

ACTS

A stylized graphic consisting of several overlapping, fan-like segments. The segments are colored in shades of grey and orange. The grey segments are on the left and right sides, while the orange segments are in the center and bottom. The segments are arranged in a way that they appear to be fanning out from a central point at the bottom left.

DISPENSATIONALLY
CONSIDERED

C. R. STAM

A C T S

**Dispensationally
Considered**

By
Cornelius R. Stam

VOLUME FOUR
Acts 21:15 through 29:31

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The map of Paul's voyage to Rome: kindness of Messrs. Walter and Kenneth Scott, Advertisers Engraving Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.



PAUL'S VOYAGE TO ROME

Chapter XL - ACTS 21:15-26

PAUL'S LAST VISIT TO JERUSALEM

AT THE HOME OF MNASON

"And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

"There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

"And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly."

-Acts 21:15-17.

The feast now at hand, the apostle and his company had to leave Caesarea for Jerusalem. This is the first time we read of their "carriage," or "baggage," perhaps because this was the last lap of their journey, to be undertaken on foot, and this baggage contained the precious "collection" for the Jewish saints.

The group now formed a small caravan. Besides the eight brethren who had accompanied Paul there were also "certain of the disciples of Caesarea" who went along and, perhaps, Mnason, an early believer, a native of Cyprus with whom Paul and his company were to lodge at Jerusalem.¹

This was important now. Suitable lodging would at best be difficult to find in Jerusalem at feast time and Mnason's hospitality would minimize the inevitable danger to Paul's life. Moreover the brethren from Caesarea would serve as a kind of escort.

In Jerusalem, evidently at Mnason's home, "the brethren" held an informal and hearty welcome for the party. It is evident that these brethren, however, did not include James and the elders, for Paul and his associates visited them "the day following" (Ver. 18).

WITH JAMES AND THE ELDERS

"And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.

"And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

¹ Some texts read "*bringing us to one Mnason,*" instead of "*brought with them one Mnason,*" but this rendering may be begotten of an imagined difficulty, for if there was time for Agabus to come down from Jerusalem to warn Paul of the dangers there, why could not Mnason have come down to offer him lodging in case he persisted in his purpose?

"And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thou sands of Jews there are which believe, and they are all zealous of the law.

"And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest an the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

"What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together; for they will hear that thou art come.

"Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them;

"Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

"As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication."

-Acts 21:18-25

STATE OF THE CHURCH AT JERUSALEM AT THIS TIME

It is with sadness that we view the condition of the Church at Jerusalem at this time.

First, we are told that Paul and his company "went in unto James" - "and the elders were *present*" (Ver. 18).

We have already seen how Peter was the Christ-appointed leader of the Messianic Church in those early days when "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost" (See [Matt. 16:19](#); [Acts 1:15](#); [2:14](#); [2:37](#); [5:29](#); etc.). We have seen too, how James, "the Lord's brother" (not even one of the twelve) gradually gained the ascendancy over Peter, probably because of his physical relationship to our Lord. Thus we find Peter reporting to "James and to the brethren" in Acts 12:17. Later Paul mentions James alone as present with Peter at Jerusalem during an earlier visit there (Gal. 1:19). Next we find Peter merely testifying at the council at Jerusalem, while James presides and brings the council to a close with the words: "*Wherefore, I decide*" (Acts 15:19). Still later, at Antioch, we see Peter intimidated by "certain [who] came from James," so that he separates himself from Gentile believers with whom he has been enjoying fellowship ([Gal. 2:11,12](#)). And now Paul and his companions go in unto James, and so final is his authority that the record states merely that "the *elders were present*" (Acts 21:18). At the council, some fourteen years previous, "*the apostles and elders*" had gathered

together to discuss Gentile liberty from the law (Acts 15:6). Now there is no trace of evidence that any of the apostles are even present; the record mentions only "*James and the elders.*" If any of the twelve apostles are to be included among the "elders," but are not even designated as apostles, we have still further evidence of the secondary character of their position at this time. James, whose very name means "Supplanter," has wholly taken over Peter's position.

In commenting on the Jerusalem council later, Paul had called "James, Cephas and John" (with James at the head) those "who *seemed* to be somewhat" and "who *seemed* to be pillars," pointing out that "the gospel of the circumcision" had been committed "*to PETER*" (Gal. 2:6-9).

This elevation of James over Peter and the eleven, whom our Lord had appointed, is evidence of the spiritual decline among the Judaeen believers after the raising up of Paul and it has an important bearing on the passage we are now to consider.

A COOL RECEPTION

As Paul saluted James and the elders there was a superficial show of harmony, but the elements of suspicion and discord lurked beneath. It had not been James who had opened his home to Paul. He had not been among those who had gathered to welcome the great apostle on the previous night. And his party had not made things easy for Paul in late years.

