

Paul Had Rights During Roman Occupation

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BIG SANDY, Texas—Members of the Church of God are wondering how the upcoming United States election on Nov. 3 will affect world events. Members of the Church of God who are citizens of the United States are wondering how the upcoming election will affect the practical day-to-day living within the United States.

Frame of reference

At this time, I want to make four statements about my worldview.

- I understand that the founding documents of the United States do not have superiority over the Bible or the Kingdom of God.
- I appreciate the founding documents of the United States—which have provided rights and freedoms not known by much of the world. (Those documents have needed to be amended over time to serve various needs of the populace.)
- I personally do not want to see the United States adopt the ideologies of communism, Marxism or socialism.
- Understanding Bible history about the apostle Paul having rights during Roman occupation can help Bible students to appreciate the rights and freedoms that they presently have.

Pitted against Caesar

The apostle Paul lived in the time of Roman occupation.

- Acts 11:28—In the days of Claudius Caesar.
- Acts 17:6-7—The mob accused Jason and others of acting contrary to Caesar.
- Acts 17:10—The brethren sent Paul and Silas away from Thessalonica.

Dealing with magistrates and soldiers

Paul had to deal with magistrates, centurions and soldiers.

- Acts 16:20-24—The magistrates commanded that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods and that they be thrown into prison.
- Acts 21:30—The mob dragged Paul out of the temple.

- Acts 21:31-34—A commander took soldiers and centurions to rescue Paul from a beating.
- Acts 23:16-24—When a commander learned of the Jewish plot to assassinate Paul, he instructed two centurions to provide protection—200 soldiers, 70 horsemen and 200 spearmen.

Appealed unto Caesar

Paul made a decision to appeal to the judicial courts of Caesar.

- Acts 25:8—Paul proclaimed that he had not sinned against the law of the Jews, against the temple or against Caesar.
- Acts 25:9—Festus asked Paul if he wanted to be judged in Jerusalem.
- Acts 25:10-11—Paul said that he stood at “Caesar’s judgment seat” and that he appealed to Caesar.
- Acts 26:32—After Agrippa heard Paul’s story, he told Festus that Paul might have become free if he hadn’t appealed to Caesar.
- Acts 27:1—Julius (a centurion of the Augustan Regiment) was chosen to take Paul and other prisoners to Italy.
- Acts 27:24—An angel told Paul that he would be brought before Caesar.
- Acts 28:16-19—When Paul arrived at Rome, he called the Jewish leaders together and told them how he appealed to Caesar.

Using his rights to gain freedom

Paul skillfully used his citizenship and his rights on three occasions.

During the first two times, he used his national rights to gain his freedom.

Acts 16:37-38—“But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans, and have thrown us into prison. And now do they put us out secretly? No indeed! Let them come themselves and get us out.’ And the officers told these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans.”

Acts 22:25-29—“And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who stood by, ‘Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?’ When the centurion heard that, he went and told the commander, saying, ‘Take care what you do, for this man is a Roman.’ Then the commander came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ The commander answered, ‘With a large sum I obtained this citizenship.’ And Paul said, ‘But I was born a citizen.’ Then immediately those who were about to examine him withdrew from him; and the commander was also afraid after he found out that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”

Using his rights to preach the gospel

During the third incident, he used his citizenship and his national rights to preach the gospel in Rome.

Acts 23:11—"But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.' "

Acts 25:8-11—" . . . He [Paul] answered for himself, 'Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all.' But Festus, wanting to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, 'Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be judged before me concerning these things?' So Paul said, 'I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know. For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.' "