

## Acts 21:37-22:29

### *Jewish, Christian, Roman: Defining the Apostle Paul*

#### Learning Objective

- Explore that our ultimate citizenship is in Heaven, but our citizenship on Earth is also important as Christians.

**Pray for your time together today.**

**?** When was a time you felt like an outsider (e.g. traveling abroad, moving to a new area, not having things in common with the people you were with)?

#### Read Out Loud:

##### Previously In Acts

In Acts 21, Paul and his companions return to Jerusalem to visit the Apostles and elders of the church, as well as worship at the temple. Paul goes through a purification ceremony to help him transition back into the Jewish culture and to appease the new Jewish followers of Christ. Before this ritual was complete, Paul was attacked by an angry mob who thought he brought Gentiles into the temple. The crowd tried to kill him, but Roman soldiers stepped in to stop the riot by arresting Paul. This week's passage picks up right after Paul has been arrested.

#### Read Out Loud: Acts 21:37-22:29 (NIV)

<sup>37</sup> As the soldiers were about to take Paul into the barracks, he asked the commander, "May I say something to you?"

"Do you speak Greek?" he replied. <sup>38</sup> "Aren't you the Egyptian who started a revolt and led four thousand terrorists out into the wilderness some time ago?"

<sup>39</sup> Paul answered, "I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no ordinary city. Please let me speak to the people."

<sup>40</sup> After receiving the commander's permission, Paul stood on the steps and motioned to the crowd. When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic:

**22** <sup>1</sup> "Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense."

<sup>2</sup> When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

Then Paul said: <sup>3</sup> "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. I studied under Gamaliel and was thoroughly trained in the law of our ancestors. I was just as zealous for God as any of you are today.<sup>4</sup> I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and

#### THE EGYPTIAN

The Egyptian referred to by the commander was likely a Jew who came from Egypt claiming to be a prophet. He took a group of people out of the city with a promise that Jerusalem would be destroyed. This group was dispersed by the Romans, but their leader, the Egyptian, escaped. If the Romans thought Paul was the Egyptian they would have wanted him detained to deter any plots to destroy the city.

### GAMALIEL

Gamaliel was a Pharisee first mentioned in Acts 5. When the Jews wanted to kill Peter and the other apostles he convinced the Jews to let them go arguing that if they were not of God their cause would ultimately fail, but if they were of God it was no use trying to stop them because it would be fighting against God.

throwing them into prison, <sup>5</sup> as the high priest and all the Council can themselves testify. I even obtained letters from them to their associates in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

<sup>6</sup> “About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. <sup>7</sup> I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’

<sup>8</sup> “‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. <sup>9</sup> My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me.

<sup>10</sup> “‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked.

“ ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ <sup>11</sup> My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me.

<sup>12</sup> “A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. <sup>13</sup> He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him.

<sup>14</sup> “Then he said: ‘The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.’ <sup>15</sup> You will be his witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. <sup>16</sup> And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.’

<sup>17</sup> “When I returned to Jerusalem and was praying at the temple, I fell into a trance <sup>18</sup> and saw the Lord speaking to me. ‘Quick!’ he said. ‘Leave Jerusalem immediately, because the people here will not accept your testimony about me.’

<sup>19</sup> “‘Lord,’ I replied, ‘these people know that I went from one synagogue to another to imprison and beat those who believe in you. <sup>20</sup> And when the blood of your martyr Stephen was shed, I stood there giving my approval and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.’

<sup>21</sup> “Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ ”

<sup>22</sup> The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, “Rid the earth of him! He’s not fit to live!”

<sup>23</sup> As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, <sup>24</sup> the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. <sup>25</sup> As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said

to the centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?”

<sup>26</sup> When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.”

<sup>27</sup> The commander went to Paul and asked, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

“Yes, I am,” he answered.

<sup>28</sup> Then the commander said, “I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship.”

“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.

<sup>29</sup> Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

**Read Out Loud:** Paul’s identity is called into question three times in this passage. We’re going to look at how Paul’s identity impacts his encounter with the Roman soldiers and the angry Jewish crowd.

### Not an Egyptian



Why would the Romans be concerned if Paul is the Egyptian rioter?

