



“Be of good cheer, Paul.”

Acts 21:15 – 28:31

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These chapters record Paul’s final journey to Jerusalem (at least, in Acts), his arrest and imprisonment in Caesarea, his journey to Rome, and his time there awaiting trial. The book of Acts ends at that point without explanation. Non-biblical sources give us more details about Paul’s life after Acts.

In chapter 21, Paul followed the example of Jesus who “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) even though he anticipated problems. Why he would do this is not explicitly explained, though several reasons seem evident. First and perhaps most importantly, he needed to deliver the donation from the Gentiles to the Jerusalem saints to help with famine relief. Second, he did not try to avoid confrontation or tribulation but was willing to encounter all such difficulties head-on for his testimony of Jesus. Finally, he wanted to go to Rome and evidently saw Jerusalem as the first step in that journey, though he may not have fully seen how correct that would be until he appealed to Caesar.

Luke was evidently with Paul during this time. One benefit was the opportunity for Luke to meet many people who knew Jesus and who knew church history. It was perhaps during the two years he was in this area that he interviewed those “which from the beginning were eyewitnesses” (Luke 1:2) in order to write his gospel and the chapters of Acts that happened before he was personally involved.

An overall outline for the book of Acts is as follows (with this week’s lesson material in bold):

- The Ascension (1:1-11)
- In Jerusalem and Judea (1:12 – 6:7)
- From Jerusalem to Antioch (6:8 – 12:23)
- In Syria and Galatia (12:24 – 15:35)
 - First journey (13:1 – 14:28)
 - Jerusalem Conference (15:1-35)
- In Western Asia and Europe (15:36 – 21:14)
 - Second journey (15:36 – 18:22)
 - Third journey (18:23 – 21:14)
- **Paul’s Imprisonment (21:15 – 28:31)**
 - **Journey to Rome (27:1 – 28:31)**

Paul’s Imprisonment – Acts 21:15 – 28:31

Paul travels to Jerusalem – Acts 21:15-17

21:15 **took up our carriages**. Greek *aposkeuazō*, meaning ‘to carry off one’s personal property.’

21:16 **Mnason of Cyprus, and old disciple**. While *archaios* could mean ‘old,’ a better translation is probably ‘a disciple from the beginning.’ In other words, Mnason has been around since the earliest days of the church. He was probably also another great source for Luke, and was part of a shrinking group who had known Jesus personally.

21:17 **the brethren received us gladly**. I’m sure they were pleased to see Paul and his companions but perhaps he is referring to their bringing of the relief money especially. The word can mean both men and women.

Paul meets with James – Acts 21:18-25

21:18 **Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders**. A large meeting of the leadership in Jerusalem, under the direction of James who seems to be the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and Paul, a prominent missionary to the Gentiles, with representatives he brought from all over Asia and Greece.

21:20 **they are all zealous of the law.** James and the Jerusalem elders “glorified the Lord” when they heard about the success among the Gentiles (v. 19). But many Jewish converts in Jerusalem still clung to the Law, setting up a conflict that was still an issue with some Jewish Christians who were still “zealous of the law.”

21:21 **neither to walk after the customs.** Because some were saying that Paul was out teaching the Diaspora Jews not to keep the Law of Moses any more, James and the others asked Paul to perform an act that had no effect toward salvation but would help quiet the rumors in Jerusalem about his work among the Gentiles. In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 9:20 (“And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law”), Paul agreed. That he was put in this position was because the Jerusalem Council ignored the status of the Law of Moses among the Jews but only ruled that the Gentiles did not have to live it. That left it open for Jewish converts to continue to act as Jews in every way, even though claiming a belief in Jesus as Messiah.

21:22 **What is it therefore?** ‘What shall we together do?’ Paul’s coming was common knowledge so a shared decision was needed to allay concerns and fears among Jewish Christians.

21:23 **have a vow on them.** “If these were regular Nazarite vows, they lasted thirty days if no other time was specified, according to the Talmud. At the end of that time, the participant went through a process of purification; cut his hair, which he had left uncut along with abstaining from wine; and offered a sacrifice in the temple, which included the burning of his severed hair.”¹

21:24 **be at charges with them.** Meaning, pay the expenses associated with them concluding their vow, including purchasing the sacrifices (see Numbers 6:13-21).

21:25 **they keep themselves.** James listed the four considerations that had been in the Jerusalem Council decree, as a reminder to everyone present of the compromise that he had ‘brokered’ and of all that was required of Greek converts.

Paul arrested – Acts 21:26-35

Paul went to the temple with the four men under the vow, but while there he was seen by Jews from Asia where Paul has labored. These Jews had fought against him—perhaps even stoned him. When they saw him in the temple they were outraged, believing that he also defiled the temple by bringing Greek Christians into the inner courtyard. The riled crowd came together to kill him, and Paul was saved only by the intervention of the Roman troops from nearby Fortress Antonia.

21:27 **when the seven days were almost ended.** All had gone fine for most of the week, as Paul went about his business. It wasn’t until the very end of his commitment that the trouble happened.

21:28 **brought Greeks also into the temple.** Gentiles were permitted to enter the outermost courtyard of the temple. Separating this courtyard from the other temple areas was a wall three cubits high (about 4-1/2 feet) with stone slabs every few feet warning Gentiles in Greek not to enter upon pain of death.² Perhaps Paul’s Gentile companions waited for him in the Court of the Gentiles and were seen by these Jews. Luke simply explained that the Jews had seen Paul during the week with Trophimus, who was from Ephesus, and supposed he had also been in the temple with Paul (v. 29).

21:29 **Trophimus an Ephesian.** Trophimus was only mentioned in Acts during this time, but he would appear to be a convert from Paul’s time in Ephesus (third mission) or perhaps he was converted by the teaching of Aquila and Prisca or other members there. He came to Jerusalem with Paul on this trip (Acts 20:4). Paul mentioned him in his last letter, saying that Trophimus had been left in Miletus as he was sick (2 Timothy 4:20). It is unknown why Trophimus was singled out by Luke when so many other Gentiles accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (see 20:4).

