

# An Unexpected Ministry Opportunity (Acts 21:27-40)<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Context

- Paul on his way back to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey.
- When in Tyre and Caesarea, Paul is warned that he would encounter trouble in Jerusalem: be bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles (Romans).
- Paul resolves to return to Jerusalem, regardless of the danger.
- Last time
  - The elders of the Church in Jerusalem expressed concern that some Jews erroneously believe that Paul was teaching Jews to forsake Moses and reject their customs.
  - The elders recommended that Paul demonstrate otherwise by participating in and paying for the purification ceremony of four other men signifying the end of their Nazarite vows.

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## 2. Passage (Acts 21:27-40)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>27</sup> *Now when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,*  
<sup>28</sup> *crying out, "Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place."* <sup>29</sup> *(For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)* <sup>30</sup> *And all the city was disturbed; and the people ran together, seized Paul, and dragged him out of the temple; and immediately the doors were shut.* <sup>31</sup> *Now as they were seeking to kill him, news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.* <sup>32</sup> *He immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down to them. And when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.* <sup>33</sup> *Then the commander came near and took him,*

*and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and he asked who he was and what he had done.* <sup>34</sup> *And some among the multitude cried one thing and some another. So when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded him to be taken into the barracks.* <sup>35</sup> *When he reached the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because of the violence of the mob.* <sup>36</sup> *For the multitude of the people followed after, crying out, "Away with him!"* <sup>37</sup> *Then as Paul was about to be led into the barracks, he said to the commander, "May I speak to you?" He replied, "Can you speak Greek?"* <sup>38</sup> *Are you not the Egyptian who some time ago stirred up a rebellion and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?"* <sup>39</sup> *But Paul said, "I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak to the people."* <sup>40</sup> *So when he had given him permission, Paul stood on the stairs and motioned with his hand to the people. And when there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, . . .* (Acts 21:27-40)

### 3. Crowd Dynamics

- <sup>27</sup> . . . *Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd . . .* (Acts 21:27)
  - Jews from Asia who had seen or heard about Paul when he was ministering on the missionary journey.
  - In Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, similar to the situation in Acts 2.
- Reactionary emotional response: promoting lies and/or inaccuracies
  - *This . . . man teaches . . . against this people, the law, and this place . . .* (Acts 21:28)
    - Inaccurate representation of Paul's ministry and teaching.
  - *. . . he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place* (Acts 21:28)
    - "Such an act in Jewish eyes would have defiled their holy place. Gentiles were permitted into the court of the Gentiles but no farther. Two inscriptions have been found on a balustrade separating the court of the Gentiles from the rest of the temple area. These warned Gentiles they would have themselves to blame for their deaths which would certainly ensue if they would proceed beyond the barrier (cf. Eph. 2:14). So deep was this feeling that the Romans gave permission to Jews to fulfill this death sentence, even if the intruder was a Roman citizen. [Toussaint]"<sup>3</sup>

- Untrue: *For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.* (Acts 21:29)
- . . . *some among the multitude cried one thing and some another . . . he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult* (Acts 21:34)
- . . . *he had to be carried because of the violence of the mob.* (Acts 21:35)
  - Oh how Satan *loves* a mob. The issues involved matter little to him: disorder and mob rule will *a/ways* serve the devil. Logic and reasonableness go out the window: damage and injury are certain to follow!
  - Even if disorder doesn't lead to physical violence, it will completely squelch any real communication. At this point: *nobody is convincing anybody of anything!*

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## 4. Law and Order to the Rescue

