

Ouachita Baptist University

## Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

---

Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts

W.O. Vaught Archive

---

9-14-1983

### Paul in the Hands of an Angry Mob

W. O. Vaught

*Ouachita Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn\\_acts](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_acts)



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), and the [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Vaught, W. O., "Paul in the Hands of an Angry Mob" (1983). *Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts*. 76.

[https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn\\_acts/76](https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/vn_acts/76)

This Sermon Notes is brought to you for free and open access by the W.O. Vaught Archive at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Vaught Sermon Notes: A Study of the Book of Acts by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact [mortensona@obu.edu](mailto:mortensona@obu.edu).

PAUL IN THE HANDS OF AN ANGRY MOB

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS  
NUMBER 106  
ACTS 21:38-40

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.  
Immanuel Baptist Church  
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 21:38-40 "Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 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 thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying"

We have been studying the great doctrine of human freedom. We have seen how a mob or a riot can violate human freedom and we have seen how crime can violate freedom.

ACTS 21:38 "Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?" Here in this verse we are confronted with an Egyptian. He was the head of a great crime syndicate. Rome stood for law and order and the force of the Roman legion was the great force that preserved law and order and kept peace in the world for almost a thousand years. This means maximum protection for individual freedom and makes it possible for maximum evangelistic effort to be carried on. In our last study we saw how the Roman Government handled a riot. Rioting and mob activity simply cannot be tolerated if peace is to be long maintained.

Here in verse 38 the Roman Tribune asked Paul if he were not an Egyptian criminal. The Tribune evidently thought that Paul was the Egyptian who was the head of a great crime syndicate. Evidently Rome had been harrassed by this criminal group and evidently there had been a wide search for this gangster. When the Tribune found out that Paul was not that criminal, he gave him maximum protection. But for the time being the Tribune thought that Paul was that gangster. The Egyptians had a revolution in 54 A.D. The Egyptian gang leader announced himself as a prophet, for he knew this was a good way to appeal to the people. He knew that the Jews wanted to overthrow Rome, so this criminal announced that he had been raised up by God to do just that thing. Many of the Jews fell for his plan and became a part of his criminal syndicate. Now this is typical of religion. They will use gangsters, they will use criminals, they will even use Communism in order to carry their point. Communists have discovered they can use the social action crowd, they can use do-gooders, they can use religion to disrupt a state or a nation and the religious crowd will go right along with them. This is why so often some ministers are found in the front lines of Communist activity, doing the spade work for the Communists. Now this is the way this Egyptian gangster operated and he needed the support of the Jews to carry his organization forward. They were operating in the wilderness of Southern Palestine at this time. "Which before these days" is a reference to 54 A.D., about three years before the time of Paul's arrest by this mob. "Madest an uproar" is an old English word for revolt. The Greek word is "anastattoo" and it means to start a revolution. These men were murderers and the word for murder is "sikaiaros" and is taken from a word which means a dagger. So here was a gang that carried daggers and killed at will. Three years before that time 30,000 people in Jerusalem joined in this revolt and decided to join in with this Egyptian gangster. Of course this Egyptian proved to be a false prophet. He called all of his followers up to the Mt. of Olives and had a prayer. He told them that while he prayed the walls of Jerusalem were going to fall down.. Now while he was going through the ritual of his prayer the Roman garrison came out and disrupted their plot. They killed over 4,000 on the spot and the others escaped and continued their gangster activity.

Thus we get a good picture of Rome as a deterrent to crime and as a great power set for preserving law and order in the world. So verse 38 is really a photograph of Roman law and order. God used this government to preserve peace in the world through those centuries when Christianity was getting a footing in the earth. Not only did they give great stability to the nations but they built roads and fostered commerce and all of these means were used of God for the spreading of the gospel. This is an amazing picture of how God can take a pagan empire and make it serve his ends in the evangelization of the nations. The Roman Emperors were usually very corrupt personally, but in spite of poor leadership the basic structure of the Roman Empire continued.