¹ McRay, *Paul*, 217.

² McRay, *Paul*, 219.

21:30 **the people ran together.** A large crowd responded to the cry for help from the Asian Jews and grabbed hold of Paul, dragging him out of the inner courtyards to the court of the Gentiles, probably on the north side, based on what happened next.

21:31 **tidings came unto the chief captain.** The Romans had guards posted all around the temple courtyard during feasts because the Jews often rioted during this time. They could quickly signal to the watchman at the southeast corner of the Fortress that they needed help. With soldiers at the ready, the *chiliarchos*/tribune, leader of up to 1,000 troops, rushed out to break up the riot.

21:32 **took soldiers and centurions.** The tribune rallied a large army (“centurions” in the plural means several hundred troops) to respond to the crowd, wanting to quickly and decisively get everything under control.

21:32 **they left beating of Paul.** Seeing the Roman soldiers pouring into the outer temple courtyard, the mob quickly dispersed. From past experience, they knew the soldiers would be harsh in an effort to immediately stop the riot. This worked to Paul’s advantage, who was being brutally beaten by an unknown number who had pulled him away from the courts of the priests, men, and women.

21:33 **bound with two chains.** The tribune later regretted this quickly-made decision (22:29), since binding a Roman citizen was against the law. But he had no idea that this Jew which was at the center of the disturbance was also a Roman citizen.

21:34 **carried into the castle.** With a large crowd clearly upset and yelling many different stories at him, the tribune decided to take Paul inside the Antonia Fortress to sort things out.

21:35 **came upon the stairs.** There were two stairways leading down from the Antonia Fortress to the temple courtyard, one entering from the north and the other from the west.³ We can’t tell from the text which one Paul was on, but from either one he would be overlooking the temple courtyard and could be heard by a large crowd.

Paul speaks publicly – Acts 21:37-40

21:37 **May I speak unto thee? . . . Canst thou speak Greek?** The tribune was surprised Paul could speak Greek—so well. Many Jews in Jerusalem knew some Greek, but here was one who spoke it fluently.

21:38 **Art not thou that Egyptian.** Perhaps because Paul was fluent in Greek (the language of Egypt at this time), the tribune made the potential association. Josephus also mentions this Egyptian. He had about three years previously led a group of thousands of *Sicarii* (rebels committed to kill Romans and collaborators using a *sicarius*, or short, curved knife, easily hidden in their clothing) to the Mount of Olives to attack Jerusalem. Felix, the procurator, called upon heavy infantry to disperse them. The tribune, who was probably involved in the battle, feared that this riot was being caused by the same man.⁴

21:39 **a Jew of Tarsus.** Paul revealed to the tribune his birth in Tarsus but not that he was a Roman citizen at this point. The likely reason was that the crowd would not be offended knowing he was from Tarsus—there were many Jews living there—but it might have alienated them more to know he had Roman citizenship.⁵

21:40 **the Hebrew tongue.** Aramaic, the vernacular language in Judea at this time. It was a Semitic language related to Hebrew but different enough that knowing one did not make one fluent in the other, somewhat like how Spanish is related to but different from Italian or Portuguese. After speaking excellent Greek to the tribune, Paul turned to the crowd, gestured for attention, then began to speak in excellent Aramaic.

³ McRay, *Paul*, 219.

⁴ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:436; Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart*, 350.

⁵ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:437-438; McRay, *Paul*, 221.

Fourth speech: Defense on the Antonia steps – Acts 22:1-21

A summary of Paul's first speech in his own defense is below. He gave three more such speeches in the remaining chapters of Acts.

- Paul was raised a Jew, taught by Gamaliel, zealous for the Law.
- He persecuted the followers of "this Way."
- On the road to Damascus to bring followers of Jesus back to Jerusalem, he saw a great light and spoke to Jesus.
- Ananias healed him from the blindness he received from the vision and baptized him.
- Later, he saw a vision while he prayed in the temple of Jesus again, in which he was told to escape Jerusalem and go among the Gentiles.

Paul clearly intended to say more but the impatient audience cut him off and told the Roman soldiers to take him away because otherwise they were going to kill him.

22:3 **at the feet of Gamaliel**. Paul was name-dropping to get the attention and hopefully support of the crowd, since Gamaliel was a famous rabbi of the day. The first part of the speech was to help them see that he was "as ye all are."

22:4 **I persecuted this way**. As in other places in Acts, Paul refers to Christianity as "The Way."

22:7 **Saul, Saul**. Paul used his Jewish name, which is what Jesus called him in the vision (Acts 9:4) and which also served to continue to help his audience feel like one of them. Using "Paul" would have made him feel like a foreigner.

22:8 **I am Jesus of Nazareth**. In this telling, Paul left out the kicking against the pricks comment.

22:17 **while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance**. This comment is new information, not in other accounts of Paul's life, and is his second recorded vision of the resurrected Christ. It served two purposes, both telling his Jewish audience that he revered the temple which they were accusing him of blaspheming, and that he was not a heretic because he was blessed by God to have a vision like other prophets before him.

Paul is questioned – Acts 22:22-29

22:22 **unto this word**. At the word "Gentiles" (*ethnos*, nations, v. 21) the crowd roared again, and Paul's speech was over. Perhaps his last phrase reminded them why they had rioted in the first place.

22:23 **cast off their clothes, and threw dust**. They removed their outer cloaks in a manifestation of anger, likewise tossing dust in the air.

22:24 **he should be examined by scourging**. In an attempt to get to the bottom of the situation, the tribune determined to whip Paul severely. This is the same type of instrument used with Jesus' crucifixion.