- . . . *as they were seeking to kill him . . .* (Acts 21:31)
- . . . *when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.* (Acts 21:33)
  - “Here comes the law, we better act orderly.”
  - Law brings order!
  - The converse is also true: *lawlessness* results in *disorder*. (America today.)
- . . . *Then the commander came near and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains . . .* (Acts 21:33)
  - God may use unexpected means to protect His people.
  - To protect Paul from an assassination plot by his fellow Jews in Jerusalem, God arranged a Roman escort of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen to take him to Caesarea.
- . . . *Paul said, “I am . . . a citizen of no mean city; and I implore you, permit me to speak” . . . So when he had given him permission . . .* (Acts 21:39-40)
  - Ultimately, Paul's educational background and Roman citizenship would be used of God as a means for both protection and ministry (Acts 22:28).
- . . . *Can you speak Greek? . . . when there was great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language, saying, . . .* (Acts 21:37-40)<sup>4</sup>
  - Paul was not only a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Php. 3:5), he was bilingual and had Roman citizenship.
  - These unique characteristics enabled Paul to have a powerful ministry to both Jews and Gentiles, while also providing protection from Jewish

unbelievers.

- Next time: Acts [22](#) - Paul gives one of the most powerful testimonies found anywhere in Scripture!

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## 5. Application

- **Beware of Crowd Dynamics** - Satan *always* wins when crowd dynamics prevail: emotions run high and nobody is thinking carefully or communicating accurately.
- **Government as Minister of God** - Romans [13](#)
  - *... when they saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.* (Acts [21:33](#))
  - This is *law and order* - and *disorder* never serves God's purposes: it is the devil's mosh-pit!
  - <sup>22</sup> *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* <sup>23</sup> *gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.* <sup>24</sup> *And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* <sup>25</sup> *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.* ( Gal. [5:22-25](#))
  - <sup>1</sup> *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.* <sup>2</sup> *Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.* <sup>3</sup> *For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same.* <sup>4</sup> *For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.* (Rom. [13:1-4](#))
  - This is why governments are blessed when Christianity influences a culture.
- **God Uses Our Background and Experience** - Paul provides one of many examples where a person's background, *even prior to coming to faith*, is used for effective ministry.
- **Unexpected Ministry Opportunities**
  - In God's sovereignty, situations which appear negative may actually provide ministry opportunities.
  - Successful ministry does not always result in acceptance: sometimes our job is to provide a voice of judgment and warning.

- **In Christian Ministry: Rejection is not Failure**

- Paul rejected here after giving an eloquent testimony (but only God knows the seeds that were sown among his listeners)!
- The beginning of Paul's "fourth missionary journey" to Rome. He will be in Roman custody for the next five years (ca. A.D. 55-60).
- *Appearance* of failure, but God knows what He is doing with Paul (and us)!
- In ministry, failure is not *rejection*. Failure is *being unfaithful* in proclaiming what God has given us to say.
  - The context of Jesus' teaching on salt and light, *the rejection of truth*: <sup>11</sup> *Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.* <sup>12</sup> *Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* (Mat. 5:11-12)
  - <sup>13</sup> *You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.* <sup>14</sup> *You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.* <sup>15</sup> *Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.* <sup>16</sup> *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* (Mat. 5:13-16)
- God is sovereign: our part is to faithfully proclaim and demonstrate Christian living and truth. *God owns the results, not us!*
- Ultimately, conversion is not a matter of persuasiveness or cleverness: it is a miracle of God in response to faithful testimony.
- We must learn to separate rejection from failure! Only unfaithfulness is failure.

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## 6. Closing Prayer

Fri Mar 21 18:26:42 2025



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## Endnotes:

1. [https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts\\_by\\_Tony\\_Garland/75\\_Acts\\_21\\_27-40/index.htm](https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/Acts_by_Tony_Garland/75_Acts_21_27-40/index.htm)
  2. Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture references are from the *New King James Version*, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
  3. Ref-0038, 2.417
  4. Hebrew is <sup>אֵבְרָאִי</sup> [Hebraidi], which some scholars believe refers to the cognate Aramaic language spoke in NT Palestine.
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## Sources:

**Ref-0038** John Walvoord and Roy. B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1983).

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## Links Mentioned Above

- a - See [www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm](http://www.spiritandtruth.org/id/tg.htm).  
b - See <https://www.spiritandtruth.org>.  
c - See <mailto:contact@spiritandtruth.org>.