

## "ROMAN CITIZENSHIP"

(Lynn Cohick)

Roman citizens possessed several specific rights and privileges. Among them was that of *conubium*, the right to enter a licit Roman marriage, which gave their offspring the rank of Roman citizens and claim to their father's estate. Roman citizens had the right both to own and sell property outright, the *jus commercii*, and to access the Roman courts. While both women and men enjoyed these privileges, the latter benefited from the additional rights of voting, joining the Roman legion, and holding public office.

These basic rights of citizenship did not change over time; what changed was the criteria for inclusion on the citizen registry. Initially, the city of Rome granted all privileges of citizenship to male Patricians, wealthy, free-born landowners. Free-born men who belonged to the lower class of the Plebeians, and women in both categories, also enjoyed the rights of *conubium* and *commercium*.

For most of the history of the Roman Republic, only Roman citizens could serve in the legions. As Rome's influence stretched across Italy and Latin tribes were given the franchise (often as a group), the need for more troops grew. As a result, first Italians and then free men from free cities within the provinces were admitted to the legions, after first being given Roman citizenship. Julius Caesar began an aggressive program of offering Roman citizenship status to certain regions within the growing boundaries of Rome's influence. Augustus and subsequent emperors continued this trend in varying degrees. Those in the auxiliary forces were granted citizenship after completing their obligation of twenty-five years of service. Under the emperor Claudius, the grant was extended to the soldier's wife, children, and descendants retroactively.

A slave, male or female, owned by a Roman citizen was usually granted citizenship upon his or her manumission. Once freed, these new citizens could form licit marriages and their children were recognized as citizens. If either the mother or the father was a Roman citizen, but the other was not, then the marriage was not considered licit under Roman civil law, and the child followed the mother's status (Roman or non-Roman, slave or free). This general practice was qualified with the *lex Minicia* (ca. 90 BC), which restricted a foreign man (*peregrinus*) who married a Roman woman from having children with Roman citizenship. In this case, the children followed the father's status, even though the marriage was not licit by civil law.

A registry of citizens names was kept in Rome and updated approximately every five years, coordinated with the census. The names of freed slaves would be recorded in the local registry with copies sent to Rome. Similarly, a child born to a citizen would be registered within thirty days of birth, and a personal copy could be kept at their home. The official document was held in the city's public archives and perhaps in Rome as well.

There is a final way citizenship could be gained—by paying for it. Such is the situation of Claudius Lysias, the tribune who supervised Paul's arrest recorded in Acts 22:26-29; 23:26. The tribune states he paid a large sum for his citizenship, which, as his name suggests, he seems to have received under the emperor Claudius.

In the early decades of the first century AD, a Roman citizen was numbered among a distinctive few who had access to resources and privileges. By AD 212; this distinction evaporated, when the emperor Caracalla extended Roman citizenship to all the inhabitants of the empire.