22:25 **as they bound him with thongs**. Meaning, they were tying him to the pole with leather straps; they had already removed his clothing and were nearly ready to scourge him. Paul waited until the very last minute to reveal his Roman citizenship! This was clearly intentional and may have been quite strategic on his part, to put the Romans in his debt, as the story indicates that the Roman tribune was then very careful in his treatment of Paul.

22:27 **art thou a Roman?** Meaning, a citizen of Rome, with the rights associated with that status, including not being scourged or imprisoned without a trial, not being crucified, and the right to appeal to Caesar.⁶

⁶ *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, "Citizenship."

22:28 **With a great sum obtained I this freedom.** During the reign of Claudius many were able to bribe officials to get Roman citizenship. The fact that the soldier's name was Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:26) indicates that was probably when he did it.⁷

22:28 **And Paul said, But I was free born.** Paul, on the other hand, was born a citizen, meaning his father or some previous person in his family had achieved citizenship. Scripture does not tell us how or when, but the most likely scenario is that Paul's father was a slave who had been set free by a Roman citizen of Tarsus, which gave him some rights and Paul even more. To claim Roman citizenship when it wasn't true was a crime punishable by death, but Paul would not likely carry his proof (legal documents) around with him as they might be lost and were incredibly difficult to replace. It was probably with his family, either in Tarsus, or Antioch, or perhaps even Jerusalem, since his sister lived there (see Acts 23:16).⁸

22:29 **afraid . . . because he had bound him.** The tribune and all the soldiers withdrew and left Paul alone, fearful for their own situation since they had bound him and nearly flogged him, contrary to Roman law.

Paul's defense to the Sanhedrin – Acts 22:30 – 23:11

22:30 **set him before them.** Not knowing of any accusation against Paul in Roman law, Lysias took Paul to the Sanhedrin. If the charge of bringing a Gentile into the temple courtyard was their only issue, it was within their jurisdiction, not his.

23:2 **smite him on the mouth.** Ananias, the high priest, ordered that Paul be hit on the mouth when he claimed to "have lived in all good conscience" (v. 1). Ananias, high priest from 47-59, was popular with the people, but corrupt, well-known for his greed and for using violence against his own people. Like all high priests in this period, he was a collaborator with Rome and was killed by zealots at the start of the Jewish revolt, 66 CE.⁹

23:3 **God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.** Paul cursed Ananias (a "whited wall" means a hypocrite, like a poorly built wall that is painted to cover its weaknesses; see Matthew 23:7 and Luke 11:44 where Jesus used a similar concept). He said this because it was against Mosaic Law to hit someone during a trial (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 1:16-17).

23:5 **I wist not.** When it was pointed out to Paul that he was cursing the high priest, he said he didn't know it was the high priest, which could be viewed as, 'I didn't realize someone who could behave so illegally might also be the high priest.'¹⁰ Note that Luke again presented us with a parallel between Jesus and Paul (see Luke 22:63-64; also John 18:22) as both are hit contrary to the law. The scripture Paul quoted was Exodus 22:28.

23:6 **I am a Pharisee.** Since no witnesses against him appeared, Paul took a new tactic. He claimed that it was because of him teaching the resurrection that they had persecuted him, knowing that the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, would react strongly. His comments started a "dissension" and many of the Pharisees, who believed in a resurrection, took his side (v. 7-9).

23:10 **take him by force from among them.** Seeing the confusion and arguing and realizing he was not going to get his answers, the tribune Lysias sent in soldiers and brought Paul back to the fortress. It is interesting that the Roman tribune stayed during Paul's 'trial.' Perhaps he was still trying to ascertain if he would be impacted by his treatment of Paul, as a Roman citizen.

23:11 **the Lord stood by him.** Luke recounted another visit of Jesus to Paul in this verse, where the Lord informed (reminded?) Paul that he was to testify of Jesus at Rome. Luke offered no other details, but the interview was surely longer than this short summary and must have been of great comfort to Paul.

⁷ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:441.

⁸ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life*, 40-41.

⁹ Fitzmyer, *The Acts*, 717.

¹⁰ McRay, *Paul*, 221; Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart*, 352.

The plot to kill Paul – Acts 23:12-22

When the plot of forty Jews who banded together to kill Paul was discovered, Lysias, likely still compensating for his earlier treatment, took Paul to Caesarea where he could be in the protection of the procurator.

23:12 **they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.** Their oath sounds remarkably like those in The Book of Mormon made by the wicked Gadianton robbers (see Helaman 6:21-24). Given that Paul lived another fourteen or so years after their oath—and they had nothing to do with his death, as far as we know—I have always wondered how long they really went without eating and drinking! Of note is that their oath also necessitated being prepared to kill several Roman soldiers because they were guarding Paul.

23:14 **they came to the chief priests and elders.** The men declared their oath and intentions to the Jewish leaders, the very Sanhedrin, and devised a plot with them to make Paul vulnerable to attack (v. 15). So also like Jesus, there was a great conspiracy against him in the highest levels of Jerusalem society.

23:16 **Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait.** How the young man heard this is surely a fascinating story, but Luke didn't share it with us. That Paul's nephew lived in Jerusalem at a young age (he is called a *neaniskos* meaning a 'youth'; the tribune also "took him by the hand" [v. 19], implying a young boy) argues for his sister living there also. This is the only reference to a relative of Paul.

23:19 **What is that thou hast to tell me?** You can almost hear the tribune kneeling down and speaking kindly to the young man, who may have been quite afraid of the Roman soldier. The boy explained the plot against Paul (vv. 20-21) and Lysias counseled him not to tell anyone of their conversation or of the plot (v. 22).

The letter to Felix – Acts 23:23-30

23:23 **Make ready two hundred soldiers.** Lysias also asked for seventy cavalry and two hundred pikemen, making the total 470. The tribune commanded up to 1,000 men, so he enlisted nearly half of his command for the duty of escorting and protecting this one man. He no doubt perceived a great danger of a large-scale clash between Jewish antagonists and his army and wanted to keep the peace. Moving Paul away from Jerusalem avoided that problem.