But now perhaps the atmosphere would be cleared as Paul related to them "particularly," i.e., *in detail*,² "what things *God* had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry." It must have been thrilling to hear the great apostle tell of idols cast away, sinful books burned, wicked practices abandoned and Christ received and glorified in city after city, the delegates from the various churches doubtless presenting their gifts at this time; an immense amount, and a sacrificial proof of their affection toward their brethren in Judaea.

The response? "They glorified the Lord, and said" - quickly changing the subject to a matter that could only embarrass the apostle. The record does not say one word about their agreeing to help the Judaeen believers understand Paul and his God-given ministry, nor one word about their inviting him to tell them what God had wrought through him, nor even one word about their thanking him and the Gentile churches for so generously keeping their promise of some years back (Gal. 2:10) - and nothing would have fallen more naturally within the scope of Luke's account, had it taken place.

Instead they pointed out "how many thousands" (Lit., *myriads*, or *tens* of thousands) of believing Jews there were, all of them "zealots³ for the law," and urged upon him that since these had been informed that he had apostatized from Moses, he ought to silence the rumor by publicly taking part in a Nazarite vow.

² This may further indicate the unfavorable attitude of those present toward his ministry.

³ The word, in the original, is a noun.

As we read the record we do not receive the impression that these men were completely candid, for what greater zealot for the law was there than James himself, and was it not a group who "came from James" who had caused Peter to separate himself from the Gentile believers? (Gal. 2:12). If these myriads of Jewish believers had come to believe that Paul had apostatized from Moses, they had done so under the leadership of James and his party.

James and the elders were using an old familiar device in labeling *others* zealots and declaring: "They are all saying this about you," but refraining from telling Paul how they themselves felt about it.

In the words of John Kitto, "It is disappointing ... to find the apostle's glorious recital of gospel triumphs, and the elders' apparently hearty responsive thanksgiving, immediately followed by a proposition of expediency, with a view to conciliate unworthy prejudices, based on false representation" (*The Apostles and Early Church*, P. 304).

Years before, at the great Jerusalem council, Peter had stated that *God* had put "no difference" between them and the Gentiles, purifying the Gentiles' hearts by faith. He had further urged his brethren not to place a yoke upon the neck of the Gentile disciples which neither the Jewish fathers nor their children had been able to bear ([Acts 15:9,10](#)). He had even gone so far as to say: "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as *they*" (Ver. 11).

As a result of this magnificent testimony James, Peter, John and the whole church had given solemn and public recognition to Paul as the apostle of the uncircumcision and the apostle of grace ([Acts 15:23-29](#); [Gal. 2:7-9](#)). The church at Jerusalem should have gone on from there, as Peter *did* ([II Pet. 3:15-18](#)) and should now have accepted Paul in accordance with that agreement. But under James and his party they had declined and gone backward, rather than forward, spiritually.

Geikie says of this: "... whereas some time ago, only a portion of these were extreme in their Jewish ideas ([Acts 15:1,5](#)) all were now fanatically zealous of the law. So rapidly had the extreme party in the nation spread their bitterly irreconcilable Judaism ... " (*New Testament Hours*, Vol. III, P. 375).

COULD PAUL HAVE ERRED BY SUBMITTING TO JAMES?

Before going into a detailed examination of James' proposal⁴ and Paul's acceptance of it, we must find a Scriptural answer to the above question. Mark well, we do not yet ask whether the apostle *did* err in acquiescing, but whether, in the light of other Scriptures, it is even *possible* that he could have done so.

We pose this question because there are many who, viewing the apostle's godly,

⁴ Assuming that James was the spokesman for the elders.

faithful life; hearing him say: "*Be ye followers of me,*" etc., and rejoicing in his glorious message of grace, subconsciously entertain the notion that he *could not* have erred so grossly and, in answer to those who feel he *did*, reply that if this is so, the famed apostle was actually one of the greatest hypocrites in Scripture and not worthy of a hearing.

This whole subject is admittedly a difficult one - so difficult that the writer, for one, has never once heard a comprehensive sermon on it, and has been unable to find a single book dealing with all of the Scriptures involved.

Many speakers and writers have, on the basis of a few passages, declared that Paul was right, or that he was wrong, in involving himself in Judaism at this time, but few indeed have gone into the subject at all comprehensively. This is why we first inquire whether, in the light of other passages of Scripture, it is even *possible* that he might have erred here.

Surely no believer would deny that Paul's life as a Christian is probably the greatest example of human devotion and faithfulness to Christ in all history. Indeed, who of us can even begin to measure up?

