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PAUL ARRESTED AND BOUND, BUT NOT SCOURGED

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 112
ACTS 22:21-30

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ACTS 22:21-30 "And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them."

Paul is ending his speech but he doesn't know it. This passage is recorded here in order to give us the background on the procedure that finally landed Paul in Rome. I am also certain these verses are given us to teach us many great Biblical truths. Here we are looking at a fantastic setup of law and order and this Roman Chiliarch here extended to Paul all the protection the Roman Empire was able to give. He stood between Paul and the mob and as a good military commander, he remained impartial until he got all the facts. This Chiliarch is a Roman unbeliever but as a military commander, he helped stabilize the world while Christianity was getting a footing in the earth. This Chiliarch had received excellent training. Right at first the Chiliarch thought Paul was some Egyptian gangster, but he soon discovered he was dealing with a Roman citizen. Now when you deal with a Roman citizen, you always deal with him under Roman law. The Romans assumed that if you were not a Roman citizen you could not and would not tell the truth, and when they dealt with a non-Roman, they would scourge him in order to get the truth from him. At the time of this incident with Paul, the Roman Empire had been controlling nations and people for about 800 years. In those long centuries they had been led to assume that people who weren't under their system and who didn't understand Roman law would always lie rather than tell the truth. They said the best way to turn a liar into one who would tell the truth was to beat the "you know what" out of him. And that is exactly what they had been doing for about 800 years and had been very successful in the process. If a man was a Roman citizen, they assumed he was telling the truth, but if he happened not to be a Roman citizen, they assumed he was telling a lie. So it was quite natural for this garrison commander to assume that Paul was telling a lie, for he did not know that Paul was a Roman citizen. So the Roman Chiliarch was dealing in a very natural way with Paul.

This is a very remarkable passage. We start with a screaming mob trying to take the life of Paul, and we end up with Paul being given a fair hearing before Roman law. So here we have a clash and a contrast of Roman law and Jewish law. Both systems were excellent. The Roman system was built on the assumption that a man was innocent until proven guilty. We have inherited that in our democracy from Anglo-Saxon law. Now the Jews had a good system too, but at this particular time, Jewish law had fallen under the domination of religion, and as a result Jewish law was infiltrated with prejudice and injustice. Jewish law had at this time fallen into the hands of the Pharisees and was so distorted you couldn't even recognize it. So in this part of this chapter we come again to the fact that religion is the greatest enemy of mankind. Religion is the worst thing that ever happened to the human race. Religion is the system by which the Devil hopes to gain control of the world. Roman law as we observe it here in this chapter had not been infiltrated with religion and was able therefore to administer justice. Religion is the enemy of the individual, the family and the nation and will destroy the world unless held in check. One of the tasks of a Pastor is to protect the church from legalism and religion and give the people the plain teaching of Scripture. That's why in Romans 16:17 and 18 there is a constant warning--"Beware of religion! Beware of religion!" In this passage, therefore, we will see Paul about to be scourged, but before it ends we will see Roman law save his life.

ACTS 22:21 "And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles." That word "Gentiles" literally set the Jews on fire. That was "the straw that broke the camel's back". When Paul mentioned that word "Gentiles" they broke into a screaming mob, anxious to kill him. That one word terminated Paul's message. These prejudiced Jews were just sure that for one to be a Christian he had to be a circumcized Jew and when Paul intimated that Gentiles could be saved by the message of salvation, it brought their anger to the boiling point.

ACTS 22:22 "And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." "This word" to which this sentence refers is "Gentiles". The word used here for "lifted up their voices" is "epairo" and means "to scream". In other words, each individual in that mob threw a tantrum. Of course that's all they could do for they couldn't get to Paul because of the Roman guards. When they said, "It is not fitting for him to live", the word for live is a mechanical word and refers to eating, drinking, or breathing. They wanted Paul blotted off the face of the earth.

ACTS 22:23 "And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air" Conduct like this is typical of adult babies. They had a tantrum and tore their clothes. Some people still do this today when they can't have their way. This is typical of religious people. They shout, they throw tantrums and what they want is always unjust.

