

The Church of the Servant King

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Survey of the Bible Series – The Book of Acts

(SB_Acts 24_28_Conclusion to Acts Narrative)

Introduction

In our previous study, we have read and observed the conclusion of Paul's third missionary journey that spanned a three to four year period from approximately A.D. 53 to A.D. 57. Paul's base of operations on his third missionary journey was the city of Ephesus in Asia. During this period, Paul visited churches that had been established on previous journeys that were located in Galatia as well as Macedonia and Achaia (Greece). On this third missionary journey, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus (Spring of A.D. 56), 2 Corinthians from Macedonia (Fall of A.D. 56), and the letter to the Romans from Corinth (A.D. 57).

As we have seen, Paul concluded his third missionary journey with his trip to Jerusalem to visit with the church leadership and to celebrate the Feast of Pentecost. Paul met with the leadership of the church in Jerusalem and explained all that had transpired during his missionary journeys in Gentile controlled and dominated regions of Galatia, Asia, Macedonia and Greece. Paul had not been in Jerusalem and had not visited with the Jewish-centric leadership of the church there since the Jerusalem Council which is documented in Acts 15 and which occurred in A.D. 50. So, there was an elapse of approximately seven years or so between Paul's last visit to Jerusalem in A.D. 50 and the visit to Jerusalem at the conclusion of his third missionary journey in A.D. 57.

While Paul was in Jerusalem, Paul was urged by the leadership of the Jerusalem church to demonstrate to the Jewish community at large that he still respected the law and Jewish traditions (see Acts 21:20-25). Since the request was consistent with the Jerusalem Council decision and did not involve the imposition of Jewish traditions upon Gentiles, Paul participated in the financial support for four Jewish men who desired to conclude a Nazarite vow with their offerings to be presented in the Temple in Jerusalem.

While assisting these men with the completion of their vow, Paul was recognized by some unbelieving Jews from Asia (21:27). This is when the fireworks began. We have previously studied the Jewish mob's attempts to kill Paul along with Paul's being taken into protective custody by the Roman garrison of soldiers that was housed in the Antonia Fortress adjacent to the Temple (21:26-36). Paul was permitted to address the mob by the commander of the Roman garrison prior to his detainment (21:37 – 22:23) which only resulted in further emotional and religiously motivated reaction once Paul mentioned that the resurrected Lord had commissioned him to go to the Gentiles (22:21) upon the rejection by the Jews in Jerusalem (22:18). What most offended Paul's Jewish audience was the fact that Paul taught that Gentiles could come to God directly by faith without becoming a Jew first through submission to such rituals as circumcision.

Paul was being accused of upending centuries and even millennia of Jewish Law and tradition and teaching that it did not have to be observed. In a large sense, this was true, but only consistent with the rulings of the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 50 after Paul's first missionary journey. However, what the emotion-guided, religious, unbelieving Jewish types could not properly evaluate and distinguish was 1) Paul was not teaching that Jewish tradition and Law could not continue to be observed if a believer so desired and 2) that Gentiles did not have to keep or observe any Jewish Law or tradition in order to be accepted by God. Only faith in Jesus as the Messiah/Redeemer was required.

Principle: Reversionistic people who are in emotional revolt of the soul are incapable of rational thought and discussion in any area of sensitivity to them. (They can still possess objectivity in certain areas not directly related to their points of sensitivity; however, in more advanced cases, all areas of thought become affected by emotion driven thought patterns).

The commander of the Roman garrison attempted to hold a hearing to sort out all of the facts of the matter and get to the root of the cause for the disturbance (22:30-24:10); however, the hearing became a circus when Paul deftly pitted his religious opposition against each other. The religious, unbelieving Jews were so filled with hatred against Paul that they conspired and designed a plot to murder Paul by deceiving the Roman authorities to attempt a second hearing (23:11-22). The plot was discovered by Paul's nephew and disclosed to the Roman commander who then made arrangements for Paul's transport to the Governor of the province, Felix, in Caesarea (23:23-35). Governor Felix would not hear Paul's case until his accusers had arrived from Jerusalem (23:35).

