

**Text:** Acts 21.27-40

**Proposition:** The top of mind priority for believers is always the gospel.

Today I plan to complete Acts 21. Next Sunday I will bring another message from the same passage. Then the last two Sundays of November I will devote to other topics as the Lord leads. I don't want to start Acts 22, then break for Christmas, and come back to it.

Our passage today is the narrative of Paul's arrest. This passage, and some of the others in the last quarter of Acts present some preaching challenges.

The narratives are easy enough to tell, but how to apply them?

In addition, through this section we have not one, not two, but three renditions of Paul's testimony. Some unique details show up in each rendition, but the essential story is the same.

Thus, we have some questions.

- Why does God lead Luke to include this material in Acts?
- What is God saying to us, now two thousand years later, concerning our own walk and testimony?
- How do we derive solid Bible application without spiritualizing or resorting to fanciful speculation?

Darrell Bock says,

“This scene begins Paul's defense and journey to Rome. It marks the end of missionary travel. Now Paul is under arrest. Spencer (2004: 212) calls the unit from here to the end of Acts “Prisoner's Progress.” It is a mixture of travel narratives and defense speeches and it covers a full quarter of Acts, indicating its importance.”<sup>1</sup>

Another fact noting the importance of this event are subsequent references to the arrest in the rest of Acts:

Acts 23.27: **Claudius Lysias, the tribune, by letter to Felix**

Acts 24.18: **Paul in his defense before Felix**

Acts 26.21: **Paul in his defense before Agrippa**

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<sup>1</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 654.

What are we to make of the story, then? I've given our message a very simple title:

### *Paul Under Arrest*

Read Acts 21.27-40

**Proposition:** The top of mind priority for believers is always the gospel.

## I. The injustice of the arrest (27-29)

### A. The enmity of the Jews from Asia (27)

#### 1. Timeline note: end of "seven days"

- a. Period of vow ending
- b. Possibly Paul's visit ending
- c. Perhaps thinking – when will Agabus' prophecy come true?

#### 2. Asia = Ephesus and surrounding area

- a. No record in Acts of Jewish conflict during Ephesus mission, except...
- b. Ac 19.8-9

Ac 19.8-9 ¶ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading *them* about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

#### c. And Ac 20.18-19

Ac 20.18-19 ¶ And when they had come to him, he said to them, "You yourselves know, from the first day that I set foot in Asia, how I was with you the whole time, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which came upon me through the plots of the Jews;

3. Evident deep antagonism: “began to stir up all the crowd”

a. Means “to pour together, to confuse”<sup>2</sup>

b. Same word used of Demetrius the silver-smith who “stirred up” the pagans in Ephesus

4. Led to violent arrest: “laid hands on him”

“It is possible that the cry was led by Alexander put forward by the Jews in Ephesus (19:33) who may be the same as Alexander the coppersmith who did Paul so much harm (2 Tim. 4:14).”<sup>3</sup>

a. Put forward in Ephesus, presumably to attack Paul and defend Jews

b. Later named as one who “did much harm” — perhaps here in Jerusalem

B. The false charges raised against Paul (28)

1. Ironically, they make charges like those made against Stephen

Ac 6.13 They put forward false witnesses who said, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law;

a. On these charges, there is a sense of truth

1) Paul does preach that the law can’t save

2) Paul does preach that the sacrifices can’t save, only Jesus can save

b. But overall, the sense of truth only strengthens the lie

1) The Law, in Paul’s mind has much value

2) As do the sacrifices, and the Jewish nation

3) All these things point to and prepare for Christ

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<sup>2</sup> A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 21.27.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, Ac 21.27.

- 4) Paul doesn't diminish them, he exalts them to their proper place
2. Secondly, they make serious false charges concerning Paul's present conduct: "he has even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place"
- a. There were successive courts in the temple, with varying levels of restriction
    - 1) Court of the Gentiles (general court, accessible by everyone, even Gentiles)
    - 2) Court of the Women (only Jews allowed in)
      - a) Hall of the Israelites (only Jewish men allowed in) [Court of Prayer]
    - 3) Court of the Priests (only priests allowed in) [place where sacrifices and prayers made]
    - 4) The Holy Place [and Holy of Holies] (only certain priests, and in HofH, only high priest, allowed)
  - b. Between the court of the Gentiles and the court of the Women, a low wall stood with four notice pillars (archeology discovered two of these)

"No foreigner may enter within the barricade which surrounds the temple and enclosure. Any one who is caught trespassing will bear personal responsibility for his ensuing death."<sup>4</sup>
  - c. Josephus claims that the Romans allowed the Jews to enforce this regulation (normally reserved death penalty to Roman courts)
  - d. If the charge against Paul were true, he and the Gentile were under the penalty of death

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<sup>4</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 409.