As to some of his inspired statements concerning himself, however, much more is often read into these statements than they actually say. His "follow me" is used at least once with regard to his *teaching* and otherwise with regard to certain *details or characteristics* in his behavior, or to his *adopted course*.

One of the strongest statements in this category is found in Phil. 4:9, where he says:

"Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you."

But let us not read more into this than it actually says. A glance at the preceding context will reveal that the apostle did not intend to set himself up as the standard of perfection; though he had, to be sure, set the Philippians a noble example. Indeed it is in this same letter that, telling the Philippian saints of his longings and aspirations, he assures them: "*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect*" (3:12) adding that he must forget those things which are behind, looking only ahead and straining for the prize. In doing "*this one thing,*" he calls upon them to be followers together of him (Phil. 3:10-17).

Paul would have been the last person to claim perfection, as is evident from his testimony in Romans 7, and those who tell us to "get out of the seventh of Romans into the eighth," should observe that Paul himself wrote these two chapters at *the same sitting*; that the same one who declared: "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,*" also humbly confessed: "*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not*" (Rom. 8:1; 7:18).

But, says some objector, if he could so sternly rebuke Peter and the Galatians for going back into legalism and then, without some special reason, go back into it himself, he was such a hypocrite that I cannot be impressed by his writings.

Why not? Have you forgotten to search your own heart? Does the deep devotion of the Apostle Paul make you less understanding of him if he lapses? Furthermore, he wrote by the *inspiration of God*.

Moses sinned in many ways; do you refuse to believe *his* writings? David committed both adultery and murder; do you refuse to read his Psalms? The prophets, one after another, failed; do you distrust their predictions? Peter denied his Lord and later played the hypocrite at Antioch; do you question the truth of his epistles? Of course not because these men, though themselves failing creatures, *wrote by divine inspiration*. Thus God would keep us from trusting in man and lead us to trust in *His Word alone*.

But Peter was rebuked for his failure at Antioch; would not God have rebuked Paul if he were similarly guilty? In the first place, no careful student of the record would say that Paul was "similarly guilty" in agreeing to offer the sacrifices of the Nazarite. Peter went back on the light he had received, "*fearing them which were of the circumcision*" (Gal. 2:12). Paul, on the other hand, became involved in this vow out of a burning love to his kinsman whom he hoped would thereby be won to listen to his testimony about Christ.

But did not the Lord commend him in Acts 23:11, when He stood by him and said: "*Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem so must thou bear witness also at Rome*"? No, at least He did not commend him for *taking part in the Jewish vow*. He rather comforted Paul in this case, understanding his great love for Israel and for Himself, and his deep sense of responsibility for having led Israel in their rebellion against Christ.

But did not the great apostle, in the very face of martyrdom, say: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith!*" (II Tim. 4:7)? Of course! Read the record of his faithful, tireless service for Christ. Go through the long, but far from complete, list of his sufferings for Christ in II Cor. 11. Note how his prison epistles show us even more of the glories of Christ and His grace, and take us even farther into the heavenlies than do the epistles written before this visit to Jerusalem. Consider all this, together with much more that might be said about his life and teachings, and then ask whether this lapse can cancel all that out. Indeed, who, in all history has had nearly so much reason to say: "*I have fought a good fight*" or: "*I have kept the faith*"?

By way of illustration, there may be a time, or several times, in the life of a consecrated servant of God when his sincere love for a friend and his earnest desire to see him saved, may lead him into some course of action not in God's will, and may even temporarily dull his perception as to God's will. If this takes place you will be unjust to charge him with unfaithfulness or with flagrant rebellion against God - especially if you yourself do not have half so much love for God or for your friends.

THE REPORT CONCERNING PAUL WAS IT TRUE OR FALSE?

The report which, according to James, had found general credence among the Jewish believers of Judaea, was that Paul had taught all the Jews living among the Gentiles "to apostatize⁵ from Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs."

Now this charge was rather complicated by prejudice, as such charges often are. As it stood it was false. Paul had started no rebellion against Moses or the law. To say that the law was fulfilled by Christ is not to deny but to *confirm* its claims.

But the apostle *did* teach that the law had been fulfilled in Christ and that it was *therefore* unnecessary to observe its ceremonial rites-and he taught this not only to the Gentiles but also to the Jews which were among them.

"After the reading of the law and the prophets" in the Pisidian synagogue, the rulers asked Paul for a "word of *exhortation*." In response the apostle *gave* them a word of exhortation with respect to each. With respect to the law he exhorted them not to trust in it, but to trust in Christ, saying:

"Be It known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that THROUGH THIS MAN IS PREACHED UNTO YOU THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS:

"And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which YE COULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW OF MOSES" (Acts 13:38,39).

