

CITIZEN ADVOCATES

A Devotional Meditation for Shavuot (Pentecost)

Exodus 19:1-20:26; Deuteronomy 23:4-5; Ruth 1:1-4:22; Habakkuk 2:20-3:19;
Matthew 23:13; Acts 22:23-29; Galatians 3:27-29; Philippians 3:2-7

Albert J. McCarn

May 27, 2023

American soldiers are very smart, but sometimes they lack discretion, which is why a soldier from our unit in Germany got arrested in a communist country. It was at the height of the Cold War in the 1980s, and this soldier decided to take a vacation in Yugoslavia, the country of his birth. Although he had been born in Yugoslavia, he was a naturalized US citizen.

During his vacation, he did something that caused the local authorities to bring him in for questioning, and then arrest him for draft evasion. The charge had no merit. This man had immigrated with his family before he reached military age, and had not been back to Yugoslavia until after he became an American. That's why the police had to bring him in front of several judges before they found one who would hear the case and sentence him to 30 days in jail.

All we knew at the time was that our soldier failed to return from leave. A few days later, the Army Attaché at the US Embassy in Belgrade called with news that our soldier was in jail, and that the Consul General was looking into the matter. After the Consul had visited him, we learned that his sentence was about to expire, and that he would soon be returning to Germany. The United States would file a diplomatic protest, and that would be the end of the matter.

Imagine what would have happened had this man not been an American citizen. If he were an immigrant alien serving in the US Army, we might never have heard from him again. However, as a naturalized citizen, he enjoyed all the rights and privileges of the native-born. That's why the State Department and the US Army advocated for him. The authorities in Yugoslavia understood that, and chose not to provoke the United States by keeping an American citizen in prison.

Citizenship has been a prized status since ancient times. Paul's Roman citizenship saved his life more than once, such as when a mob in Jerusalem nearly lynched him. The book of Acts explains what happened after Roman soldiers rescued him:

[The] commander ordered Paul to be brought into headquarters. He said Paul should be examined by lashing, so that he might find out why they were shouting against him so. But when they stretched him out with straps, Paul said to the



Petitioners taking the Oath of Citizenship at Yellowstone National Park. National Park Service photo by Neal Herbert, September 9, 2015, [via Flickr](#).

centurion standing there, “Is it legal for you to scourge a man who is a Roman citizen without due process?”

Now when the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it, saying, “What are you going to do? For this man is Roman.”

The commander came and said to him, “Tell me, are you Roman?”

And he said, “Yes.”

The commander answered, “I bought this citizenship for a large sum.”

Paul said, “But I was born so.”

Therefore, those who were about to interrogate him instantly drew back from him. And the commander also was afraid when he found out that Paul was a Roman and that he had bound him.

Acts 22:24-29 TLV

Paul had the advantage of being both a native-born Roman, and a native-born Hebrew. Even though he was native-born, his status was the same as the Roman commander, who was a naturalized citizen. If the commander had followed the example of the Centurion Cornelius and pledged loyalty to Israel’s Messiah, he would have become a naturalized citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven, and again Paul’s equal, as the apostle declares:

For all of you who were immersed in Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female—for you are all one in Messiah *Yeshua*. And if you belong to Messiah, then you are Abraham’s seed—heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:27-29 TLV

What promise does Paul mean? That would be the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, and that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. God restated that promise in the New Covenant promise of final redemption for the whole house of Israel, which was sealed by the blood of Messiah *Yeshua*. It’s the same promise that, since antiquity, has preserved the native-born of Israel and welcomed the foreigners who have joined themselves to Israel’s God.

The greatest example of this is Ruth, the foreigner from Moab. She was still a foreigner when, as a widow, she started on the journey to Israel with her mother-in-law Naomi. As a native Hebrew, Naomi could freely return home when her husband and sons had died, but her daughters-in-law had no obligation to do so. That’s why she urged them to return to their people and their gods. Ruth’s sister-in-law Orpah chose to do that, but she was determined to cling not only to Naomi, but to Naomi’s God and people. That’s the context of her famous words:

Do not plead with me to abandon you, to turn back from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May *ADONAI* deal with me, and worse, if anything but death comes between me and you!

Ruth 1:16-17 TLV

At that moment, Ruth ceased being a Moabite, and became a Hebrew. Her Moabite identity would remain with her, but her citizenship would be in Israel. She demonstrated

that when she willingly followed the laws and customs of her adopted people to support her mother-in-law. That's why Boaz, her kinsman-redeemer, could say:

All that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband's death has been fully reported to me—how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth, and came to a people you did not know before. May *ADONAI* repay you for what you have done, and may you be fully rewarded by *ADONAI*, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

Ruth 2:11-12 TLV

Boaz acknowledged what was already written in heaven: that Ruth was no longer a foreigner, but fully a citizen of Israel. As a Moabite, she was forbidden by the Torah from entering the community of God's people, but as an Israelite, she was welcomed. Rahab, the Canaanite of Jericho, had circumvented that Torah provision in the same way, and in later generations, Uriah the Hittite and first husband of Bathsheba would get around it also. Each of these had one thing in common: they left their people, their gods, and their previous national identities and joined themselves to the people, the God, and the nation of Israel. That's why each of them has a place in the genealogy of Israel's Messiah. Having embraced the Covenant of promise, they received the new heart and new spirit imparted freely to all, both native-born and naturalized.

This is the inheritance of those chosen by God, and who choose Him back. There is no half-citizenship in His Kingdom. Either a person is all in, or all out. The King Himself has guaranteed this by His Blood, which is why He alone decides who gets into His Kingdom. He's not happy with those who try to take this authority upon themselves, as He explained to the religious leaders of His day:

But woe to you . . . hypocrites! For you shut people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not enter yourselves, nor do you let those enter who are trying to go in.

Matthew 23:13 TLV

Instead of trying to be Kingdom gatekeepers, maybe we should try to be advocates of those He recognizes as His citizens, even if they don't look or act like us.