### C. The fatal assumptions of Paul's enemies (29)

1. The Asian Jews knew Trophimus, one of Paul's companions supervising the offering (see Ac 20.4)
2. They assumed on finding Paul, that Paul had brought Trophimus into the temple

The big thing to note is that their charges were false.

## II. The abuse suffered during the arrest (30-32)

### A. Arrest and eviction (30)

1. The whole city (exaggeration for effect) was provoked (shook up)

Verb literally means "to shake"

- a. The court of the Gentiles was large, place of public gatherings
  - b. This is the First Fruits season [Pentecost], many would gather in the temple
2. They took hold of Paul and dragged him out of the temple proper (into the Gentile court)
  3. The doors immediately shut: to preserve the temple from "pollution"

**"This event must have been a terrifying experience."**<sup>5</sup>

### B. Attempted murder and arousing the Romans (31)

1. "They were seeking to kill him"
  - a. Gathering stones?
  - b. Physical assault, surely
  - c. General uproar for certain
2. This uproar noticed by the Romans
  - a. Herod built a tower adjacent to the temple called the Tower of Antonia (named after Mark Antony)

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<sup>5</sup> L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2020), 249.

- b. The tower had two staircases leading down to the court of the Gentiles
- c. The Romans stationed guards there, especially during festivals, due to Jewish unrest
- d. Cohort: 1000 men, 240 cavalry

### C. Roman intervention (32)

- 1. Tribune (Claudius Lysias, named later) and at least two hundred men (plural “centurions”)
- 2. The arrival of the Romans brought an end to the beating

“More so than in other NT passages τύπτω is here (v. 32) the uncontrolled and unrestricted battering of someone with a view to killing him, which is possible enough even though no sticks etc. are used.”<sup>6</sup>

## III. The consequence of the arrest (33-40, cf. 22.1, 6-8)

### A. Roman imprisonment (prophecy fulfillment)

- 1. Binding Paul with chains (33)
  - a. Likely two soldiers on either side
  - b. Fulfills Agabus’ prophecy

Ac 21.11 And coming to us, he took Paul’s belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’”

- 2. Confusion in the crowd, taken into custody (34-36)
  - a. The crowd is yelling madly, some one thing and others another
  - b. The mob is so violent, the soldiers must carry Paul up the stairs to the tower

<sup>6</sup> Gustav Stählin, *τύπτω*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 267.

- c. The violence of the mob ensures detention for investigation at least, but it will also mean many years of custody awaiting trial

### 3. The tribune's misapprehension (37-38)

- a. In AD 54, an Egyptian had stirred up a mob of "Assassins" against the Romans

- 1) He led his group to the Mount of Olives, claiming that when he said the word, the walls of Jerusalem would collapse
- 2) They would then march in and overthrow the Romans
- 3) Felix, the procurator of Judaea, sent troops against them, killing many
- 4) The ringleader fled, and disappeared
- 5) We are now just three years later

- b. The tribune assumed Paul must be that Egyptian

- 1) The Egyptian, a Gentile, would likewise arouse a mob if he breached the temple precincts
- 2) The Egyptian was not popular among the general population anyway

### B. Persistent witness (apostolic mindset)

1. Paul desired only to speak to the people, which the tribune permits

"The tribune grants the request, ... given that Paul is a Jew, perhaps the tribune thinks that the crowd can be quelled by noting a crucial misidentification like the one the tribune has made."<sup>7</sup>

2. Why did Paul wish to speak to the crowd?

- a. Not to plead his innocence (to argue his case)
- b. Not to claim his rights

There remained time for him to do both, they were legal matters, and in Paul's mind less important.

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<sup>7</sup> Bock, Acts, 658.

c. Paul's desire: preach Jesus to them (22.1, 6-8)

Ac 22.1 ¶ “Brethren and fathers, hear my defense which I now *offer* to you.”

Ac 22.6-8 ¶ “But it happened that as I was on my way, approaching Damascus about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,<sup>7</sup> and I fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’<sup>8</sup> “And I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And He said to me, ‘I am Jesus the Nazarene, whom you are persecuting.’”

**Conclusion:**

**Proposition:** The top of mind priority for believers is always the gospel.