ACTS 22:24 "The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him." The word translated here "Chief Captain" should be Chiliarch and that means the highest ranking military officer of any certain region. The Chiliarch realized that he couldn't handle Paul in front of that mob. The word "commanded" here is an aorist, active, indicative and refers to decisive action. He had to

make a quick decisive decision. He didn't have time to say, "Should I do this or should I do that?". Indecision is never good, but in a military situation it is inexcusable. So here we have a picture of decisive action and it saved Paul's life. The Chiliarch decided to deal with Paul inside the fortress, away from the mob. His decision was good but his procedure was wrong. To scourge a Roman citizen was unlawful. But at that moment the officer thought Paul was a Jewish criminal and didn't have any idea that he was a prominent Roman citizen. He assumed that Paul was not telling the truth and he was going to try to beat the truth out of him. They would scourge him and then question him. For 800 years this had been the procedure of Rome and it usually brought perfect results. The whole concept of Rome was this--we want to know the facts.

ACTS 22:25 "And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" The Chiliarch walked away and turned Paul over to the centurion, who was ready to proceed with the scourging. When Paul said the word "Roman" he meant "Roman citizen". Paul knew Roman law and he knew his rights. He knew no Roman could be legally scourged without first his cause had been heard.

ACTS 22:26 "When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman." Please notice the loyalty of the centurion to the Chiliarch. He didn't try to take things into his own hands, but rather took the case to the commanding officer above him. So his message to the officer above him was "Beware what you do, for this man is a Roman citizen". Lex is the Latin word for law and leges is the plural and this is the word from which we get legislature. It means "the people making laws". Roman law said that you don't touch a Roman citizen with scourging until first you have heard his witness.

ACTS 22:27 "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea." Instantly the Chiliarch ascertained the facts and when he asked Paul if he was a Roman citizen, Paul said, "Yes". Just one word, but on that one word hung the whole force of Roman law and justice.

ACTS 22:28 "And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born." From this verse we realize that this Chiliarch was from a different nation and had not been born a Roman citizen. In some way he had gotten into the Roman army and through his military service and a large sum of money he had purchased his citizenship. The Romans had a system so an officer could take his military pay and divert it into a trust fund and when it became large enough he could purchase citizenship.

So it is quite evident that this Chiliarch is a very noble man and a faithful soldier. The word here for obtained is "Ktaiomai" and means to purchase with money. The word for freedom is "politeia" and from it we get politics. Isn't it a shame that so many times this word doesn't mean freedom today? But Paul had been born a Roman citizen. "Was born" is a perfect, passive, participle and refers to the fact that he was from a long line of Roman citizens. From this construction we know that his father was a Roman and his grandfather was a Roman. Tarsus had become a free city under Pompey. Later in the story we will see that Paul's nephew had easy access to the Roman officials and this would indicate that Paul was from a prominent Roman family. Paul was racially a Jew but he was a citizen of Rome.

ACTS 22:29 "Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him." Here we see that the Chiliarch and the other officials realized that they had over-stepped their authority when they bound Paul. So in addition to the mob, this officer had the additional problem of an illegal action toward a Roman citizen, and a prominent one at that.

ACTS 22:30 "On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them." Therefore, the decision was made to call the whole Jewish Sanhedrin together so all the evidence could be gathered concerning Paul. Immediately Paul's bonds were removed and the stage was set to hear the evidence. As we bring this study to a close, please notice something--The moment the Chiliarch received correct information he reversed his decision and set about to right the wrong done to Paul.

What does this mean to you? Well, just this. You come here and you hear Bible doctrine Sunday and Wednesday night. You are learning the facts of Scripture. You are learning Bible truth. Are you adjusting your life to make it square up to the facts? When it says here, "He would have known the certainty", the word for "Would" is "Boulomai" and means his desire to know the facts aside from his emotions.

The next study will bring us to the defense Paul made before the Sanhedrin.