So verse 38 lets us see the importance of the divine institution called the nation. It lets us see the power of Rome in preserving law and order, and lets us see how criminal elements were disruptive then just like they are now in our day. So we conclude that the Roman Empire was like a great lake and for many centuries all the streams of the nations flowed into this great lake, and the streams of modern times flow out of the Roman Empire. So we can say that the Roman Empire is the dividing line between ancient and modern history. All concepts of ancient history flowed into the Roman Empire and all concepts of modern history flowed from it. The ideas of human freedom, law and order, government for the protection of personal rights flowed from this concept of government. The presence of Rome in Palestine in Paul's day is an amazing picture of how force of an armed garrison preserved peace for all the people of the world. The Roman government actually protected the Jews who accepted Christ as Saviour and made it possible for them to live in freedom.

Several times we read in scripture that Jesus came to the earth at exactly the right moment. He came to earth during the Augustinian period of Roman history and this was a period of stability in the Roman Empire. The next period of stability was the period of the Antonine Caesars and this was the period when the Canon of Scripture was completed. So you actually have two periods of stability during the birth of Christ and the establishment of his kingdom in the earth. Both periods of stability were provided by the Roman government. "The fulness of time" or "The correct time" was a time when God used this pagan empire to stabilize the world for his goals and purposes. To be sure this empire was far from being a Christian empire, but the empire served these purposes for Christianity.

We will see that Paul is able to convince this Roman Tribune that he is not that Egyptian gangster, and thereby, Paul will receive maximum protection from the Roman government. This points up the great stability and fairness of the Roman government. This tribune had made an incorrect estimate of the situation and had decided Paul was an Egyptian gangster. But once he got the truth he was willing to change his mind quickly. It is always important to get all the facts and then act on the basis of all the facts. Many of us as believers haven't learned to wait for all the facts. But many of us live on the pattern "Don't bother me with the facts for I have already made up my mind". We need to be objective and make up our minds on the basis of all the facts. We will now get the facts in the next verse. Rome always said that a man was innocent until proven guilty. Religion says that you are guilty until proven innocent. This religious mob said, "Paul is guilty, let's kill him". But this fair minded Roman official saw to it that fairness and justice prevailed. So here is an illustration of how the divine institution called the nation protected the human race from the encroachment of religion.

ACTS 21:39 "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 thee, suffer me to speak unto the people." In this verse we will see the facts that Paul gave. "I am a man, a Jew". In other words Paul was letting him know immediately that he was not that Egyptian. He mentioned "Tarsus" for Tarsus had been made a free city of the Roman Empire. Taurus Mountains rose above Tarsus and in those mountains was a famous pass known as the

Cilician Gates. Here Tarsus was located with one of the finest universities of the Roman Empire. When Pompey the Great conquered the Middle East, he made Tarsus a free city and every person who lived there became a citizen of the Roman Empire. So when Paul said, "Tarsus" immediately this Tribune knew Paul was a Roman citizen and in the next verse Paul will reveal that he was born a Roman citizen. This Tribune had to purchase his own Roman citizenship and it was quite expensive--but Paul was born a Roman citizen. Paul reminded him that Tarsus was no insignificant city.

On the basis of being a Roman citizen, Paul requested that he might speak to the mob. So we see that Paul was just as objective as was this Tribune. The mob was screaming, trying to get at Paul and kill him, but these two men were quite objective in their conversation. In other words, both Paul and the Tribune kept their cool and both of them acted on the basis of clear thinking. To put it in our language, they were calm, cool and collected while the mob roared around them. Eventually Paul will appeal to Caesar and will end up in Rome. So from this we see that people were given justice under the Roman system.

"I beseech thee" is a polite request. Now this is amazing considering the raging mob around them. But both Paul and the Tribune are relaxed and calm even in the midst of a mob. Paul is anxious to speak to the mob and he is anxious to witness to the mob. Paul had made a terrible blunder, but he is now back in fellowship and we will observe him act as a Christian in fellowship. Even though they tried to kill him, Paul is going to witness to them.

ACTS 21:40 "And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying," "Given him license" means the Tribune gave Paul permission to speak freely to the crowd. The high stairs proved to be a good pulpit for Paul and with the Tribune standing by his side for protection, he bore witness to them. It says here that Paul spoke to them in "The Hebrew Tongue". It means Hebrew dialect, and we call it Aramaic. Paul was able to speak Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic and probably several other languages. Here before a hostile crowd, a crowd with negative volition, Paul was willing to speak. It was not an ideal situation, but we will see in our next study how his message affected the crowd.