23:23 **the third hour of the night.** An urgent departure was needed so Paul's enemies would not cause a problem, so the group left at about 9:00 pm and traveled in the dark through the night.

23:24 **provide them beasts.** Paul and perhaps others with him were given horses or perhaps donkeys to make the trip a bit faster or at least easier.

23:25 **a letter after this manner.** The language is that Luke has a copy of the letter. The letter is copied in verses 26-30.

23:26 **Claudius Lysias.** We finally learn the name of the tribune in the opening line of his letter.

23:26 **the most excellent governor Felix.** Antonius Felix was the procurator, as was Pontius Pilate during Jesus' life. He was well known for corruption and willingness to take a bribe. He will shortly be followed by Porcius Festus in 58 CE.

23:29 **nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.** Lysias informed Felix that Paul had not done anything that needed a Roman trial, but that he was sending Paul to Caesarea for protection while Felix tried to sort things out.

Felix and Paul – Acts 23:31-35

23:31 **Antipatris.** A stopping point halfway between Jerusalem and Caesarea.

23:32 **they left the horsemen.** Having safely escaped Jerusalem, the four hundred infantry returned to Jerusalem while Paul and the seventy cavalry moved on.

23:33 **presented Paul also before him.** Felix saw Paul for the first but not last time. The first encounter was brief, with the procurator buying himself time by claiming to hold Paul until things could be sorted out.

23:35 **Herod's judgment hall.** This was the *praetorium* or official residence of the governor. Paul was not in prison but was given a room to stay in, but he also could not leave Caesarea until things were resolved.

The charges against Paul – Acts 24:1-9

The law required that the accuser face the accused, and so the high priest and others of the Jewish leadership came to Caesarea for a hearing.¹¹

24:1 **Ananias the high priest descended with the elders.** The Jews hired a lawyer (called an “orator”) named Tertullus whom they hoped would persuade the procurator. Perhaps the man spoke in native Latin—his name is a Roman one—or eloquent Greek.

24:2 **by thee we enjoy great quietness.** Tertullus gave a ‘standard’ address for an official like Felix, first complementing him, then begging his indulgence, and finally laying out the charges against Paul (vv. 5-6): being a plague, causing sedition among Jews all over, being a leader of the Nazarenes (followers of Jesus), and profaning the temple. When questioned, the Jews present agreed with the charges (v. 9).

24:7 **with great violence took him.** Tertullus spoke of Lysias’ actions, claiming that the problem of Paul was being handled just fine by the Jews until Lysias intervened forcefully and unfairly and took Paul away from them. Since Luke has already described the scene in detail, he is giving Tertullus’ speech in detail so that we will see that he is lying in behalf of the high priest. Note, however, that this verse is missing from the earliest and best manuscripts, so it was probably not in the original text.

Fifth speech: Defense before Felix – Acts 24:10-27

Paul’s fifth speech is his defense before Felix, outlined as follows:

- Felix was a judge of the nation for many years.
- Paul spent only twelve days in Jerusalem.
- The Jewish leaders didn’t see him disputing or causing a stir anywhere, nor can they produce witnesses to back up their claims against him.
- Paul confessed that he was a follower of “The Way,” worshipping the God of his fathers and believing in the scriptures and the resurrection.
- After many years away from Jerusalem, Paul came to make an offering, but while quietly worshipping in the temple was accused by Jews from Asia who should have been there as witnesses if they had anything to say.
- They had nothing against him except that he taught the resurrection.

24:14 **after the way which they call heresy.** Paul again referred to the church as “The Way,” indicating that even Felix may have heard of that name. Paul wanted to be clear to Felix that this was purely a religious difference, because he taught the “resurrection of the dead” (v. 15), referring to Jesus specifically, something the Jews considered heresy.

24:16 **a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.** Joseph Smith used this same phrase on the way to Carthage jail (D&C 135:4).

24:17 **I came to bring alms to my nation.** The reason for Paul’s return to Jerusalem was to bring the offering from the Greek saints to those in Judea, suffering from famine and persecution.

24:18 **neither with multitude, nor with tumult.** ‘I was just in the temple, minding my own business.’ Paul further made the point that his accusers, “certain Jews from Asia,” were not present, though they should have been there to testify against him. All other witnesses were heresay.

¹¹ McRay, *Paul*, 224.

24:21 **Touching the resurrection of the dead.** Paul again brought it back to this—he was being persecuted because he taught the resurrection of the dead, which doctrine many Jews believed. What he doesn't say is that he taught it because Jesus had been resurrected, though perhaps he may have gone there had not Felix cut him off.

24:22 **Felix heard these things.** Felix was a former royal slave who, with his brother, Pallas, gained great authority through marriage and personal effort. He was appointed procurator of Judea in 52 CE.¹² He had been dealing with many citizenship quarrels between the Gentiles and Jews in his kingdom. So tired was he of the fighting that he hired an assassin to kill the Jewish high priest, Jonathan. He had no interest in aggravating the situation and angering the Jews with Paul's case.¹³ Yet neither could he punish Paul, given the evidence before him. Instead, Felix held Paul, claiming that he was waiting for more information (v. 22) but really hoping for a bribe from the apostle (v. 26). Since no bribe came, Paul stayed there two years in relative freedom (v. 23), his needs cared for by friends.

24:24 **Felix came with his wife Drusilla.** Felix had two wives named Drusilla. This was the second one, a daughter of Herod Agrippa I, which is why Luke calls her "a Jewess." She and Felix came to hear Paul teach, during which he preached of Christ, "righteousness, temperance [self-control], and judgment to come." Paul's preaching was powerful and convincing enough that "Felix trembled" and sent him away (v. 25). There are no other recorded interactions between Felix and Paul.

24:27 **after two years Porcius Festus came.** Finally, in about May 58, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus.¹⁴ This was because Nero called Felix back to Rome to account for his corrupt actions.

