

Title: Acts 21-22: Paul's Jerusalem Journey, Temple Arrest, and Roman Custody

Author: Dr. Craig Keener

Session 21

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

prophecy, Trophimus, Claudius Lysias, Gamaliel, Roman citizenship, Fortress Antonia, Caesarea, Jerusalem Temple, Sicarii, theophanic call

Abstract

This lecture explores Acts chapters 21 and 22, detailing Paul's final journey to Jerusalem, his arrest in the Temple, and his subsequent custody under Roman authorities. Dr. Craig Keener examines how the Holy Spirit warned Paul of impending arrest through prophetic declarations from the believers at Tyre and the prophet Agabus, setting up a theme of divine necessity. He provides rich historical and architectural context on Herod's Temple, the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and the military role of the Fortress Antonia. Finally, Keener analyzes Paul's rhetorical defenses, highlighting the strategic use of bilingualism, his training under Gamaliel, and his Roman citizenship to secure safety and witness.

Outline

I. Introduction to Acts Chapters 21 and 22

- A. Detailed travel narratives in the "we" material (eyewitness accounts).**
- B. Value of travel descriptions for ancient urban and educated audiences.**
- C. Focus on the Aegean islands and coastal ports of Asia Minor (Kos, Rhodes, Patara).**
 - 1. Kos's wine production.
 - 2. Rhodes's historical alignment with Rome.
 - 3. Patara as a southern Asia Minor port and key hub for the Alexandrian grain trade (the largest trade network in the Roman Empire).

II. Prophecy, Guidance, and Divine Necessity

- A. The Conflict of Prophetic Warnings (Acts 21:4)**
 - 1. Believers in Tyre warn Paul "through the Spirit" not to go to Jerusalem.
 - 2. Paul's certainty of his calling to proceed to Jerusalem despite the warnings.
 - 3. Theological resolution: "Knowing in part and prophesying in part" (1 Corinthians 13:9).

a. John the Baptist parallel (Luke 7): Knowing the coming kingdom but questioning current events.

b. Elisha/Elijah parallel (2 Kings 2): Prophets knew Elijah would be taken but lacked the full picture of how or where.

4. Prophecy reveals the trials, but God orders steps and gives grace for fulfillment.

B. The Household of Philip and the Female Prophets (Acts 21:8-9)

1. Paul and Luke lodge with Philip the Evangelist in Caesarea (the Roman capital of Judea).

2. Philip's four virgin daughters who regularly prophesied.

a. Historical and cultural context: likely young teens (12-14 years old), showing God's use of youth.

b. Fulfillment of Joel 2:28-29 / Acts 2:17-18 ("your sons and daughters will prophesy").

C. The Prophecy of Agabus (Acts 21:10-11)

1. Agabus (a senior Judean prophet from Acts 11) performs a symbolic, enacted prophecy.

2. Binds his own hands and feet with Paul's girdle/belt.

3. Introduction of the formula: "Thus says the Holy Spirit" (Greek: *tade lege to pneuma to hagion*), transitioning from the Old Testament "Thus says the Lord".

4. Declares the owner of the girdle will be bound by Judeans and handed to the Gentiles.

a. Literary and historical parallelism with Jesus' predictions of his own arrest and trials (Luke 22-23).

D. The Resolution of Divine Necessity

1. Luke and the diaspora companions (carrying the collection) plead with Paul to stay.

2. Paul's willingness to suffer and die in Jerusalem for the Name of Jesus.

3. The community surrenders to God's will: "The will of the Lord be done."

III. Arrival in Jerusalem and the Conciliation Campaign

A. Lodging with Mnason (Acts 21:15-16)

1. Traveling with Mnason of Cyprus, an "old disciple" representing early Hellenistic believers.

2. Hosting Gentile believers in Jerusalem represents the practical fulfillment of the Acts 15 decree.

B. Meeting with James and the Jerusalem Elders (Acts 21:17-25)

1. James and elders receive the team hospitably.

2. James notes there are "tens of thousands" (*myriadoi*) of Jewish believers in Judea who are zealous for the law.

a. Far outnumbering contemporary Pharisees (estimated at 6,000 by Josephus).

3. Valuation of the law in Luke-Acts: Piety towards the law is presented positively (e.g., Jesus' parents, Joseph of Arimathea, Ananias).

C. The Rumors against Paul

1. Accusations that Paul teaches diaspora Jews to abandon Moses, circumcision, and customs.
2. Paul's actual practice: becoming "all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:19-23), keeping Jewish customs among Jews but rejecting their imposition on Gentiles.

D. The Nazarite Vow Sacrifice

1. James suggests Paul pay the expenses for four men under a Nazarite vow.
2. Paul gladly agrees to show solidarity with Jewish customs, as the temple is still standing and not yet judged.
3. Analogy of cross-cultural missionary work (Zimbabwe and China illustration).

IV. The Temple Riot and the Dividing Wall of Hostility

A. The Ephesian Accusers and False Charge (Acts 21:27-30)

1. Ephesian Jews from the province of Asia recognize Paul.
2. Recognize Trophimus (an Ephesian Gentile) in the city with Paul.
3. Falsely extrapolate that Paul brought Trophimus into the inner courts of the Temple (a capital desecration).