Certainly there were Jewish believers among the Galatians and they were included in the number of those to whom the apostle wrote:

" ... false brethren ... came in privily to spy out OUR LIBERTY which we have In Christ Jesus" (Gal. 2:4).

"... I THROUGH THE LAW AM DEAD TO THE LAW... " (2:19).

"Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?" (3:3).

"... the law was our schoolmaster ... But after that faith is come, WE ARE NO LONGER UNDER A SCHOOLMASTER" (3:24, 25).

"... HOW TURN YE AGAIN TO ME WEAK AND BEGGARLY ELEMENTS, WHEREUNTO YE DESIRE AGAIN TO BE IN BONDAGE?"

⁵ This is the very Greek word used in Acts 21:21. While it sometimes means simply "to depart," James probably used it here in the sense of apostasy from the Word of God through Moses.

“YE OBSERVE DAYS, AND MONTHS, AND TIMES, AND YEARS.

“I AM AFRAID OF⁶ YOU, LEST I HAVE BESTOWED UPON YOU LABOR IN VAIN” (4:9-11).

“STAND FAST THEREFORE IN THE LIBERTY WHEREWITH CHRIST HATH MADE US FREE, AND BE NOT ENTANGLED AGAIN WITH THE YOKE OF BONDAGE.

“BEHOLD, I PAUL SAY UNTO YOU, THAT IF YE BE CIRCUMCISED, CHRIST SHALL PROFIT YOU NOTHING”⁷ (5,1,2).

". . .they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.

". . .they ... desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

"BUT GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD GLORY, SAVE IN THE CROSS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, BY WHOM THE WORLD IS CRUCIFIED UNTO ME, AND I UNTO THE WORLD" (6:12,13,14).

The Galatian congregations were, of course, largely made up of Gentiles, but the apostle did not single the Gentiles out as he wrote about circumcision, so that the principle certainly applied also to those already circumcised and had its bearing on any contemplated circumcision of their children.

Nor can it be said that in the Galatian letter the apostle argued only against seeking to be *justified* by the law, for he clearly warns those *already* justified against becoming "entangled" again by submitting to one of its, rites, warning them that submission to one implies the responsibility to obey all (See [Gal. 5:1,3](#)). And in this connection he had warned them that "*a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (5:9).

Next consider the Corinthian church. It was begun with a group from the synagogue, including the household of Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue and, later, Sosthenes, the next chief ruler ([Acts 18:8,17](#); [I Cor. 1:1](#)).

To these Jews "which were among the Gentiles," he wrote:

"For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles ... " (I Cor. 12:13).

"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh ... " (II Cor. 5:16).

⁶ About.

⁷ Not *actually*, of course, but *logically*.

To them he wrote that the law was "*the ministration of death*" and "*the ministration of condemnation*" (II Cor. 3:7,9). Nor did the apostle here refer only to the ten commandments, for in saying that all this had been "abolished" he clearly referred to the whole law (Cf. Ver. 13 [with Ex. 34:32,33](#)).

And to both the Jewish and Gentile believers at Corinth he had written:

" ... I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to ONE HUSBAND, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from THE SIMPLICITY THAT IS IN CHRIST" (II Cor. 11:2,3).

And only recently he had written to the believers at Rome - and especially to the *Jewish* believers among them - in the same vein:

" ... ye also are become DEAD TO THE LAW ... THAT YE SHOULD BE MARRIED TO ANOTHER ..." (Rom 7,4).

"But now WE ARE DELIVERED FROM THE LAW, THAT BEING DEAD WHEREIN WE WERE HELD; THAT WE SHOULD SERVE IN NEWNESS OF SPIRIT, AND NOT IN THE OLDNESS OF THE LETTER" (Ver. 6).

Indeed, if Paul had not taught the Jews among the Gentiles to give up Judaism, what right did he have to rebuke Peter for reverting to it while visiting with the Gentiles at Antioch? Peter, remember, had been "*living after the manner of Gentiles, and NOT as do the Jews*" while there at Antioch. And "*the other Jews*" among them had been doing the same, until "certain came from James." Then Peter and the Other Jewish believers began living "as do the Jews" again and were rebuked by Paul for their dissimulation (See [Gal. 2:11-14](#)).

We cite these passages, and could cite others, only to show that while Paul had not, to be sure, *apostatized* from Moses, he *had* taught the Jews among the Gentiles that the law had been fulfilled in Christ and that *therefore* they were to enjoy freedom from its yoke, so that the current reports about the apostle were not exactly "nothing" as James intimated (Ver. 24). Indeed, of those who contend that the report was *entirely without foundation*, we know of none who face up to the facts.

JAMES' PROPOSAL

James' proposal, evidently agreed upon beforehand, must be carefully considered in the light of its background.

