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## **Acts 21:37–39—Mistaken for an Egyptian**

A curious passage in the book of Acts indicates that a Roman tribune mistook Paul for some infamous Egyptian:

Just as Paul was about to be brought into the barracks, he said to the tribune, “May I say something to you?” The tribune replied, “Do you know Greek? Then you are not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand assassins out into the wilderness?” Paul replied, “I am a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of an important city.” (Acts 21:37–39).

To whom does the Roman refer? Fortunately, the Jewish Roman historian Josephus offers us an account of the Egyptian that the Roman tribune has in mind. The event reported would have occurred in Jerusalem (where Paul is now being held) about three years prior to the events reported in Acts.

Moreover, there came out of Egypt about this time to Jerusalem one that said he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go along with him to the Mount of Olives, as it was called, which lay over against the city, and at the distance of five furlongs. He said further, that he would show them from hence how, at his command, the walls of Jerusalem would fall down; and he promised them that he would procure them an entrance into the city through those walls, when they were fallen down. Now when Felix was informed of these things, he ordered his soldiers to take their weapons, and came against them with a great number of horsemen and footmen from Jerusalem, and attacked the Egyptian and the people that were with him. He also slew four hundred

of them, and took two hundred alive. But the Egyptian himself escaped out of the fight, but did not appear any more. (*Antiquities* 20.8.6)<sup>1</sup>

1. Josephus, *Antiquities*, trans. William Whiston. *Project Gutenberg*, [www.josephus.org](http://www.josephus.org).