B. Architectural and Cultural Segregation in Herod's Temple

1. Unlike Solomon's temple, Herod's temple strictly segregated Jews from Gentiles.
2. The inner Court of Israel and Court of Women were separated from the outer Court of the Gentiles by a low dividing wall.
3. Warning signs in Greek and Latin informed Gentiles that crossing past the wall made them responsible for their own immediate death.
 - a. *Josephus documents these signs; archaeologists have recovered them.*
4. Theological Parallel in Ephesians 2:11-22:
 - a. *Paul declares that this "dividing wall of hostility" (mesotoichon) has been shattered by Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:14).*
 - b. *A new temple built of Jews and Gentiles is constructed in the Spirit.*
5. Historical context of ethnic polarization: shortly after, Jews and Syrians massacred each other in Caesarea (18,000 in an hour), Philip's family fled to Ephesus, and Rome destroyed the temple.

C. The Riot and Roman Intervention (Acts 21:30-36)

1. Gates of the temple are shut by Levite guards to avoid desecrating the temple with blood.
2. Paul is dragged out and beaten.
3. Sentry in the Fortress Antonia (which overlooked the outer court) spots the riot.
4. The Tribune Claudius Lysias runs down the wide stairs with soldiers and centurions to capture Paul.
 - a. *Inadvertently rescues Paul from death.*

V. Paul's Defense on the Antonia Stairs (Acts 21:37 - 22:21)

A. Lysias's Misidentification of Paul

1. Tribune mistakes Paul for the Egyptian false prophet who recently led an abortive desert uprising.
2. Or one of the Sicarii (political assassins who hid daggers under cloaks to execute aristocrats in temple crowds and escaped by crying faux horror).

B. The Language and Accent Barrier

1. Paul addresses Lysias in highly educated Greek: "May I say something to you?".
2. Paul speaks with an Aegean/Attic accent, which was considered the purest form of Greek, astonishing the Tribune.
3. Parisian French and accents illustration (Medine Keener story).
4. Paul asserts his citizenship of Tarsus, "no insignificant city", gaining permission to speak.

C. Address in Aramaic (Acts 21:40 - 22:2)

1. Paul gestures for silence and speaks in Aramaic.
2. The crowd goes completely silent, realizing he is fluent in their primary local tongue.
3. Paul's bilingualism and cross-cultural adaptability.

D. Paul's Pedigree and Education

1. Reared in Jerusalem from his youth (explaining his fluent Aramaic).
2. Educated "at the feet of Gamaliel," the most elite Pharisee of his generation.
 - a. Posture of a disciple: sitting in the dust (Mishnah Abot 1:1, Luke 10 Mary parallel).*
 - b. Gamaliel's house taught Greek literature and classics alongside Hebrew scripture.*
3. Rearing as a "son of Pharisees" in Jerusalem.

E. Paul's Zeal and Conversion Testimony

1. Zealous for the law, persecuting the Way unto death.
2. Under commission of the high priests (the same group now accusing him).
3. Recounting the Damascus road theophany and his calling.

F. The Trigger Word: Gentiles (Acts 22:21-22)

1. The crowd listens favorably until Paul quotes Jesus' command: "Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles".
2. This triggers immediate outrage, as the crowd is deeply polarized by growing anti-Roman nationalism.
3. The mob throws off cloaks and flings dust into the air, screaming, "Away with such a fellow from the earth!", echoing the trial of Jesus (Luke 23).

VI. Interrogation and Roman Citizenship (Acts 22:22-30)

A. The Interrogation Order

1. Lysias orders Paul inside the fortress to be interrogated under torture by scourging (coercitio).
2. Aims to discover the root cause of the Jewish mob's anger.

B. Assertion of Citizenship Rights

1. As they bind Paul with leather thongs, he asks the centurion: "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned?"
2. Centurion immediately stops and warns the Tribune: "Take heed what you do, for this man is a Roman citizen".

C. The Lex Julia and Legal Consequences

1. The Julian Law strictly forbade binding, beating, or torturing a Roman citizen without a trial.
2. Violating citizen rights was a severe crime; subordinates could face execution (e.g., a tribune who did so was drawn and quartered).

D. Claudius Lysias vs. Paul: How Citizenship Was Acquired

1. Lysias states: "With a great sum I obtained this citizenship".
 - a. Common bribery practice under early Emperor Claudius.*
 - b. Lysias was a Greek who took the imperial benefactor's name (Claudius).*
2. Paul replies: "But I was born a citizen".
 - a. Indicates higher social status, likely descending from freed slaves of a wealthy Roman patron in Tarsus.*

E. The Tribune's Fear and Damage Control

1. Lysias is terrified for having bound a Roman citizen.
2. Unbinds Paul and commands the Sanhedrin to assemble the next day to investigate the charges properly.

VII. The Apologetic Purpose of the Custody Narratives

- A. One-quarter of Acts is dedicated to Paul in Roman custody.**
- B. Chains and custody carried immense shame in the Greco-Roman world (cf. 2 Timothy 1, Philippians 1).**
- C. Luke's narrative serves to vindicate Paul and, by extension, the entire Gentile mission.**
- D. Parallelism between Paul and Jesus: both declared innocent by Roman authorities but held due to political pressures.**
- E. The value of historical, legal, and theological apologetics in defending the faith.**