



[Acts 21:27-40 and 22:22-29](#)

Paul is seized in the Jerusalem Temple, and appeals to his Roman citizenship

Date: 70 CE to 130 CE

Language: Greek

Category: New Testament

Title of work: Acts of the Apostles

Reference:

21:27-40 and 22:22-29

Commentary:

This passage, which narrates Paul being attacked by a Jewish mob in Jerusalem, and his subsequent seizing by a Roman tribune and his soldiers, can reveal significant aspects of the Lukan author's outlook when understood in terms of what it suggests about the relationships between the Jewish population of Jerusalem and its Roman occupiers, and potentially between the Romans and Christianity. Acts is written by the same author as Luke's Gospel, who models Paul's arrest and imprisonment account on that of Jesus in the Gospel (see Dennis MacDonald, "Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives," p. 64-66). Both Jesus and Paul are predicted to suffer in Jerusalem, and do, they are both seized in the temple, both are subject to four trials, during which they are delivered to Gentiles and declared innocent three times, and are both treated well or praised by a Roman centurion (see Luke 9:51-23:47 and Acts 20:1-27:43). An interesting difference is that Luke does not narrate Paul's death (see David Eastman, *Paul the Martyr*, p. 18).

In this passage, Paul has returned to Jerusalem and commenced teaching in the Temple. However, his reputation for controversial teaching regarding the Jewish law is proving to be a point of contention. In an attempt to try and counter this bad press, the leaders of the Jerusalem church formulated a plan whereby Paul can show that he is not opposed to observance of the law by performing a purity ritual (see Acts 21:20-26). The seven days at the beginning of the passage mark the completion of this ritual, which evidently has not worked to calm the fears of those uncomfortable with Paul's reputation, as he is promptly seized by some Asian Jews claiming that he defiles the Jerusalem temple by taking Greeks into it. It seems that the Asian Jews have previously seen Paul with an Ephesian called Trophimus, and falsely assumed that Paul has taken this Gentile into the Temple (verse 29). The Lukan author makes clear that they are wrong, however, they merely "supposed/believed" (?????) (see Luke Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 381). A combination of Paul's reputation and the accusations being made against him convince the Jewish mob that he must die. The shutting of the Temple doors as Paul is dragged out by the mob (verse 30) vividly mark his ultimate exclusion from the Jewish community (Luke Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 382).

The diffusion of the situation by the Roman tribune, Claudius Lysias, effectively saves Paul from almost certain death. Indeed, verse 35 emphasises the close escape that he has, literally having to be carried by the soldiers in order to remove him from the area, the angry crowd's cry of "Away with him," echoing the cries of the crowd at Jesus's trial before Pilate in Luke 23:18-25. As Matthew Skinner argues, it is not necessarily helpful to understand Paul's seizing by the Romans as an "arrest." In verse 33, the verb used to describe the tribune's taking of Paul is ??????????, which despite often being understood as such (e.g. in the translation of the NRSV), does not have to constitute an arrest for the purpose of legal action. More broadly, the verb refers simply to the taking of something, and so an explicit jurisdictional context for this passage should not be assumed (see Matthew Skinner, *Locating Paul*, p. 111). Rather, the tribune's actions are better understood as an attempt to maintain social order by removing the recipient of the violence. The tribune is ready to whip Paul in order to find out the source of problem, so his safety is not the primary concern (see Acts 22:22-29). The prophecy that Paul will be given to the Gentiles by the Jews (see Acts 21:11) is here fulfilled with a vital modification – Paul is not handed over to the Romans (the Gentiles) by the Jewish population, rather the Romans effectively liberate him from them (see F. Scott Spencer, *Acts*, p. 201). While historically the tribune's actions cannot be understood as undertaken out of any particular sympathy for Paul, it is very revealing of the viewpoint of the Lukan author, who throughout Luke-Acts presents Jews extremely negatively. The trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, for instance, minimises the responsibility of the Roman governor, Pilate, and maximises that of the Jewish authorities and the Jewish crowd in