The Case Presented Against Paul (24:1-9)

24:1 AND after five days the high priest Ananias came down with some elders, with a certain attorney *named* Tertullus; and they brought charges to the governor against Paul. 2 And after *Paul* had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying *to the governor*,

“Since we have through you attained much peace, and since by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation,

3 we acknowledge *this* in every way and everywhere, most excellent Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 “But, that I may not weary you any further, I beg you to grant us, by your kindness, a brief hearing. 5 “For we have found this man a real pest and a fellow who stirs up dissension among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes. 6 “And he even tried to desecrate the temple; and then we arrested him. [And we wanted to judge him according to our own Law. 7 “But Lysias the commander came along, and with much violence took him out of our hands, 8 ordering his accusers to come before you.] And by examining him yourself concerning all these matters, you will be able to ascertain the things of which we accuse him.” 9 And the Jews also joined in the attack, asserting that these things were so¹

Some Greek texts omit the statements about the violent actions of Lysias from the second half of verse 6 to the last half of verse 8. It is unlikely that Tertullus would have criticized the actions of the Roman chief captain before the Roman governor.²

It is interesting that the religious, unbelieving Jews were so convinced of the righteousness of their cause that they pursued Paul over 50 miles in an attempt to see him killed or silenced. Their determination was further evidenced by the fact that they brought a lawyer and orator, Tertullus, to argue their case for them. To appreciate the opposition that Paul endured and to appreciate the opposition of religious types to the Truth, we must stop and meditate on Paul's circumstances as we progress through the remainder of our study of Acts.

The Defense Before Felix (24:10-21)

10 And when the governor had nodded for him to speak, Paul responded:

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

² Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Bible College Publications, 1981), 158.

“Knowing that for many years you have been a judge to this nation, I cheerfully make my defense,

11 since you can take note of the fact that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. 12 “And neither in the temple, nor in the synagogues, nor in the city *itself* did they find me carrying on a discussion with anyone or causing a riot. 13 “Nor can they prove to you *the charges* of which they now accuse me. 14 “But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets; 15 having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. 16 “In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience *both* before God and before men. 17 “Now after several years I came to bring alms to my nation and to present offerings; 18 in which they found me *occupied* in the temple, having been purified, without *any* crowd or uproar. But *there were* certain Jews from Asia— 19 who ought to have been present before you, and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me. 20 “Or else let these men themselves tell what misdeed they found when I stood before the Council, 21 other than for this one statement which I shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today.’”

Paul defended himself without using undue or superficial flattery. His statements were simple and straightforward and unemotional to encourage objectivity on the part of Felix. Paul reflected great poise and confidence knowing that he was taking a stand for the Truth and that the Lord had confirmed his ministry and that he would be sent to Rome (23:11). Baker paraphrases Paul’s defense as follows.

To paraphrase Paul's defense, he said, "You can easily verify the fact that it was not more than twelve days ago I came to Jerusalem to worship. But my accusers did not find me in the temple arguing with anyone, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogue, or doing so anywhere else. They cannot prove any of the charges they have made; however, I do admit that I worship the God of our fathers by following the Way which they call heresy, believing all that is written in the Law and in the prophets, having hope towards God that there shall be a resurrection of the just and of the unjust, which they also believe. And in all of these things I do my best to maintain a good conscience toward God and man. Now after several years I came to bring financial help to my countrymen and offerings. While I was engaged in this service, certain Jews from Asia saw me purified in the temple, but there was no mob or disturbance. These Jews ought to be here to accuse me, but since they are not, let those who are here say if they found any evil-doing in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin, except it might be they would object to my shouting, 'Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day!'"³

Principle: Confidence and poise in the midst of opposition characterizes the believer who is aware of God’s purpose and plan in their life and who is led by the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of ministry to others.

Felix Reveals His True Character – Attempts Extortion From Paul (24:22-27)

22 But Felix, having a more exact knowledge about the Way, put them off, saying, “When Lysias the commander comes down, I will decide your case.” 23 And he gave orders to the centurion for him to be kept in custody and *yet* have *some* freedom, and not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him.

