
a *Grace Notes* course

The Acts of the Apostles

an expositional study
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Lesson 320: **Acts 21:27-40**

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Acts 21:27-40**Acts 21:27**

And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

The Jews which were of Asia

The Jewish opposition had pursued him from the cities which he had visited in Asia Minor, places like Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium. Or they may have been from Ephesus, since they recognized Trophimus the Ephesian (verse 29), and were those who had savagely opposed his ministry there.

Here were men who had traveled to Jerusalem for Passover and Pentecost, and all the feasts, who saw this opportunity to finish what they had started during Paul's first and second journeys.

At the very time Paul was participating in the Temple ceremonies, these men stirred up a mob of angry Jews and grabbed hold of Paul by bodily force.

Acts 21:28,29

Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks into the temple, and has polluted this holy place.

(For they had seen him before in the city with Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Apparently this Jewish mob had seen Paul enter the temple with the four men who were under the vow, four men they did not know. Because they had seen him in the city with Trophimus, a Gentile from Ephesus, they assumed that Paul had brought a Gentile into the holy place, that is, further inside the temple than Gentiles were

allowed to go. So they stirred up the crowds in the temple courts.

This charge was ridiculous. No Gentile would think of entering the inner courts of the temple; there were signs everywhere, in Greek and Latin, forbidding Gentiles to go beyond the Court of the Gentiles. The inscription read "No Gentile may enter within the railing around the sanctuary and within the enclosure. Whoever should be caught will render himself liable to the death penalty, which will inevitably follow."

Now there was legal recourse for such trespassing; the mob could have called the captain of the temple guard, or one of his officers, to deal with it. But they were beyond rationality or legal procedure; they wanted blood. They had not actually captured any trespassers; they were relying on hearsay, not fact.

Acts 21:30

And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

They removed Paul from the temple. Notice that they had no other trespassers, particularly Trophimus, to grab. The pretence was that Paul had defiled the temple; their obvious intention was to kill Paul.

Acts 21:31,32

And as they went about to kill him, tidings came to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.

They sought to kill him, in some kind of frenzied popular tumult, much as had been done with Stephen. There was no attempt to proceed lawfully. They were already trying to beat him to death when the soldiers heard the uproar.

The **chief captain of the band** was the commanding officer of the Roman soldiers who were stationed in the Fortress of Antonia, just north of the temple.

Within the walls of the Fortress of Antonia there were barracks for at least a thousand soldiers. The whole garrison in Jerusalem was not always posted there. It is probable that the usual quarters of the “whole cohort” (Matt. 27:27), or the greater part of it, were towards the western quarter of the city, in the Praetorium (John 18:28) or official residence where Jesus was mocked by the soldiers, and on the pavement in front of which Pilate sat, and condemned the Lord Jesus Christ.

But at the time of the greater festivals, when a vast crowd of people, full of religious fanaticism and embittered by hatred of their Roman rulers, flocked into the Temple courts, it was found necessary to order a strong military force into Antonia, and to keep them under arms, so that they might act immediately and promptly in the case of any outbreak.

The Roman troops, serving as a police force, were very alert and responded immediately when they knew there was trouble.

Acts 21:33

Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

We know from Acts 24:22 that this chief captain was Claudius Lysias, a military tribune, or Chiliarch, a commander of 1000 men.

Acts 24:22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that Way, he deferred them and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of this matter.

Lysias may have been Greek by birth (cf. Acts 21:37), and who had probably assumed the Roman forename Claudius (Acts 23:26) when he purchased citizenship (Acts 22:28), was a military tribune or chiliarch (i.e., leader of

1000 men) in command of the garrison stationed in the castle overlooking the temple at Jerusalem.¹

Upon learning of the riot instigated by the Asiatic Jews, he hastened down with his soldiers, and succeeded in rescuing Paul from the hands of the mob. As Paul was the apparent malefactor, Lysias bound him with two chains, and demanded to know who he was and what was the cause of the disturbance. Failing amid the general tumult to get any satisfactory reply, he conducted Paul to the castle, and there questioned him as to whether he was the “Egyptian,” an impostor that had lately been defeated by Felix (Josephus BJ ii.13.5; Ant. xx.8.6).

Upon receiving the answer of Paul that he was a “Jew of Tarsus,” he gave him permission to address the people from the stairs which connected the castle and the temple. As the speech of Paul had no pacifying effect, Lysias intended to examine him by scourging; but on learning that his prisoner was a Roman citizen, he desisted from the attempt and released him from his bonds. The meeting of the Sanhedrin which Lysias then summoned also ended in an uproar, and having rescued Paul again with difficulty he conducted him back to the castle.

The news of the plot against the life of one whom he knew to be a Roman citizen decided for Lysias that he could not hope to cope alone with so grave a situation. He therefore dispatched Paul under the protection of a bodyguard to Felix at Caesarea, along with a letter explaining the circumstances (23:26–30; the genuineness of this letter has been questioned by some, but without sufficient reason). In this letter he took care to safeguard his own conduct, and to shield his hastiness in binding Paul.

There is evidence (cf. Acts 24:22) that Lysias was also summoned to Caesarea at a later date to give his testimony, but no mention is made of

¹ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia

his arrival there. It is probable, however, that he was among the chief captains who attended the trial of Paul before King Agrippa and Festus (cf. 25:22).

Acts 21:34-36

And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

And when he came upon the stairs, he was carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the people.

For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

The officer tried to interview Paul, but you can imagine how hard it must have been to hear anything. The people were screaming uncontrollably, crowding and pushing the soldiers, still trying to get their hands on Paul to kill him. The soldiers arrested Paul, and chained him up; they had no idea who he was or what he was supposed to have done. He had to be carried by the soldiers, who formed a protective cordon around him and took him into the Fortress.

“Away with him!”, that is “To death with him!”

Acts 21:37,38

And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said to the chief captain, May I speak to you? Who said, Can you speak Greek?

Are you not that Egyptian, which before these days made an uproar, and led out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

The chief captain was not a Roman by birth, which we know from Acts 22:28 where he states that he had paid a lot of money for his citizenship. He was surprised to hear Paul speak Greek; he had thought Paul was a criminal or crime boss, an Egyptian who had

started a revolt and led 4000 assassins into the desert.

It was no wonder that the officer was careful to determine whether Paul was an Egyptian revolutionary. During the administration of the governor Felix, a terrorist group known as the Sicarii assassinated Jewish leaders who were friendly with the Romans. The thugs got their name from the *sica*, daggers which they concealed in their flowing robes. During Jewish festivals they would mingle with crowds, strike down their targets, join the general crowd and escape detection.

Acts 21:39,40

But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech you, allow me to speak to the people.

And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand to the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

Paul's speech to the Jewish citizens is given in Acts 22.