*Possible Answers: The Egyptian rioter was causing problems in Jerusalem for the Romans, by causing unrest and trying to remove them from power and overthrow Jerusalem. Paul is not trying to incite a riot in the city to overthrow Rome. He wants the Romans to know he is not a threat to them.*



Paul says that Tarsus is no ordinary city. Tarsus was a metropolitan city, known for its culture and philosophy. Why might this have been helpful in his appeal to the commander?

*Possible Answers: Being from Tarsus gave Paul credibility and further set him apart from the rebellious Egyptian. As a man from a well-known respectable place the commander could trust that he was not there to cause problems with the Jews.*



If Paul was no threat to the Romans, why didn’t they just let him go? What seems to be their primary concern?

*Possible Answers: They still can’t release him because the Jews are rioting against him. The Romans just want to keep the peace. They have no interest in the religious divisions among the Jews.*

### Paul the Jew



Why does Paul tell the commander he is a Jew?

*Possible Answers: He wants the Romans to know he is one of the people who are against him. Perhaps if the Romans know he is a Jew, like the people in the crowd, they will let him speak to them in the hopes that he is able to calm them down and resolve the issue so that the Romans don't have to continue to intervene.*

**?** Why would Paul begin his defense to the Jews by recounting his Jewish background?

*Possible Answers: He wants the Jews to know he is one of them. He understands the law and was a leader among the Jews. He was respected among the Jews prior to his conversion. This background would give him some legitimacy. The Jews were accusing him of denigrating the Temple and breaking the law. He defends himself by pointing out that he strictly adhered to the Jewish law.*

**?** How do commonalities with the people we interact with help us when it comes to sharing the gospel and glorifying God?

*Possible Answers: Sharing the gospel can be a natural part of our day-to-day lives. Even though there are those that will go to entirely different cultures as missionaries, we have the ability to reach those who we would naturally connect with. Our relationships with people give us the foundation to share the gospel with others.*

**?** Paul goes on to talk about his conversion after encountering Jesus on the road to Damascus. Jesus tells Paul to stop persecuting the Christians and to spread the Gospel to the Gentiles. Why would he share this with this Jewish crowd (hint: look back at why the Jews were angry with Paul)?

*Possible Answers: As a result of his encounter with Jesus Paul has been changed. His conversion explains why he left his Jewish life to share the Gospel with the Gentiles. He was trying to show them that even though his actions looked like they might be in conflict with his Jewish heritage he had been called directly by God to do what he was doing. He shared this with them hoping to win others in this crowd over to Christianity.*

**?** Has anyone ever questioned your actions that stem out of your faith? How did you, or could you, have shared your faith with them as an explanation for your actions?

*Possible Answers: Will vary. As leaders you can prepare an answer ahead of time to get the conversation started.*

**?** The crowd listens to Paul's speech until verses 17 through 21. Why do you think the statements Paul makes in these verses upset the crowd of Jews?

*Possible Answers: Paul claims that God gave a decree from heaven to preach salvation and citizenship to Israel for the Gentiles. This would have angered the Jews that set up many laws against interacting with Gentiles. These laws set Jews apart from and above Gentiles, including the oppressive Roman*

government. Paul also claims that God said the Jews would not accept heavenly testimony, something they were created to do as a nation set apart by God in the Old Testament.

**?** Why does Paul bring up his history of persecuting Christians when God calls him to leave Jerusalem and stop sharing the Gospel with the Jews?

*Possible Answers: Paul thought he was the perfect instrument to bring the Gospel to the Jewish people. He was the Jew of Jews, having learned from the greatest Jewish teacher in the greatest Jewish city. He fought against Christianity and was now one of its biggest advocates, which should have been a big conversion point for Jews. Paul loved his Jewish culture and it would be difficult to live in other cultures that were not as familiar to him, especially Gentile cultures.*

### **Paul the Roman Citizen**

**Read Out Loud:** Philippians 3:20 “But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.”

**?** How did Paul use his Roman citizenship to his advantage?

*Possible Answers: Bringing his Roman citizenship to the commander kept him from being flogged and entitled him to a Roman trial. Paul cannot be punished as a Roman citizen without going through the proper legal process. Paul also uses his Roman citizenship to get protection from the Jews.*

**?** Have you ever used being a Christian to your advantage?

*Possible Answers: Will vary.*

### **For Discussion and Accountability**

**?** Is there something God has called you to do that is out of your comfort zone?

**?** How would your life change if you lived as a true citizen of heaven?