³ Baker, *Understanding Acts*, 158.

24 But some days later, Felix arrived with Drusilla, his wife who was a Jewess, and sent for Paul, and heard him *speak* about faith in Christ Jesus. 25 And as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time, I will summon you." 26 At the same time too, he was hoping that money would be given him by Paul; therefore he also used to send for him quite often and converse with him. 27 But after two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus; and wishing to do the Jews a favor, Felix left Paul imprisoned.

We have observed what a devious and selfish leader that Felix was purported to be. His motives are revealed to us by Luke in this passage.

Antonius Felix governed Judea from A.D. 52 to 60. Felix had been a slave, but had gained the status of freedman under the Emperor Claudius. Because Felix's brother was a friend of the emperor, Felix's political career blossomed, even though he was not popular among his peers. Felix was known for indulging in every kind of lust, and the writer Tacitus described him as "exercising the powers of a king with the character of a slave."⁴

It might appear from his knowledge of the Way and of his kindness to Paul that Felix was a generous and good Roman governor. However, such is not the case. We see from the context that Felix had an ulterior motive in his treatment of Paul. He sent for Paul on numerous occasions to talk with him, not because he wanted to know more about the Lord Jesus Christ, but because he hoped Paul would pay him a bribe to release him. Modern politics hasn't changed much. Both Tacitus and Josephus testify to his cruelty and rapacity which knew no bounds. It is said that he did not hesitate to employ the *sicarii* for his own ends. The *sicarii* were a band of assassins which sprang up in Jerusalem who carried daggers under their garments and slew men during the day, especially at festival times, when the streets were crowded. Their name comes from the Latin for dagger. Lysias at first mistook Paul for "the Egyptian who... led out into the wilderness the 4,000 men of the *sicarii*," (Acts 21:38). During the reign of Felix revolts by the Jews became increasingly common and it is thought that these revolts marked a distinct stage in that movement which precipitated the outbreak of 70 A.D. Felix was guilty of the murder of Jonathan, the Jewish High-priest. He hired assassins who killed him in the sanctuary of the temple. Tacitus wrote of Felix, "in the practice of all kinds of lust and cruelty he exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave."⁵

The result was that Paul languished in an imprisoned state of existence for two years in Caesarea until Felix was eventually succeeded by Porcius Festus. Paul must have reflected on the Lord's promise to him that he would testify in Rome during this two year period on many occasions. Paul was not anxious or worried that he was not traveling, ministering and building up the nescient churches that he had founded and trusted their continuance to the Lord. He must have analyzed the circumstances on a continual basis and envisioned how he should respond when given the opportunity to speak in such a way that would be consistent with the Lord's promise to send him to Rome. That opportunity was to come, but it would be two years in the making.

Principle: When we know the Lord's ultimate purpose for our lives, we should not sweat the small stuff like timing; however, we should be alert to seize the moment.

⁴ Earl D. Radmacher, gen editor, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1866.

⁵ Baker, *Understanding Acts*, 159.

Finally, a few notes about Drusilla, the “Jewess” wife of Felix. Paul was acquainted with the background of Drusilla and Felix, so he spoke to them about righteousness and the final judgment. This disturbed Felix and no doubt was the reason Felix gave up on trying to extort money from Paul since he would have rather lived a life of ignoring reality rather than acknowledge the Truth. Drusilla was probably enraged by Paul’s words much like Herodias was enraged over the preaching of John the Baptist (Matt 14:1-12). Felix was also motivated to keep Paul imprisoned in order to curry favor with the Jews since he had angered them on so many occasions.

