

Acts 22:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Analysis

Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him—The men who were about to torture Paul immediately withdrew (ἀπέστησαν, apestēsan, 'stood away from'). Those who were μέλλοντες αὐτὸν ἀνετάζειν (mellontes auton anetazein, 'about to examine him by torture')—using ἀνετάζω, referring specifically to judicial torture to extract confessions—instantly stop. Roman law absolutely forbade torturing citizens. The verification of Paul's citizenship creates legal immunity.

And the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him—The tribune experienced ἐφοβήθη (ephobēthē, 'he feared') because even binding (δεδεκὼς, dedekōs) a Roman citizen without proper legal process violated law. His fear wasn't of Paul but of superior officers and potential loss of position or worse. The Lex Porcia prescribed severe penalties for officials who violated citizen rights. God uses Roman law to protect His apostle and ensure Paul's path to Rome.

Historical Context

Roman law distinguished between torture for slaves and non-citizens (legal) and torture for citizens (absolutely illegal). Judicial torture (quaestio) was common for extracting confessions from non-citizens, but applying it to citizens was a serious crime. Officers who violated citizenship rights faced court-martial, demotion, fines,

or execution, depending on severity. The tribune's fear was justified—he had publicly ordered a citizen bound for torture, with witnesses. This legal protection would allow Paul to preach the gospel throughout his imprisonment with unusual freedom.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How does God's providential protection through Roman law demonstrate His sovereignty over earthly systems for gospel purposes?
2. What does the tribune's fear teach about the proper role of law in restraining injustice and protecting the vulnerable?
3. In what ways might legal structures today provide similar protection for gospel witness, and how should Christians wisely utilize them?

Interlinear Text

εὐθέως οὖν ἀπέστησαν ἀπ' αὐτὸν ὁ μέλλοντες
straightway Then they departed from him which should
G2112 G3767 G868 G575 G846 G3588 G3195

αὐτὸν ἀνετάζειν καὶ ὁ χιλίαρχος δὲ ἐφοβήθη
him have examined also which the chief captain and was afraid
G846 G426 G2532 G3588 G5506 G1161 G5399

ἐπιγνοὺς ὅτι Ῥωμαῖός ἐστιν καὶ ὅτι ἦν αὐτὸν
after he knew because a Roman he was also because he had him
G1921 G3754 G4514 G2076 G2532 G3754 G2258 G846

δεδεκώς

bound

G1210

Additional Cross-References

Acts 21:33 (Parallel theme): Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

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