Paul appeals to Caesar – Acts 25:1-12

25:1 **after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.** Three days after Festus took his position, he went to Jerusalem to meet with the Jewish leaders there. Even after two years, they were still trying to kill Paul, and asked Festus to send him to Jerusalem. Festus was probably briefed by Felix or other advisors, and so knowing of the danger to Paul, a Roman citizen, invited them to Caesarea to accuse him in person (v. 5). They did so again, hoping to get a different outcome with Festus (v. 7), but Paul again challenged their lack of evidence (v. 8).

25:9 **Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure.** Being new to the area, Festus was anxious to make a good first impression. Therefore, he offered to hold Paul's trial in Jerusalem instead of Caesarea.

25:10 **Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged.** As a Roman citizen, Paul had the right to a hearing before appropriate Roman authorities. He had already had a hearing before the Sanhedrin in which they proved nothing.

25:11 **I appeal unto Caesar.** Paul knew if he went to Jerusalem, they were plotting to kill him. He had already been in Caesarea for two years waiting for something. It was within his rights to request an appeal to Caesar and it gave him a sure way to get to Rome and fulfill the promise from Jesus (Acts 23:11). Festus conferred with his advisors then granted Paul's request (v. 12). He had no choice, but it was advantageous to him anyway, removing the problem of Paul from his jurisdiction without angering the Jews.

Festus and Agrippa – Acts 25:13-22

25:13 **king Agrippa and Bernice came.** This was Marcus Julius Agrippa, or Herod Agrippa II, the son of Herod Agrippa I whose death was recounted in Acts 12. His sister was the 10-year-old Drusilla, the wife of Felix, the procurator recently replaced by Festus. Bernice was Agrippa's sister but it commonly understood that they were in an incestuous relationship.¹⁵ At this time, Agrippa was 32 years of age, Bernice 31.

¹² Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart*, 355.

¹³ McRay, *Paul*, 225-226.

¹⁴ McRay, *Paul*, 66.

¹⁵ McRay, *Paul*, 229; Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:460.

25:14 **Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king.** In verses 14-21, Festus explained Paul's case to Agrippa, summarizing what had transpired so far. It is not known how Luke was made aware of this seemingly private conversation, but having been at the palace for two years, perhaps he had informants among the staff.

25:22 **I would also hear the man myself.** Agrippa asked Festus if he might hear Paul's defense personally, to which Festus agreed, setting up the next encounter with Paul and a king.

Paul before Agrippa and Bernice – Acts 25:23-27

25:23 **Agrippa was come, with Bernice, with great pomp.** Agrippa was a local king, under the authority of Rome but with some degree of independence. As he was a visiting dignitary, he was shown deference and respect as he entered "into the place of hearing."

25:26 **Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord.** Festus admitted that his problem was that he needed to send a letter with Paul explaining his case to Caesar, and he frankly did not know what to write. He knew what the Jews accused him of, but if it was a religious dispute about which he did not care (v. 24), and knew Rome would not either. He could find nothing of which to accuse Paul, at least a capital crime that merited an appeal to Caesar (v. 25). He hoped that Agrippa might help him determine what to write.

Sixth speech: Paul before Agrippa – Acts 26:1-29

In this third and final recounting of Paul's conversion story, Luke gave the most details. This sixth speech in Acts can be outlined as follows:

- Agrippa is praised for his personal knowledge of Jewish customs and practices. Paul is confident that Agrippa will thus understand how the charges against him are without merit.
- Raised a Pharisee, the real crime against Paul is that he claims the doctrine of resurrection is true.
- Paul persecuted the saints in Jerusalem, then took his efforts to far-off Damascus.
- In the middle of the day, he had a vision and a voice told him he was persecuting Jesus, raised from the dead.
- Jesus told Paul he had a mission to fulfill among the Gentiles, to bring them to the truth.
- He obeyed the vision and spent his time calling Jews and Gentiles to repentance, and that's why the Jews were trying to kill him.
- He taught only those things from the prophets and Moses (the Law) that said Christ would suffer, die, and rise from dead.
- Agrippa knew these things and believed the prophets, and was almost persuaded, which Paul wished for all people.

26:1 **Paul stretched forth the hand.** This is an act of classic Greek oratory, though we don't know exactly what purpose it served. Perhaps it was to draw everyone's attention to him, or merely to signal that he was ready to begin.

26:3 **expert in all customs and questions.** Paul was appropriately flattering Agrippa in the custom of the day. While Agrippa was technically born Jewish, he did not live according to anything from the religion.

26:6 **the promise made of God.** This word may have been chosen as a wordplay on Paul's message. "Promise" is *epangelion* while the word "gospel" is *euangelion*.

26:8 **God should raise the dead.** After telling Agrippa that was being persecuted for teaching "hope," he finally explained just what that hope was—in the resurrection.

26:10 **many of the saints did I shut up in prison . . . when they were put to death, I gave my voice.** Luke's story only recounts the specific instance of Stephen being put to death (Acts 7). The plural form of the admission here implies Stephen was not the only death in which Paul had some role.

26:11 **I persecuted them even unto strange cities.** "Strange" meaning 'foreign.' This is reflected in Acts 9 where Saul went to Damascus to arrest and bring back for trial Christians who had fled to that city. As with v. 10, this use

of the plural may reflect more cities than Damascus where Paul did that—in other words, Acts tells the Damascus story because of Saul’s conversion but it wasn’t the first city he visited and brought people back. That helps explain Ananias’ understanding of Saul’s mission before he even arrived in Damascus.

26:14 **saying in the Hebrew tongue.** Jesus spoke to Saul in Hebrew (Aramaic), which is only recounted here.

26:16 **make thee a minister and a witness.** This is the only account of these words of Jesus informing Saul of his future mission. On the use of both titles, minister and witness: “One without the other does not suffice. No man can be a true minister without also being a personal witness of the divinity of the Lord; and every witness carries the commission to minister to his fellowmen.”¹⁶

26:17 **the Gentiles, unto whom I now send thee.** The earlier accounts of the vision do not record a commission to preach to the Gentiles in the Damascus experience. This unique contribution could have been included here to bolster Paul’s testimony that God himself sent him to the Gentiles.