Drusilla was one of the three daughters of Herod Agrippa I, who had had the Apostle James beheaded and who was smitten by God for accepting the worship of the people. We will meet her sister, Bernice, in chapter 25. According to Josephus, Drusilla was married to King Azizus of Emeza at the age of 14. Shortly after this Felix induced her through a Cyprian magician whom he hired, to desert her husband and marry him. Although she is called a Jewess, the Herods were actually Idumaeans or Edomites. In 126 B.D., Idumaea was subdued by John Hyrcanus, who compelled the people to become Jews and submit to circumcision. Hence, Drusilla could be called a Jewess.⁶

Paul’s Appearance Before Festus and Appeal to Caesar (25:1-12)

25:1 FESTUS therefore, having arrived in the province, three days later went up to Jerusalem from Caesarea. 2 And the chief priests and the leading men of the Jews brought charges against Paul; and they were urging him, 3 requesting a concession against Paul, that he might have him brought to Jerusalem (*at the same time*, setting an ambush to kill him on the way). 4 Festus then answered that Paul was being kept in custody at Caesarea and that he himself was about to leave shortly. 5 “Therefore,” he *said, “let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him.”

6 And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them, he went down to Caesarea; and on the next day he took his seat on the tribunal and ordered Paul to be brought. 7 And after he had arrived, the Jews who had come down from Jerusalem stood around him, bringing many and serious charges against him which they could not prove; 8 while Paul said in his own defense, “I have committed no offense either against the Law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” 9 But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these *charges?*” 10 But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar’s tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to *the* Jews, as you also very well know. 11 “If then I am a wrongdoer, and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is *true* of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” 12 Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.”

It is not a coincidence that God selected Paul to be His agent through whom a change in God’s administration would occur. Only Paul could say that he was a Jew of Jews and at the same time claim the privileges of Roman citizenship. Humanly speaking, Paul could not have been delivered from severe punishment and death apart from his status as a Roman citizen. In

⁶ Baker, *Understanding Acts*, 159-160.

addition, his status as a citizen of Rome gave him a hearing among Gentile authorities and rulers that was probably without precedent among the Jews with the possible exception of the Jewish high priest and a few other select Jews. God used Paul's unique credentials to present the Truth to the highest officials in the most powerful government in the world at that time. These officials had everything to lose from the world's viewpoint if they were to acknowledge the Truth of Paul's testimony – perhaps even their lives, but certainly their careers. This fact makes the presence of believers within the Roman army such as the Roman centurion, Cornelius (Acts 10) and the centurion who demonstrated such faith in Jesus as is documented by Matthew and Luke (Matt 8:5-13; Lu 7:1-10).

Paul's Appearance Before King Agrippa (25:13-26:32)

25:13 Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus. 14 And while they were spending many days there, Festus laid Paul's case before the king, saying, "There is a certain man left a prisoner by Felix; 15 and when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews brought charges against him, asking for a sentence of condemnation upon him. 16 "And I answered them that it is not the custom of the Romans to hand over any man before the accused meets his accusers face to face, and has an opportunity to make his defense against the charges. 17 "And so after they had assembled here, I made no delay, but on the next day took my seat on the tribunal, and ordered the man to be brought. 18 "And when the accusers stood up, they *began* bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting; 19 but they *simply* had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and about a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive. 20 "And being at a loss how to investigate such matters, I asked whether he was willing to go to Jerusalem and there stand trial on these matters. 21 "But when Paul appealed to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision, I ordered him to be kept in custody until I send him to Caesar." 22 And Agrippa *said* to Festus, "I also would like to hear the man myself." "Tomorrow," he *said*, "you shall hear him." **23** And so, on the next day when Agrippa had come together with Bernice, amid great pomp, and had entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in. 24 And Festus *said*, "King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer. 25 "But I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death; and since he himself appealed to the Emperor, I decided to send him. 26 "Yet I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord. Therefore I have brought him before you *all* and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after the investigation has taken place, I may have something to write. 27 "For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him."