The Jewish church had become numerically powerful in Jerusalem and Judaea. Since the scattering of Acts 8:1 the rulers of Israel had lost Saul of Tarsus, the flaming

leader of their rebellion against Christ, and had themselves become less aggressive. The result was that great numbers had returned to Jerusalem until, some ten years later, not only was there a "multitude" of believers in the city, but they had attained so favorable a position that the Church could hold the great council of Acts 15 with no one to molest. And now, another thirteen or fourteen years later, there are evidently greater numbers than ever⁸ (Acts 21:20).

But the council at Jerusalem, while it had closed the mouths of the Judaizers as far as public opposition to Paul's message of grace was concerned, had by no means won them to the attitude which Peter had displayed in his noble declaration of Acts 15:8-11. Instead they had dogged Paul's footsteps wherever he had gone, seeking to undermine his ministry among the Galatians, the Corinthians and the Gentile believers in general. Indeed, Peter himself, along with other Jewish believers, including even Barnabas, had nearly caused serious division in the church at Antioch under the influence of "certain [that had come] from James" (Gal. 2:12,13).

And now do James and the elders make their proposal to Paul to help *him*, or because *they* are embarrassed by his presence in Jerusalem at this time? If their desire is truly to help, *they* are in the position to do so now, but this does not appear to be the case, for, without offering to endorse his ministry or to stand by him in any way, they urge him to go through a Jewish ritual to appease those who have been informed (partly in truth) that he is leaving Judaism.

The multitude, they say, will certainly "come together" when they hear that Paul has arrived. Something, then, must be quickly done, *by Paul*, in a public way, to convince them that they have been misinformed; that the apostle is a good Jew, faithfully observing the ordinances of the law.⁹

Their proposition, therefore, was this: *Paul* was evidently not under a vow at this time, but *they* had four men who were, and Paul could join *publicly* with them in their vow by purifying himself and paying for the sacrifices marking the consummation of their vow—a considerable amount, since two doves or pigeons, one he-lamb, one ewe lamb and a ram had to be offered for *each* of the four (Num. 6).

This procedure was evidently not uncommon at that time. Indeed, Josephus tells how Agrippa I courted Jewish favor by thus financing Nazarite vows (Ant. XIX, 6,1).

James and the elders evidently wished Paul to leave with them any questions he might have about this, urging him: "*Do therefore this that we say unto thee*" (Ver. 23). And to induce him further to yield, they reminded him that they had "written and concluded that [the Gentiles] observe no such thing"¹⁰ (Ver. 25).

⁸ Granted that many of the believers present in Jerusalem at this time had come from distances, the great majority would still have been from Jerusalem and Judea.

⁹ The words "*walkest orderly and keepest the law*", can mean nothing less than faithful observance of the law.

¹⁰ *R.V.* omits this part of the verse. The context seems to favor *A.V.* but if *R.V.* is correct it would then seem to indicate that James and the elders were putting stronger *pressure* on the apostle.

WOULD IT BE RIGHT OR WRONG TO YIELD?

Thus the apostle was urged to endorse the action of four Jewish zealots in taking a Nazarite vow, by financing, not one, but five bloody sacrifices *for each*. And he was urged to do this to prove that he was a faithful observer of the law. Would it be right or wrong of him to yield?

As we examine all the Scriptures involved we can come to but one conclusion: It would be wrong.

Much is said about the two programs that run side by side through the latter part of Acts. We have no objection to the term "side by side," if only it is understood that it was not God's purpose for both programs to continue with *equal force* during those years. Just as the new program gradually emerged, the old was gradually to pass away. There was to be a *transition* from the one to the other. Peter's part in the conversion of Cornelius and his household, his words in Acts 15:8-11 and the decision of the Jerusalem council alone had indicated that even on the part of the Jewish believers there was to be a gradual liberation from the law. The breaking down of "the middle wall of partition" was to affect those on both sides.

But had not Paul written the Corinthians that every man should abide in his own calling, and that the circumcised should not become uncircumcised? (I Cor.7:18). First, the apostle here does not refer to doctrinal positions which men might hold, but to *physical circumstances* in which they are found, including slavery, virginity, married life, etc. Now there were evidently some Jewish converts that had become so extreme in their feelings about circumcision and the law, that they had sought, by surgical operations, to become "uncircumcised." The Greek word "*epispaomi*," unlike the usual word for uncircumcision, is a surgical term meaning "to draw over." Thus the passage has nothing to do with Jews remaining in Judaism.

But had he not also written: "*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; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law*"? (I Cor. 9:20,21).

This passage is thought by some to contain the full justification of Paul's involvement in Judaism at this time. They suppose that it means that he alternately placed himself in subjection to the law and at liberty from it as he labored, now with Jews and then with Gentiles.