Jerusalem (see commentaries on Luke 23:1-7; 23:8-12; 23:13-25). Similarly, in Paul's case here the Asian and Jerusalem Jews are presented as both bloodthirsty and unjustified in their accusations against Paul. The tribune, on the other hand, is essentially dragged into the conflict out of duty, and when the broader narrative function of the Romans in this passage is considered in a broader sense, they have effectively saved Paul from death, and will proceed to transport him to a new location where they later allow him a platform from which to make a speech defending himself to the Jewish people (verses 37-40, see also Acts 22:1-21). It is important to remember, however, that neither Pilate or the Roman tribune in this passage are portrayed as heroes – they both have their own agendas of attempting to maintain the peace and assert their authority. The Lukan author is not seeking to portray Rome positively in and of itself, but just in relation to the Jews who seek to kill Jesus and Paul.

The second passage narrates events after Paul has been taken back to the barracks for questioning by Claudius Lysias and his soldiers. These barracks were probably within the Fortress Antonia, as Luke's description of the surroundings in Acts 21:30-40 correspond to Josephus's description in *Jewish War* V.238-247 (see Matthew Skinner, *Locating Paul*, p. 112). One of the things that makes Paul and his Christian mission so interesting is its intersection with his status as a Roman citizen, which Luke attests in this passage, and which affords Paul the rights to a Roman judicial process. As stated above, the Romans serve a dual function in this episode, acting both as saviours for Paul (liberating him from the mob in Jerusalem), and as another potential danger – Lysias is ready to torture Paul for information once he is back at the barracks. It is only when Paul interjects, and rhetorically asks a nearby centurion whether he is legally allowed to tie up and whip a Roman citizen, that the centurion hesitates, and take Paul's claim to his superior. Many commentators look to Cicero's strong reaction to the condemning to death of a Roman citizen without adequate evidence for his guilt in *Against Verres* 5.166 for evidence that there were Roman prohibitions against treating citizens in an unjust manner (see, for example, Charles Talbert, *Reading Acts*, p. 199, and Ben Witherington, *Acts*, p. 677-678). However, there is a difference between Cicero's opposition to what was the planned crucifixion of a citizen, and the binding and whipping of one. Brian Rapske (*Paul in Roman Custody*, p. 38-70) argues that the Roman authorities would often deal with such legal disputes as they saw fit, largely based on the social statuses of both the accused and the accuser. Paul's comprehension of his rights as a Roman citizen fit with the understanding of Roman law of François Jacques and John Scheid, *Rome et l'intégration à l'Empire*, p. 213-214 (who cite Peter Garnsey, *Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire*). Regardless, historicity is less important for the polemic of the passage, which through his embarrassing and unnerving of his Roman captors, somewhat elevates Paul above them. While the Lukan author appears to view the Romans more positively than the Jews, Paul as the Christian hero of the narrative is portrayed clearly as being firmly at the top of the honour scale.

In the conversation that follows, a difference emerges between the method of citizenship acquisition that Paul claims and that of the tribune; Paul's was granted by virtue of being born a citizen (he comes from an imperial city, which he himself identifies in Acts 21:39), whereas the tribune states that he bought his. As has been argued by John Lentz, in polemical terms, this simply serve the purpose of elevating Paul's status above that of the tribune, in an attempt to increase his honour in relation to his questioner (*Luke's Portrait*, p. 44-45). This scene in the barracks essentially allows the Lukan author to portray Paul in an authoritative manner, as one who is able somewhat take control of a potentially perilous situation, and even gain one up (by virtue of his seemingly superior citizenship) on his questioners. Paul is very much in a Roman sphere in this passage, and the theme of citizenship becomes a vital tool for the author in enabling Paul to gain essential increased status, transforming danger into a controllable situation.

