

Acts 22:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging. This verse reveals the brutal Roman practice of extracting confessions through torture. The Greek word *mastixin* (μάστιξιν) refers to scourging with a flagellum—a whip with leather thongs often embedded with bone or metal fragments designed to tear flesh. This was standard Roman procedure for interrogating non-citizens, especially when dealing with civil unrest.

The chief captain (*chiliarchos*, χιλιάρχος), commander of approximately 1,000 soldiers, faced a dilemma: a riot had erupted over Paul, but he didn't understand why. The Jews shouted accusations in Aramaic or Hebrew (Acts 21:40), leaving the Roman officer confused about the offense. Roman law permitted scourging of provincial subjects without trial to expedite investigation—a practice that demonstrates the cruel efficiency of imperial justice.

This moment sets up Paul's strategic use of his Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25). The contrast between Roman legal brutality and Paul's rights as a citizen illuminates the precarious position of early Christians within the empire. Paul's willingness to endure persecution while wisely exercising legal protections models balanced Christian engagement with secular authority—neither seeking martyrdom unnecessarily nor compromising gospel witness.

Historical Context

This incident occurred around 57-58 AD in the Fortress of Antonia, the Roman military garrison overlooking the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. The fortress housed the cohort responsible for maintaining order in Jerusalem, especially during festivals when pilgrimage crowds swelled.

Roman scourging (flagellatio) was notoriously severe—some victims died during the process, and survivors often suffered permanent injury. The procedure involved stripping the prisoner, binding him to a post or frame, and whipping the back, shoulders, and legs. Roman citizens were exempt from this punishment except in cases of treason, making Paul's citizenship (Acts 22:25-29) a crucial protection.

The chief captain's confusion about the Jewish accusations against Paul reflects the cultural and religious divide between Roman authorities and their Judean subjects. Romans generally viewed Jewish religious disputes with incomprehension and irritation, as seen in Gallio's response to charges against Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:14-16). This verse captures the tension of first-century Christianity navigating both Jewish and Roman legal systems.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's experience of unjust treatment inform Christian responses to persecution today?
2. What does this passage reveal about the proper use of legal rights and civic privileges in gospel ministry?
3. How should believers balance submission to authority with resistance to injustice?

4. What does the chief captain's resort to torture reveal about human attempts to discern truth apart from God?
5. How does Paul's composure under threat model Christian courage rooted in confidence in God's sovereignty?

Interlinear Text

ἐκέλευσεν	αὐτῷ	ὁ	χιλίαρχος	ἄγεσθαι	εἰς	τὴν
commanded	him	G3588	The chief captain	to be brought	into	G3588
G2753	G846		G5506	G71	G1519	
παρεμβολήν	εἰπὼν	μάστιξιν	ἀνετάζεσθαι	αὐτῷ	ἵνα	
the castle	and bade	by scourging	should be examined	him	that	
G3925	G2036	G3148	G426	G846	G2443	
ἐπιγινῶ	δι'	ἦν	αἰτίαν	οὕτως	ἐπεφώνουν	αὐτῷ
he might know	wherefore	G3739	G156	so	against	him
G1921	G1223			G3779	G2019	G846

Additional Cross-References

Acts 23:10 (Parallel theme): And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

Acts 21:34 (Parallel theme): And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.