Those who interpret this passage in this way to defend Paul's action at Jerusalem should take care that they do not charge him with worse than a lapse in faithfulness. We can understand how the apostle, like all other men of God, should stumble and fall,

but the above interpretation of I Cor. 9:20 would make Paul guilty of *habitual duplicity*.

In the first place, the apostle labored with Jews *and* Gentiles most of the time. In practically all of the churches he founded there were Jews at first; then Gentiles were added. Now suppose he placed himself under the law in order to win the Jews, and then, later, these same Jews learned that among the Gentiles he cast off the yoke and taught that the ceremonies of Judaism were "nothing"; what would they - what *could* they think of him?

We believe that the passage in I Cor. 9 simply means that, sympathetically, he placed himself mentally in the position of those with whom he dealt. He did not go back into Judaism while among Jews, but, recognizing their prejudices, he refrained from doing what might offend them - so that he might gradually teach them the same truths he had taught the Jews at Pisidian Antioch: justification from all things *by faith in Christ, apart from the law* (Acts 13:38,39).

In the next verse in I Cor. 9, the apostle says: "*to the weak became I as weak.*" Does this mean he actually became weak? Of course not. It means he *sympathized* with the weak, dealing with them gently and not showing off his strength. In the same way he became "as a Jew" to the Jews and "as under the law" to those who were under it.¹¹

As we have said, the two programs in later Acts were not to continue with equal force. The old was permitted to continue for a time, only because men are slow to learn and customs of long standing are difficult to throw off. But that the apostle sought to show "the Jews which [were] among the Gentiles" the *finished* work of Christ and their liberty in Christ, along with the Gentiles, is evident from the fact that at Antioch he, along with Peter, had lived "after the manner of Gentiles" and had rebuked Peter for reverting to Judaism for fear of those of James' party (Gal. 2:14).

How could either Peter or Paul have practiced the popular interpretation of I Cor. 9:20,21 here at Antioch anyway, with *both* Jews and Gentiles present? In such cases the fruits of duplicity would surely be reaped! And note further that Paul rebuked Peter on this occasion, not for crossing a Jewish-Gentile line the wrong way or at the wrong time, but for *going back on light received* (Gal. 2:15-19). Peter had learned by a special vision and by the conversion of Cornelius that God had made no difference between Jew and Gentile and he had publicly stated this, and more, at the council at Jerusalem. Now, by separating the Jews from the Gentiles at Antioch, he was building again that which he had destroyed, and thus making himself a transgressor (Gal. 2:18).

Thus it is not enough to argue that there was one program for the Jew and another for the Gentile, during the latter part of Acts, for it was on the basis of revealed *truth* as to Old Testament rites that Paul fought for Gentile liberty from them, and it was on the basis of revealed truth also that the Jewish program was gradually to be abandoned (Acts 15:8-11; Heb. 10:1-39, etc.). Therefore, one who sought now to place himself under the law was condemned, not because he violated a program, but because he

¹¹ Some MSS even add the words "*not being myself under the law*" here (See I Cor. 9:20, R.V.).

disobeyed *the truth* (See [Gal. 3:1; 5:7](#)).

As Paul now agreed to take part with unbelieving priests and Levites in offering burnt offerings, sin offerings and peace offerings, all of which had been fulfilled in Christ, he would surely be helping to keep Jewish believers under bondage from which the Gentiles had been freed and which even Peter had described as a yoke too heavy to bear (Acts 15:10). In the light of all the Scriptures on the subject, it is surely more tenable to hold that he lapsed here than that this was his policy.

But had he not on a previous occasion, taken a vow and hastened to keep a feast at Jerusalem? Was the apostle out of the will of God on this occasion too? In answer we say, examine the record and observe the circumstances: In the only recorded case where a congregation in a synagogue "desired him to tarry longer time with them" he it consented not" because he hastened because it was his desire "by all means" to reach Jerusalem by feast time (Acts 18:20,21). And then the Spirit draws a veil about the apostle's activities. What feast it was he wanted to keep, we are not told. Nor are we told whether he reached Jerusalem in time, or how he was received. Indeed, it is only *implied* that he arrived at Jerusalem at all.¹²

Certainly we are not informed, either by Paul himself or by Luke, what good reason there was for taking the vow or why it was so necessary that he keep a Jewish feast at Jerusalem. We can only conclude that his "great heaviness and continual sorrow" over Israel kept turning his heart back to Jerusalem and impelled him to take even this course to win them if possible.