26:1 AND Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and *proceeded* to make his defense:

2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today; 3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among *the* Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently. 4 "So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time previously, if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion. 6 "And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O

King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 “Why is it considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead? 9 “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 “And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 “And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. 12 “While thus engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, 13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. 14 “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 “And I said, ‘Who art Thou, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. 16 ‘But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 delivering you from the *Jewish* people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.’ 19 “Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but *kept* declaring both to those of Damascus first, and *also* at Jerusalem and *then* throughout all the region of Judea, and *even* to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. 21 “For this reason *some* Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. 22 “And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 23 that the Christ was to suffer, *and* that by reason of *His* resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the *Jewish* people and to the Gentiles.”

24 And while *Paul* was saying this in his defense, Festus *said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad.” 25 But Paul *said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. 27 “King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.” 28 And Agrippa *replied* to Paul, “In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.” 29 And Paul *said*, “I would to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.”

30 And the king arose and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them, 31 and when they had drawn aside, they *began* talking to one another, saying, “This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.” 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, “This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Bernice was even more devious and immoral than her sister, Drusilla. It is very interesting that we see time and again in the Bible cases where men of political and significant worldly power seem to almost be puppets to the whims of the women to whom they are married. There are several factors at play in such a scenario, but one of the reasons this occurred and still occurs is that men are very vulnerable to the sensual pleasures offered by a woman and will compromise principal and will even orient their careers to maximize the potential that their sensual desires will be fulfilled. Wise women learn how to appropriately channel their husband's sensual desires for constructive good in the home and in their marriage. Devious women learn to

manipulate a man and obtain power themselves through controlling this vulnerability in a man – especially a man who has a position of worldly power.

We have already remarked that Bernice was a sister of Drusilla and a daughter of Herod Agrippa I. If anything, she was more immoral than her sister. She was an incestuous person. She first married her uncle, Herod, king of Calchis. After his death she consorted with her own brother, the Agrippa of our present story. She had an affair with King Palemo of Sicily, who for her sake was circumcised and embraced Judaism. She then deserted him and went back to live with her brother. Later on she had a shameful relationship with Vespasian and Titus, father and son. She is not only an example of the ungodly character of the whole Herod clan, but also of how one can be devoutly religious and at the same time devoutly immoral.⁷

Another interesting thing to note about this hearing is that Paul was not speaking to the riff-raff of society from the world's perspective here. He was addressing the top echelons of the world. Nevertheless, even though these people had it all from the vantage point of the world, they had nothing from the vantage point of eternity. We don't know if any of those in attendance ever became believers. What a tragedy! Yet, throughout the Bible, God's plan of salvation is always more readily accepted among those who are the nothings of the world. The cynic sees this trend and says it is because Christianity (religion) is the opiate of the masses – they have to have some hope provided to them for their pitiable lives.

Paul's testimony of his conversion in this account is similar to his previous testimony given in chapter 22. However, Paul's testimony before Agrippa provides additional insight that is worthy of note.

Paul tells us the glorified Christ told him, "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." Apart from this statement we might suppose 'that Paul got his complete revelation at the time of his conversion. But this verse tells us that there was progressive revelation given to Paul. Paul was ministering during a period of transition. New truth was revealed when the time for it was ripe. The former dispensation was passing away and the new one was coming into prominence. There were numerous practises [sic] which were common to Paul and the Twelve during the latter half of the Acts period which passed away after that period. We are plainly told of certain things which would pass away or cease in 1 Cor. 13:8. The later epistles of Paul give us a more detailed revelation about the dispensation of the mystery and the fact that there is only one baptism for the Body of Christ, whereas during the Acts period there were three baptisms: that of water, that of Christ baptizing with the Holy Spirit, which was an enduement of power to perform miraculous works, and that of the Holy Spirit baptizing believers into the Body of Christ.⁸

Agrippa was no doubt put out with Paul's attempt to persuade him. This fact is reflected better in what is perhaps a more accurate translation of Agrippa's reply to Paul.