26:19 **I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.** Meaning, he was obedient (double negative).

26:20 **they should repent and turn to God.** Paul summarized many years and thousands of miles of travels in a few words—he journeyed to many locations to preach Christ’s message.

26:22 **saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say.** Paul knew the scriptures, being thoroughly trained in them from the time he was a young man. Since his conversion, he found Christ all through the Old Testament.

26:24 **Paul, thou art beside thyself.** Hearing all this talk of a Messiah raised from the dead, Festus blurted out, “Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.” The English phrase ‘beside oneself’ is Tyndale’s invention, who loved Paul; the Greek is simply ‘Paul, you are crazy.’

26:26 **this thing was not done in a corner.** Paul countered Festus’ talk of his insanity by turning back to Agrippa, nothing that he must have heard something of all this because it wasn’t done in back rooms or other secret places, but in the full light of day.

26:27 **King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?** What could Agrippa answer? If he said no, the Jews would stop supporting him. If he said yes, Festus, who had just mocked Paul, would think him crazy. Paul knew that and didn’t wait for a response but answered in the affirmative for the king.

26:28 **Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.** This problematic phrase has been translated many ways. The sense, however, is that Paul was trying to persuade Agrippa to join the church, but Agrippa wonders that even with so little discussion Paul is trying to get him to join the church: “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” (NIV).

26:29 **altogether such as I am, except these bonds.** Paul preached to the whole room, even the whole world. You can almost imagine him making the first statement, forgetting his manacled hands, then sheepishly holding them up for the punchline, “except these bonds.”

[Festus and Agrippa confer – Acts 26:30-32](#)

26:30 **the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice.** The three rulers and many of their court rulers separated themselves from Paul and discussed his case.

26:32 **This man might have been set at liberty.** Both men recognized Paul’s innocence (v. 31) but could not set him free after the appeal to Caesar. Though legally possible, they risked the wrath of the emperor, as “no sensible

¹⁶ McConkie, *DNTC*, 2:203.

man with hopes of promotion would dream of short-circuiting the appeal to Caesar unless he had specific authority to do so.”¹⁷

Paul’s trip to Rome – Acts 27:1-8

In magnificent Lucan detail, we again hear about Paul’s adventures at sea. The group left Caesarea about August 59.

27:1 **Paul and certain other prisoners.** Paul was included in a group of prisoners bound for Rome, some certainly headed to the games or to slavery. Few, if any, enjoyed Paul’s citizenship status.

27:1 **Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band.** Julius was from the Sebastos Cohort. Sebastos was a title of the emperor given to these soldiers stationed in Syria for their bravery. The KJV translators expressed it by the emperor’s name.

27:2 **a ship of Adramyttium.** This was a local cargo ship headed to southwest Asia Minor (modern Turkey). From there the group would anticipate finding a larger grain or other ship heading to Rome.¹⁸

27:2 **Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.** “Us” means Luke and Paul. The others that went to Jerusalem with Paul originally (Acts 20:4) had left during his two years at Caesarea. Only Luke and Aristarchus remained and stayed with him all the way to Rome, or, in Luke’s case, even while Paul was at Rome. Aristarchus is mentioned five times in the New Testament, including being one of two in the middle of the riot in the Ephesus theater (Acts 19:29).

27:3 **touched at Sidon.** The first stop was the port town of Sidon about 70 miles north of Caesarea. There Julius kindly allowed Paul to visit with local members, demonstrating a great degree of trust on his part (though he was certainly accompanied by Roman soldiers).

27:4 **sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.** To speed the voyage, ships would normally sail on the south side of Cyprus. But they left late in the season (probably October 59 at this point) and so had to hug the coastline instead to catch the winds.¹⁹

27:5 **Myra, a city of Lycia.** They sailed along the coast past Cilicia and Pamphylia, places Paul knew well, to Myra, a city about three miles inland and whose port was called Andriace. That they went to the inland city shows they stayed there and not just at the port for at least some period of time while looking for a ship to Italy.

Interestingly, Myra was the home of a real man made popular through legend in many parts of the world today. In the late third century, a Christian man named Nicholas lived here. There was a poor man in the city who had no money for dowries and so couldn’t marry off his daughters, but instead planned to give them to a brothel. Learning about this situation, Nicholas tried to sneak into their house and leave some money. But finding the doors and windows all locked, he climbed on the roof and dropped the three bags of gold down the chimney. The girls were thus saved but Nicholas was not. Having become bishop of Myra, he seems to have been killed during the persecutions of Diocletian and became the venerated saint Nicholas first in the Netherlands, where his name was shortened to “Klaas,” later becoming Santa Claus in English.²⁰

27:6 **a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy.** Huge grain ships commonly sailed from Alexandria, Egypt, to Italy to supply the Roman capital with food. This would have been a two- or three-masted vessel, about 175 feet in length and 45 feet wide.²¹ While not a passenger ship, such vessels commonly took on passengers to help pay the costs. In this case, there were 276 people on board (Acts 27:37), though a large number of them would have been the crew.

¹⁷ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:467.

¹⁸ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:468.

¹⁹ McRay, *Paul*, 230.

²⁰ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:470.

²¹ McRay, *Paul*, 232.

27:7 **sailed under Crete, over against Salmone.** Not making good progress, they bypassed Cnidus, a port city of southwest Asia Minor near Rhodes and Cos where Paul stopped on the way to Jerusalem at the end of his third journey, then made for the island of Crete. Though Luke doesn't mention any missionary efforts here, Paul will later send Titus to establish the church here (Titus 1:5). It could be that this visit started something.