But what about his circumcision of Timothy and the baptisms he administered? Were not both of these connected with the law? Here we must again emphasize the transitional character of the latter part of Acts. Without considering again the circumstances surrounding Timothy's circumcision, this, like Paul's baptisms, was done before he had even written his first epistle and while he was still receiving revelations, one after another, from the glorified Lord. And when he does look back, years later, on the Corinthian baptisms administered by him, he thanks God that he did not baptize more, adding: "*For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel For the preaching of the cross ... is the power of God*" (I Cor. 1:14-18).

As to James' proposal that Paul prove to the "zealots for the law" that he himself was a faithful observer of the law, the fact is that only a few days later Paul testified: "*I ... WAS zealous*¹³ *toward God, as ye all are this day*" (Acts 22:3). And later again he testified before Felix:

"But this I confess unto thee, that AFTER THE WAY WHICH THEY CALL HERESY, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Acts 24:14).

¹² It merely states that he had "gone up, and saluted the church" (Acts 18 22).

¹³ Here too the original word is a noun: "I was a *zealot*."

The apostle *could not*, then, have been a faithful observer of the law. Why should he now seek to prove that he was? Why should he try to prove to the Jews that he "walked orderly and kept the law" when he *certainly* had not done so among the Gentiles?

He had come to Jerusalem to bring an offering to the poor saints there and to "testify the gospel of the grace of God." There is no record that the offering was gratefully received, and surely he could not "testify the gospel of the grace of God" by offering blood sacrifices. But even the sacrifices were not actually offered. So far from James' plan succeeding, a great commotion and Paul's arrest it when the seven days were almost ended," prevented him from having any part in the offering of the proposed sacrifices.

THE APOSTLE YIELDS

"Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them."

-Acts 21:26.

Thus Paul, as the representative of the four Nazarites, entered into the temple to announce to the priest that after seven days' purification the prescribed sacrifices should now be offered.

It is strange to see Paul yielding to James and going back again to what he had only recently called "weak and beggarly elements."

What all his own reasons were for doing so we do not know. It cannot be said that, being at Jerusalem, he submitted to the authority of the circumcision apostles, for there is no evidence that any of them were there - indeed, the evidence rather indicates that they were *not* present at the meeting.

Yet, he later testified before the Sanhedrin: "*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*"¹⁴ (Acts 23:1). Doubtless he reasoned that the charge made against him was untrue, that he was here on Jewish ground and that joining in the vow might induce the Jews to give him a hearing. Also, had he not at great labor and through long months organized the collection of the great offering which they had now brought to their Jewish brethren? Must this all go in vain? What would the churches say if, after sacrificing so heavily of their means, the plan miscarried? Such would be the thoughts running through his mind, and so complex can spiritual problems become.

As we know, the plan miscarried anyway, for the object of the course he took was altogether frustrated by the uprising that took place just before its completion, with the added result that his public ministry was brought to a close, at least for the present, and

¹⁴ He may well, however, have referred to *his adopted course*, first in persecuting Christ and then in *proclaiming* Him.

he was led away as "*the prisoner of Jesus Christ for [the] Gentiles*" (Eph. 3:1). This, we take it, was not done as a punishment, but rather as a means to keep him "*the apostle of the Gentiles,*" regardless of how keenly he might feel obligated to the Jews.

Chapter XLI – Acts 21:27–22:30

THE UPROAR AT JERUSALEM

"And when the seven days were almost ended the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,

"Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.

"(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

"And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.

"And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.

"Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

"Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

"And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

"And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.

"For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

"And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek?

"Art not thou that Egyptian which before these days madest an uproar, and reddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

"But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

"And when he had given him license, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto

them In the Hebrew tongue, saying,"

-Acts 21:27-40.

PAUL SEIZED IN THE TEMPLE

The thousands of pilgrims who travelled to Jerusalem on its principal feast days would, of course, be those which were most zealous of the law and the traditions of the fathers. Also, of the unbelieving Jews who resided in Jerusalem there would probably be few left who would recognize Paul, for it was now more than twenty-five years since he had been in the public eye in Israel, as the leader of the great persecution against Christ.

Thus it was "the Jews which were of Asia" who started the great uprising against Paul in Jerusalem.

It was as the seven days of purification were about to be accomplished that these zealots saw him in the temple and raised a cry against him. They had recognized Trophimus of Ephesus with him in the city and now supposed that he had brought "Greeks¹⁵... into the temple" to demonstrate his contempt for Israel, the law and the temple.

That Paul's ministry had been widely discussed - and misrepresented - is evident from the cry: "*Men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place*" (Ver. 28).

This was practically the same charge upon which the Sanhedrin, along with Saul, had stoned Stephen to death years before ([Acts 6:13](#)). Now the apostle hears the same charge of blasphemy hurled at him. The charge was, of course, utterly untrue, as was the additional charge that he had polluted the temple by bringing Greeks inside, yet it was bound to stir the people up to indignation.