Agrippa was apparently insulted by Paul's act of bringing him into this controversy. Who did this leader of this heretical sect of Christians think he was, trying to persuade the great King Agrippa? There is no doubt that he answered Paul in a contemptuous tone of voice. The "almost thou

⁷ Baker, *Understanding Acts*, 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

persuadest me to be a Christian," of the *King James* is not an accurate translation. The Greek word "oligo," translated "almost," means either little or *few words*, or little or short time. The exact expression is found in Eph. 3:3: "As I wrote afore in few words." Agrippa apparently said, "Do you think that in such a short time, or with such few words, you can persuade me to become a Christian?"⁹

Paul's Trip to Rome (27:1-28:16)

27:1 AND when it was decided that we should sail for Italy, they proceeded to deliver Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan cohort named Julius. 2 And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia, we put out to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica. 3 And the next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul with consideration and allowed him to go to his friends and receive care. 4 And from there we put out to sea and sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we landed at Myra in Lycia. 6 And there the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy, and he put us aboard it. 7 And when we had sailed slowly for a good many days, and with difficulty had arrived off Cnidus, since the wind did not permit us *to go* farther, we sailed under the shelter of Crete, off Salmone; 8 and with difficulty sailing past it we came to a certain place called Fair Havens, near which was the city of Lasea.

9 And when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul *began* to admonish them, 10 and said to them, "Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be *attended* with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives." 11 But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship, than by what was being said by Paul. 12 And because the harbor was not suitable for wintering, the majority reached a decision to put out to sea from there, if somehow they could reach Phoenix, a harbor of Crete, facing southwest and northwest, and spend the winter *there*. 13 And when a moderate south wind came up, supposing that they had gained their purpose, they weighed anchor and *began* sailing along Crete, close *inshore*. 14 But before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; 15 and when the ship was caught *in it*, and could not face the wind, we gave way *to it*, and let ourselves be driven along. 16 And running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the *ship's* boat under control. 17 And after they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on *the shallows* of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor, and so let themselves be driven along. 18 The next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; 19 and on the third day they threw the ship's tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 And since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing *us*, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned. 21 And when they had gone a long time without food, then Paul stood up in their midst and said, "Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete, and incurred this damage and loss. 22 "And *yet* now I urge you to keep up your courage, for there shall be no loss of life among you, but *only* of the ship. 23 "For this very night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve stood before me, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar; and behold, God has granted you all those who are sailing with you.' 25

⁹ Ibid., 167.

“Therefore, keep up your courage, men, for I believe God, that it will turn out exactly as I have been told. 26 “But we must run aground on a certain island.” 27 But when the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven about in the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors *began* to surmise that they were approaching some land. 28 And they took soundings, and found *it to be* twenty fathoms; and a little farther on they took another sounding and found *it to be* fifteen fathoms. 29 And fearing that we might run aground somewhere on the rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern and wished for daybreak. 30 And as the sailors were trying to escape from the ship, and had let down the *ship’s* boat into the sea, on the pretense of intending to lay out anchors from the bow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the *ship’s* boat, and let it fall away. 33 And until the day was about to dawn, Paul was encouraging them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have been constantly watching and going without eating, having taken nothing. 34 “Therefore I encourage you to take some food, for this is for your preservation; for not a hair from the head of any of you shall perish.” 35 And having said this, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of all; and he broke it and began to eat. 36 And all of them were encouraged, and they themselves also took food. 37 And all of us in the ship were two hundred and seventy-six persons. 38 And when they had eaten enough, they *began* to lighten the ship by throwing out the wheat into the sea. 39 And when day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a certain bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. 40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders, and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. 41 But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern *began* to be broken up by the force *of* the waves. 42 And the soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, that none *of them* should swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest *should follow*, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And thus it happened that they all were brought safely to land. 28:1 AND when they had been brought safely through, then we found out that the island was called Malta. 2 And the natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all. 3 But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 And when the natives saw the creature hanging from his hand, they *began* saying to one another, “Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.” 5 However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm. 6 But they were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and *began* to say that he was a god. 7 Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days. 8 And it came about that the father of Publius was lying *in bed* afflicted with *recurrent* fever and dysentery; and Paul went in *to see* him and after he had prayed, he laid his hands on him and healed him. 9 And after this had happened, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured. 10 And they also honored us with many marks of respect; and when we were setting sail, they supplied *us* with all we needed. 11 And at the end of three months we set sail on an Alexandrian ship which had wintered at the island, and which had the Twin Brothers for its figurehead. 12