27:8 **The fair havens.** A small port in the middle of the island on the southern side. The town of Lasea is about five miles east of the port.²²

Shipwrecked – Acts 27:9-44

27:9 **sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past.** The “fast” was the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), which was early October 59. Because of storms, sailing after 14 Sep was considered dangerous. After 11Nov, sailing came to an end in the Roman world until 10Mar. It is not surprising, though, for a grain ship to try and get to Rome this late in the year as the profits for a successful trip would be substantial.²³

27:10 **this voyage will be hurt and much damage.** Luke doesn't claim Paul was speaking prophetically here (that will happen later) but as an experienced traveler. He had been shipwrecked before (2 Corinthians 11:25) and had learned the hard way.

27:11 **believed the master and the owner.** These are two separate people. The “master” is the *kybernētēs* or ‘steersman,’ and the “owner” is the *nauklēeros*, the owner or, more likely, his representative. Ships were privately owned in the free enterprise Roman economy. Both men agreed to move the ship away from the current port.

27:12 **they might attain to Phenice.** Fair Havens was a small, exposed port in the winter and the crew determined that wintering at Phenice (Phoenix) would be safer for them and the ship. The town was also at the western edge of the island of Crete and thus gave them a good chance to get to Rome first in the spring when grain prices were still higher.

27:13 **the south wind blew softly.** This type of wind would allow them to sail out of their port and around the island to the Phenice, so they launched.

27:14 **a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.** The ship never made it to Phenice/Phoenix because it was blown off course by a ‘northeaster,’ *euroklydōn* in Greek. This wind occurs when a low-pressure system sets up in the fall over Libya, pulling air in a southeastern direction.²⁴ When the crew could no longer fight the wind, they “let her drive” (v. 15), meaning they stopped fighting the wind, to avoid being capsized by waves from the side.

27:16 **island which is called Clauda.** A small island several miles south of Crete, it is the most southern of all the Grecian islands. Today it is called Gaudos.²⁵

27:16 **we had much work to come by the boat.** Ships towed a lifeboat off the back to pick up anyone that fell overboard. In a storm, though, it needed to be brought on board or it and the other ship could be damaged, crashing into one another. In this case, it was very hard to do, probably because the lifeboat had taken on so much water.

27:17 **used helps, undergirding the ship.** Meaning they passed heavy ropes under the ship and tied them on either side in order to help secure the planks against the frame of the ship. They were bracing for a huge storm.

27:17 **fall into the quicksands.** “Quicksands” is the Greek *Syrtis*, a region off the coast of North Africa with many reefs and sandbanks dangerous to ships.

²² Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:471.

²³ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:472.

²⁴ McRay, *Paul*, 233.

²⁵ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:473.

27:17 **strake sail**. Loosened the sails so the ship would not be driven as much by the wind; this might have included lowering the masts themselves, to avoid them breaking in the storm. They may also have lowered a 'drift anchor' to slow them down a bit.

27:18 **lightened the ship**. In an effort to keep the ship high in the water, they began to dump cargo. This must have been a painful decision for the owner's agent who was essentially dumping his salary, but it shows how desperate they were to save the ship and their own lives.

27:19 **we cast out with our own hands**. Or, "with their own hands they threw the ship's tackle overboard" (NRSV). After tossing the cargo, now they began to toss parts of the ship itself over to keep the ship afloat.

27:20 **all hope that we should be saved was then taken away**. Short on food and water, driven before a huge storm and entirely lost because they had not seen sun or stars in days, the crew despaired.

27:21 **after long abstinence**. Seasickness and their mental state must have made it difficult to eat. That they had food is evident from verse 33.

27:21 **Paul stood forth**. Paul first did a little 'I told you so' but quickly got to his point: an angel had appeared to him and assured him that he would indeed stand before Caesar and that no one would be killed, though they would be "cast upon a certain island" and lose the ship (v. 22-26). That must have been very reassuring to the crew and passengers, though disheartening to the owner and master.

27:27 **they drew near to some country; and sounded**. After fourteen days of storm, about midnight they were sounding to see how deep the water was. This was done with a long rope to which were attached lead weights at certain intervals, filled with grease. When the rope was lowered into the water, the weights near the ocean floor picked up rocks or plants. When they raised the rope, the depth was determined by the highest weight that had picked up anything. Using this method, the crew realized they were in a shallow area and nearing land.²⁶

27:28 **twenty fathoms . . . fifteen fathoms**. A fathom is the distance of a man's outstretched arms. That makes this roughly 120 feet and then 90 feet, meaning land was getting closer.

27:29 **cast four anchors out of the stern**. Normally anchors were dropped from the front of the ship, but in this case they dropped four from the rear in order to slow the ship down but allow it to still move forward. They wanted to find the shore but not run into something dangerous in the dark.²⁷

27:30 **the shipmen were about to flee**. Pretending ("under colour") to be dropping more anchors, some of the crew instead dropped the lifeboat into the water, hoping for a quick escape.

27:31 **Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved**. Paul must have spotted their actions and alerted the centurion, Julius. The soldiers rushed to the front of the ship before the sailors could escape and cut the lifeboat loose (v. 32). Now they were all in it together.

27:33 **Paul besought them all to take meat**. Paul knew they would need their strength and encouraged everyone to eat some food, something they hadn't done much of in the previous two weeks. Paul offered a blessing and they all had some bread, giving them some comfort (v. 35-36).

27:37 **two hundred threescore and sixteen souls**. Or 276 people.

27:38 **cast the wheat into the sea**. Dumping the rest of the cargo was a last-ditch effort to try and save the ship.

27:39 **they knew not the land**. Meaning they didn't recognize the place or know where they were. But they saw a small bay with a sandy beach ("a certain creek with a shore") and hoped to ground the ship there.

²⁶ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:475.

²⁷ Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds*, 2:476.

27:40 **taken up the anchors . . . loosed the rudder bands.** They raised the four anchors, untied the dual rudders and lowered them back into the water (secured up from the storm), raised the sail, and made for the beach.