Keywords in the original language:

- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???](#)
- [???](#)
- [?????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [?????](#)



- [??????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [?????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [????????](#)
- [?????????](#)
- [?????](#)
- [?????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [?????](#)
- [????????????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [?????????](#)
- [?????????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [?????](#)
- [??????????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [????????????](#)
- [???????](#)
- [?????????](#)

Thematic keywords in English:

- [arrest](#)
- [Asia](#)
- [barracks](#)
- [centurion](#)
- [Cilicia](#)
- [citizen](#)
- [crowd](#)
- [Ephesus](#)
- [Greek](#)
- [Greeks](#)
- [Hebrew](#)
- [Israelite](#)
- [Jerusalem](#)
- [Jerusalem Temple](#)
- [Jewish authorities](#)
- [Jewish Law](#)
- [Jewish people](#)
- [military tribune](#)
- [Paul the Apostle](#)
- [revolt](#)
- [Roman citizenship](#)
- [Roman law](#)
- [soldier](#)



- [Tarsus](#)
- [violence](#)

Bibliographical references:

[“Paul the Roman Citizen: Roman Citizenship in the Ancient World and its Importance for Understanding Acts 22:22–29”](#)

Adams, Sean A. article-in-a-book Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman Stanley E. Porter 309-326 “Paul the Roman Citizen: Roman Citizenship in the Ancient World and its Importance for Understanding Acts 22:22–29” Leiden Brill 2009

[The Books of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody](#)

Rapske, Brian book *The Books of Acts and Paul in Roman Custody* The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting Volume 3, edited by Bruce Winter Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans 1994

[Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography](#)

Chilton, Bruce book *Rabbi Paul: An Intellectual Biography* New York Doubleday 2004

[Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology](#)

Schnelle, Udo book *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* Grand Rapids, MI Baker Academic 2003

[“Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives about Paul”](#)

MacDonald, Dennis R. Paul and the Legacies of Paul William S. Babcock 55-70 “Apocryphal and Canonical Narratives about Paul” Dallas, TX Southern Methodist University Press 1990

[Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West](#)

Eastman, David book *Paul the Martyr: The Cult of the Apostle in the Latin West* Atlanta Society of Biblical Literature 2011

[Locating Paul: Places of Custody as Narrative Settings in Acts 21-28](#)

Skinner, Matthew L. book *Locating Paul: Places of Custody as Narrative Settings in Acts 21-28* Leiden Brill 2003

[Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Book of Acts](#)

Talbert, Charles H. book *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Book of Acts* Macon, GA Smyth and Helwys 2005

[Luke’s Portrait of Paul](#)

Lentz, John C. book *Luke’s Portrait of Paul* Cambridge Cambridge University Press 1993

[The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary](#)



Witherington III, Benbook*The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* CambridgeEerdmans1998

[The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology](#)

Porter, Stanley E.book*The Paul of Acts: Essays in Literary Criticism, Rhetoric, and Theology*TübingenMohr Siebeck1999

[The Acts of the Apostles: A New Commentary with Introduction and Commentary](#)

Fitzmyer, Joseph A.book*The Acts of the Apostles: A New Commentary with Introduction and Commentary*LondonDoubleday1998

[Acts](#)

Spencer, F. Scottbook*Acts*SheffieldSheffield Academic Press1997

[The Acts of the Apostles](#)

Johnson, Luke T.book*The Acts of the Apostles*Collegeville, MNLiturgical Press1992

[Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1-23:35](#)

Keener, Craig S.book*Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 15:1-23:35*Grand Rapids, MIBaker Academic2015

[Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire](#)

Garnsey, Peterbook*Social Status and Legal Privilege in the Roman Empire*OxfordClarendon Press1970

[Rome et l'intégration à l'Empire \(44 av. J.-C.-260 ap. J.-C.\)](#)

Jacques, François, Scheid, Johnbook*Rome et l'intégration à l'Empire (44 av. J.-C.-260 ap. J.-C.)*ParisP. U. F.1990
Other sources connected with this document: Text

[Luke 13:1-3](#)

Pilate mixes the blood of Galileans with that of sacrifices

- [Read more about Luke 13:1-3](#)

Text

[Luke 23:1-7](#)

Jesus before Pilate



- [Read more about Luke 23:1-7](#)

Text

[Luke 23:13-25](#)

Jesus is sent back to Pilate

- [Read more about Luke 23:13-25](#)

Text

[Luke 23:8-12](#)

Jesus before Herod

- [Read more about Luke 23:8-12](#)

Realized by:

[Kimberley Fowler](#)



Source URL: <https://www.judaism-and-rome.org/acts-2127-40-and-2222-29>