And after we put in at Syracuse, we stayed there for three days. 13 And from there we sailed around and arrived at Rhegium, and a day later a south wind sprang up, and on the second day we came to Puteoli. 14 There we found *some* brethren, and were invited to stay with them for seven days; and thus we came to Rome. 15 And the brethren, when they heard about us, came from there as far as the Market of Appius and Three Inns to meet us; and when Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

16 And when we entered Rome, Paul was allowed to stay by himself, with the soldier who was guarding him.

Luke does not disclose certain details of Paul's two year imprisonment and of his trip to Rome even though from Luke's statement in 27:1, it is quite apparent that Luke was with Paul on his journey to Rome. We don't know who else may have accompanied Paul to Rome or who ministered to Paul during his imprisonment in Caesarea; however, it is possible that some of the leaders of the Jerusalem church (contrary to speculation otherwise that they deserted Paul) may have ministered to Paul in Caesarea. Luke provides no information on the subject and identity of who ministered to Paul in the prison at Caesarea or the identity of those who may have accompanied Paul on his trip to Rome.

Luke provides us with quite a bit of detail regarding the voyage toward Rome to include the fact that Paul and Luke were accompanied by an Aristarchus who was from Thessalonica in Macedonia. Apparently, this man was a convert from Paul's trips there. In addition, the ship was full of other prisoners – perhaps some who had appealed to Caesar also and some who may have been destined to fight as combatants in the arena in Rome. We can only wonder how many of these men Paul may have converted to Christianity on this voyage. All in all, there were 276 souls on board the ship (27:37), so it must have been a fairly large vessel to carry that many men as well as cargo.

During the storm, the ship had been driven about 460 miles from the island of Clauda to Malta. Once driven ashore, the men were cold for it was the Fall of the year. The natives built fires and the men warmed themselves. This is when Paul was bitten by a viper and the natives at first interpreted this to be an indication that Paul was indeed a guilty man. Their fickle nature was revealed when they later reversed themselves and determined that Paul was a god since he did not die. This was not the first time that the fickle nature of humanity is disclosed during Paul's journeys.

Back at Lystra the people were ready to worship Paul as a god after he had healed the crippled man, but after the Jews came condemning Paul as an evil man they stoned him and left him for dead. Here the people started out thinking he was a murderer and the next moment they were ready to worship him as a god.¹⁰

When Paul healed the sick of the island, we are not observing the gift of healing. Rather, we are observing the signs of an apostle (2 Cor 2:12 cf. Rom 15:18-19). Paul wrote that the miraculous gifts such as healing were to pass away and the time was drawing near when they would pass away at the end of the transition period. This healing by Paul as an apostle is the last recorded instance of a miraculous healing in Scripture. In Paul's epistles written after this event, Paul is forced to prescribe remedies for sickness (1 Tim 5:23) and having to leave a fellow worker ill (2 Tim 4:20).

The party waited for three months for the weather to become more favorable for the trip to Italy. The details surrounding the Alexandrian ship are fairly interesting.

¹⁰ Baker, 171.

There was an Alexandrian ship which had wintered in the harbor which was bound for Italy and which bore the sign of Castor and Pollux. In the Greek text the word for Castor and Pollux is "Dioskourous." The Dioscuri were the twin sons of Zeus or Jupiter in Roman and Greek mythology, whose names were Castor and Pollux. These are the names of the two brightest stars in the constellation of Gemini, often called "the Heavenly Twins." Many hundreds of years before the birth of Christ these two stars served to mark the beginning of the new year by setting together with the first new moon of spring. The constellation of The Twins was supposed to be especially favorable to sailors and ships were often placed under the protection of these twin gods. Our modern ejaculation, "By Gemini," is a swearing by these two gods.¹¹

