate him instantly drew back from him (22:29a). They** were afraid of even being associated with **the flogging** of **a Roman citizen**.



The reaction of Lysias: And the commander also was afraid when he found out that Paul was a Roman and that he had bound him to be **flogged (22:29b).** This was the second time **Roman** law and justice came to **Paul's** aide. On learning **Paul's citizenship,** the whole procedure was stopped immediately. **Lysias** was quite alarmed when **he** realized that **he** had placed **Paul** in chains. To

subject **a Roman citizen** to *the flagellum* could have destroyed **Lysias'** military career or even cost **him his** life. Evidently the Julian and Porcian laws protected **Roman citizens** from being placed **in chains** without **due process**. But **Paul's** situation was complicated by the fact that **his** detention could be considered protective custody rather than an arrest. Nevertheless, from that point on, **Lysias** treated **Paul** with great respect. But, **he** still didn't understand **the Jewish** charges against **Paul**. Examination by **flogging** was obviously out of the question. So, **the commander** turned to another avenue for answering **his** questions, **the Jewish Supreme Court** or **the Great Sanhedrin.**[535]

Paul's conduct throughout his ordeal provides us with an example for all believers of how to give a positive testimony in negative circumstances. Five principles can be seen.

First, Paul accepted the situation as God ordained it. Facing persecution never caused **him** to be unfaithful to **God's** plan. **He** had known for some time that **he** faced arrest when **he** arrived in **Jerusalem (20:22-23, 21:4** and **10-13)**. **He** calmly accepted the will of **ADONAI**, telling those trying to dissuade **him** from going to **Jerusalem, "I am ready not only to be bound but to die** in **Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Yeshua" (21:13)!**

Second, Paul used his circumstances as an opportunity. The mob had not gathered to hear **him** preach but to **kill him (22:22)**. **Paul**, however, used that occasion to proclaim to **them** how **God's** saving power had transformed **his** life.

Third Paul was conciliatory toward his persecutors. He did not threaten **the** hostile **mob** or seek revenge. Instead, **he** courteously addressed **them** as **brothers and fathers (22:1)**, and even assigned to **their** vicious beating of **him** the noble motive of **zeal** for **Ha'Shem. Paul** practiced the command that **he** had written earlier to the believers in **Rome, "Bless those who persecute you – bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14). He** was like his Savior, who **when He was abused, He did not return abuse. While suffering, He made no threats. Instead, He kept entrusting Himself to the One who judges righteously (First Peter 2:23).**

Fourth, Paul praised the Lord. His defense to **the mob** focused not on **his** impressive credentials and achievements, but on what **God** had accomplished in **his** life. That was consistent with **his** words to the church at Corinth: **So that, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in ADONAI" (First Corinthians**

1:31).

Fifth, and most important, Paul maintained the proper attitude – one of selfless love. It was **his** love for other believers that brought **him** to **Yerushalayim** (to deliver the collection from the Gentile churches). It was **his** love for **his** unsaved fellow **Israelites (Romans 9:1-3)**, that led **him** to evangelize **the** hostile **mob**. And it was **his** love for **God** that motivated **his** love for people and caused **him** to give glory to **Him**.[536]

A closer look at Paul and Roman citizenship: There are only two places in the book of **Acts** where **Paul's Roman citizenship** really become an issue, in **Acts 16:37-39** and **22**. In both cases **Paul** only draws **his citizenship** to the attention of **Roman** authorities and those working under them, and in both cases **Paul's** announcement is made for the purpose of influencing their improper conduct towards **him**. In the vast majority of material in **Acts** that involves **Paul**, the matter doesn't come up at all. In view of this, it might be better to ask why the matter comes up were it does in **Acts 16:37-39** and **22**, rather than asking why doesn't it come up elsewhere and earlier in **Acts**.

In **Acts 16:37-39, Paul** does not mention **his Roman citizenship** until after **he** is released after **his flogging** at the hands of the **Roman** authorities. And here, **Paul** does not mention **it** while still within earshot of the volatile **Jewish mob**, even when **he** was addressing **the commander**, for the very good reason that this would not have helped **his** cause with **the Jewish audience**. It would have merely amounted to pouring gas on an already raging fire. **Paul** only chose to use **his Roman citizenship** when if furthered the advancement of the gospel, not when it merely personally advantageous for **him** to do so. **Paul's** sense of identity came first from **his** faith in **Yeshua**, secondly from **his** Jewish heritage, and only thirdly from **his** Greco-**Roman** heritage.

From now on, **Paul's Roman citizenship** and **Roman** law will dictate how the narrative will proceed, determining not only *who* will try **Paul's** case, but ultimately, *where* **he** will be tried. It will also affect *how* **Paul** is treated while in **Roman** custody. The narrative, from now on, not only moves inexorably forward toward its geographical destination of **Rome**, but it also turns on all things **Roman**.[537]

You reign, Lord! The world is firmly established – it will not move. You will judge the peoples with fairness. So let the heavens be glad, let the earth rejoice. Let the sea roar – and all that fills it; let the land rejoice – and all

that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing with joy before You, for You are coming to judge the earth. You will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with Your faithfulness (Psalm 96:10-13). *I put my trust and reputation in* ***Your*** *hands,* ***Lord****, for* ***You*** *will make all things known.*[538]