

Valley Bible Church
Sermon Notes for March 25, 2018

Paul Arrested by a Commander
Acts 21:27-40

Acts 21 begins the final section of the book where Paul's ministry turns toward Rome through his arrest and trials by the Romans.

1. Paul falsely accused (21:27-30)

The Jews from Asia were likely from Ephesus since Paul recently returned from that city and they were familiar with Trophimus (21:29). Paul had been opposed by the Jews in Ephesus during the third missionary journey (19:9). It was the Greek speaking Jews who were the most offended by Paul's conversion to Christ.

There were two charges made against Paul. The first was that he taught against the Jews, the Law and the temple. This was similar to what Stephen was accused of in Acts 6:11-14. The elders of the Jerusalem church were aware of this perspective and told Paul to participate in the Jewish customs (21:20-24). It is ironic that Paul was in the temple for the purpose of fulfilling a Jewish vow when the Jews laid hands on him.

The second charge accused him of bringing Gentiles into the inner court of the temple, which was punishable by death. Trophimus was one of Paul's ministry companions to Greece during the third missionary journey (Acts 20:4). The Jews wrongly assumed that Trophimus was one of the four men with Paul in the temple area (cf. 21:23).

It is very human to jump to conclusions, particularly when we are predisposed to believe a certain point of view. While certainly we ought to avoid such wrong judgments, when we are falsely accused we must not return evil for evil (cf. 1 Peter 2:21-23; 3:9).

2. Paul's final arrest (21:31-36)

The commander of the "cohort," Claudius Lysias (cf. Acts 23:26), would be in charge of 1,000 soldiers. Under his leadership, each centurion would lead 100 soldiers, indicating a large presence of Roman soldiers. They came from the Antonia Fortress which overlooked the temple and was over 100 feet tall and 50% larger than a football field.

The arrest of Paul was not based on any understanding of the issues but was simply in order to end the riot. The priority for the commander was to guard against any civil disruption. The arrest also fulfilled the prophecy of Agabus from Acts 21:11.

Paul's arrest served to protect Paul from the mob for the moment but it also set in motion a series of sufferings, along with ministry opportunities for him. The governing authorities have their interests in mind but God accomplishes His work in the midst of their decisions.

3. Paul's fervent appeal (21:37-40)

While the Jews were familiar with Paul, the commander did not know who he was. He was surprised that Paul knew Greek because he assumed Paul was an Egyptian who stirred up a revolt against Rome through the use of men with daggers.

Paul found enough favor with the Roman commander based upon his heritage. He allowed Paul to speak in the hope of pacifying the mob. He spoke in Aramaic to connect with the audience, the first of five defenses of himself in this section of Acts.

About six months earlier Paul wrote of his desire to visit Rome (Romans 1:10). From here on, Rome would be his destiny, although beyond his control. The Lord plans our way in spite of our circumstances and our task is to follow Him in obedience wherever He leads.