Their first stop was at the historic city of Syracuse on the eastern shore of Sicily, where they stayed for three days. Their next stop was Rhegium, at the "toe" of the Italian boot, where they were detained for a day waiting for favorable winds. The next day the south wind sprang up and carried the ship some 180 miles to Puteoli on the northern edge of the bay of Naples. As they sailed across the bay the prominent part of the landscape was Vesuvius, that sleeping giant which, eighteen years later, was to explode and snuff out all life in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and Stabiae. Little did Paul realize, as he viewed that peaceful scene on his right, that a fiery rain like that which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah would rain down upon Pompeii and snuff out the life of that Jewish princess, Drusilla, with whom he had conversed shortly before leaving Caesarea. From excavations of Pompeii, it is evident that it was perhaps as immoral as Sodom and deserved the destruction which came upon it.¹²

The citizens of Puteoli who were believers probably relayed the message that Paul had arrived. All the believers in and around Rome were awaiting Paul's arrival and visit since they had received his letter some two to three years earlier that indicated that he desired to see them. These people had probably become believers due to missionary travels of Peter and others perhaps. The believers from Rome traveled about 33 miles south to a place called Three Inns and some traveled another 10 miles further to meet Paul at Appii Forum. The latitude afforded Paul by the Roman centurion Julius is nothing short of amazing. It could be that Julius felt he owed Paul a debt of gratitude for saving him and all aboard the ship that wrecked or it could be that Julius actually became a believer through Paul. We don't know, but God used this man in a mighty way. It is also likely that through Julius' influence, Paul was given great liberty while under house arrest in Rome during this first imprisonment in Rome. During Paul's second imprisonment in Rome, his circumstances were different – probably due to the fact that he was a condemned man (2 Timothy).

Paul's First Imprisonment and Ministry in Rome (28:17-31)

17 And it happened that after three days he called together those who were the leading men of the Jews, and when they had come together, he *began* saying to them, "Brethren, though I had done nothing against our people, or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. **18** "And when they had examined me, they were willing to release me because there was no ground for putting me to death. **19** "But when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar; not that I had any accusation against my nation. **20** "For this reason therefore, I requested to see you and to speak with you, for I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel." **21** And they said to him, "We have neither received letters from Judea concerning you,

¹¹ Baker, 172.

¹² Ibid.

nor have any of the brethren come here and reported or spoken anything bad about you. 22 "But we desire to hear from you what your views are; for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere." 23 And when they had set a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in large numbers; and he was explaining to them by solemnly testifying about the kingdom of God, and trying to persuade them concerning Jesus, from both the Law of Moses and from the Prophets, from morning until evening. 24 And some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe. 25 And when they did not agree with one another, they *began* leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, "The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers, 26 saying,

'GO TO THIS PEOPLE AND SAY, "YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;

AND YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;

27 FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,

AND WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR,

AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES;

LEST THEY SHOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES,

AND HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,

AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,

AND I SHOULD HEAL THEM." '

28 "Let it be known to you therefore, that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will also listen." 29 [And when he had spoken these words, the Jews departed, having a great dispute among themselves.]

30 And he stayed two full years in his own rented quarters, and was welcoming all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all openness, unhindered.

This final pronouncement of judicial blindness upon the nation of Israel brings the Book of Acts to a close (cf. Isa. 6:9,10; Matt. 13:14,15; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10; John 12:39-41; Rom. 11:8). But what is the significance of closing the book at this point? Why does Luke simply tell us that Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired lodging, receiving all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching with all confidence those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, no man forbidding him? Why does he not tell us why his trial before Caesar was delayed so long? Why does he not tell us of the verdict of that trial? We are sure that Paul was acquitted and had further missionary journeys, perhaps going as far as Spain (Rom. 15:24). Why is Luke silent about the last days of Paul's life and his final imprisonment and death? Luke was with him to the end (2 Tim. 4:11), and could have told us all of these things, had his purpose in writing been simply to portray the life and ministry of Paul. If this was not Luke's purpose, what was it?¹³

¹³ Ibid, 175.