27:41 **a place where two seas met.** There must have been a sandbar at the entrance of the bay. The front of the ship got stuck in the sandbar but the waves were still strong enough that the back was broken up.

27:42 **kill the prisoners.** The soldiers would be killed if they allowed any prisoner to escape. Better to kill them all now than risk their own lives, they determined.

27:43 willing to save Paul. Julius the centurion had learned to trust Paul and stopped his soldiers from their plans. Instead, the group made its way to the shore, swimming if they could, or hanging onto broken pieces of the ship if they couldn't. All passengers and crew safely made it to land, just as Paul had predicted.

Paul's time in Malta – Acts 28:1-10

28:1 **the island was called Melita.** The shipwrecked crowd was soon discovered and helped by the local population who informed them that the island was Malta (Melita in Greek).

28:2 **the barbarous people.** Luke called them “barbarous” (*barbaros*) not because they were uncivilized but simply meaning their native language was not Greek. Their language was a Phoenician dialect related to Hebrew, so Paul may have actually been able to communicate with them.

28:3 **a viper . . . fastened on his hand.** Seeing Paul get bitten by a poisonous snake and knowing he was a prisoner, the local people first believed it was the judgment of the gods upon him (specifically, the goddess *dike*, which means “Justice,” v. 4). But when he didn't die or show any ill effects, they determined that he must actually be a god of some kind (v. 6).

28:7 **the chief man of the island.** The “chief man” (*protos*, an appropriate Roman title for a local official) of the island, named Publius, took them (probably Paul and his companions and the Roman centurion) in for three days.

27:8 **the father of Publius lay sick of a fever.** Publius' father was ill so Paul blessed him and he was healed. This caused many sick to come to him and be healed (v. 9). The result was a great respect for Paul and the group received “such things as were necessary” (v. 10).

Paul arrives in Rome – Acts 28:11-16

28:11 **after three months.** Paul and the other shipwrecked passengers stayed on the island for three months. Fortunately, there was another Alexandrian grain ship wintering there, which must have been large enough to take on the extra passengers.

28:11 **Castor and Pollux.** The name of the ship was *Dioskouroi*, a title for the twin sons of Zeus and Leda, named Castor and Pollux.

28:12 **landing at Syracuse.** In early March they set out for Rome, stopping at Syracuse (Sicily) for three days.

28:13 **came to Rhegium.** The next stop was Rhegium, after which they arrived at Puteoli, the port of Rome (today Naples). Mount Vesuvius was just to the east, which would erupt in about twenty years and bury the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The passengers got off at Puteoli but the grain ship continued up the coast to Portus where cargo was unloaded. The people would have to walk the rest of the way to Rome.

28:14 **tarry with them seven days.** Paul and his companions stayed a week in Puteoli, finding other church members. Leaving for Rome, they traveled north on the road to Capua, then joined the Via Appia (Appian Way) which led to Rome. Walking for five or six days, they would have passed through the Appii forum (v. 15) about thirty miles south of Rome, where they would have taken a barge through the canals there to cross the swamps, then picked up the road again to Three Taverns. At both locations, the group was met by many church members. Paul's company must have been a large crowd by this time, and the group marched with him into Rome.

Seventh speech: Paul speaks to the Jews in Rome – Acts 28:17-31

28:17 **Paul called the chief of the Jews.** In Rome, Paul first met with the local Jewish leaders to inform them of his situation and teach them the gospel. They had not heard anything of him from Jerusalem (v. 21)—not surprising given the long distances. This gave Paul the advantage of telling his story before they were prejudiced against him. The result was that “some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not” (v. 24). Paul compared the non-believers to Isaiah’s prophecy of those who will not hear or see (vv. 26-27; see Isaiah 6:9-10).

28:30 **Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house.** Luke pointed out that Paul stayed for two years in Rome in a house that he paid for himself and taught all who would come to him. He was under house arrest, perhaps chained to a Roman soldier, but otherwise seemed to enjoy the freedom to receive anyone he liked (v. 31). He waited patiently for his hearing with Nero, who had become emperor just before Paul went to Jerusalem and was arrested.

Epilogue

Though Luke’s record ends with Paul imprisoned in Rome, this journey wasn’t his last missionary effort, as demonstrated by his later ‘pastoral’ letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). Early church writers record that Paul was freed by Nero this time and went to more destinations, including Spain. Certainly, more travels in Asia and Greece are discussed in his later letters, including Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3), Miletus (2 Timothy 4:20), and Macedonia (Philippians 1:26; 2:24; Philemon 1:22). He probably also visited Corinth again (2 Timothy 4:20), Crete (Titus 1:5), Nicopolis (Titus 3:12) and Troas (2 Timothy 4:13).

In the end, Paul was arrested again (2 Timothy 4:13, 16-17) and felt like death was imminent (2 Timothy 4:6). Tradition says that Nero beheaded him in Rome after a stay in the Mamertine Prison, sometime in late 67 or early 68.

Though all the apostles appear to have traveled and done much good in the world, we know the most about Paul because of his traveling companion, Luke, and because he personally composed and sent so many letters to his converts and churches. We owe a debt of gratitude to him and those who labored with him for bravely carrying forward the message of the good news of Christ to many parts of the world, confronting dangers and threats, and enduring much, including death in the end. His last recorded words summarize his message and echo our prayer for him: “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen” (2 Timothy 4:22).

Bibliography

Abbreviations:

- AT – Author’s translation
- BYU – BYU New Rendition
- CJB – Complete Jewish Bible
- ESV – English Standard Version
- JST – Joseph Smith Translation
- KJV – King James Version
- LXX – Septuagint (Greek Old Testament)
- NAB – New American Bible
- NASB – New American Standard Bible
- NIV – New International Version
- NJB – New Jerusalem Bible
- NLT – New Living Translation
- NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
- TNT – William Tyndale 1534 New Testament

- TW – Thomas Wayment translation

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