Excavations of the Palestine Exploration Society (Report for 1871, P. 132) have brought to light a slab of stone with an inscription, deciphered by M. Clermont Ganneau, which illustrates the horror with which the Jews looked upon the profanation by Gentiles of that inner portion of the temple grounds sacred to Jews alone. The inscription reads:

"NO MAN OF ALIEN RACE IS TO ENTER WITHIN THE BALUSTRADE AND FENCE THAT GOES ROUND THE TEMPLE. IF ANY ONE IS TAKEN IN THE ACT, LET HIM KNOW THAT HE HAS HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR THE PENALTY OF DEATH THAT FOLLOWS."

Such a cry, then, raised against one who had been so long and so widely slandered, had an immediate effect.

Whether Alexander, the Ephesian Jew ([Acts 19:33,34](#); [II Tim. 4:14,15](#)) had anything

¹⁵ The four men for whom Paul was now about to offer sacrifices may have been with him and mistaken for Greeks.

to do with this uprising we are not told, but the pattern followed closely that of the uprising at Ephesus some years previous.

Suddenly the whole city was in commotion, the people running together and dragging¹⁶ Paul out of the temple and closing the great doors to prevent further desecration. Holding him illegally, they began to beat him and were about to kill him when something occurred to stop them.

Overlooking the temple grounds was the "It castle" of Antonia, the barracks of the Roman soldiers who kept order in Jerusalem. No more had the tumult started down below than a report of it was relayed to "the chief captain of the band,"¹⁷ probably by sentries on duty. Immediately the chief captain, Claudius Lysias, with a detachment of soldiers, ran down to investigate and restore order.

With this the Jews "left beating of Paul" (Ver. 32). Once more the apostle owed his safety from violence to intervention by civil authorities.

PAUL AND LYSIAS

Supposing that Paul was responsible for the uprising, the chief captain took him into custody, commanding his soldiers to bind him with "two chains."¹⁸ Already Agabus' prediction was being fulfilled (See Vers. 10,11).

But the confusion was so great that it was impossible for Lysias to get at the root of the trouble. As it had been at Ephesus, "some cried one thing, some another" (Cf. Ver. 34 with 19:32). Lysias therefore "commanded him to be carried into the castle," and Paul actually *had* to be *carried* up the stairs by the soldiers, so great was "the violence of the people." Meantime one consistent cry alone rose above the angry tumult; the same cry which had been heard at the trial of the Lord Jesus: "*Away with him!*" All this before the apostle had even been heard. So unreasonable and vicious can religious bigotry cause men to be.

One would suppose that having just been rescued from a severe beating by men intent on killing him, and hearing even now the wild clamor for his life, the apostle would be more than grateful to be taken to a place of shelter and safety, but not so. He, apparently, was the only cool person in all that multitude. Moreover, his heart bled for those whose blind, bitter hatred of Christ was but the reflection of his own former feelings, when he had led his nation in a brutal war against Messiah.

Thus it was that the apostle, now to be led into the castle, respectfully asked the chief captain in Greek: "*May I speak unto thee?*" The fact that Paul addressed him in Greek surprised the chief captain, who had supposed him to be an Egyptian with whom

¹⁶ Gr., *Helko*

¹⁷ "Chief captain," Gr., *chilliarch*, "captain over a thousand,"; Gr. *Speira*, one of the ten divisions of a legion, or about 600 men.

¹⁸ Probably to two soldiers, at the wrists (Cf. 12:6).

Rome had previously had trouble. And here Paul demonstrates his breeding and aristocratic consciousness. With calm dignity he identifies himself, pressing home to Lysias the fact that he is a citizen of Tarsus, "no mean city,"¹⁹ and requesting an opportunity to speak to the people.

This tactful approach, together with his bearing under such circumstances evidently struck Lysias, so that he granted him permission to address the furious throng.

But now Lysias is in for another surprise, for Paul turns at the top of the stairs to address the multitude, not in Greek, which all could understand, but in *Hebrew!* In his alertness and presence of mind, the apostle had at least two reasons for this.

First, to conciliate the Jews. They would expect him to address them in Greek; instead he does so in the language which none but the Circumcision could understand and which was associated in their minds with all that was sacred in the Judaism they fought for. This would speak to them of loyalty to God's law rather than apostasy from it (See 22:2).

Secondly, he did *not* wish Lysias to understand. To Lysias he had just said: "I am ... a Jew of Tarsus ... a citizen of *no mean city*" (Ver. 39) but to the Jews he now says in Hebrew: "I am verily ... a Jew, born in Tarsus ... *yet brought up in this city* (22:3). To them he places Tarsus in the background and places the emphasis upon Jerusalem. Also, it would be better if Lysias did not hear how he had persecuted many of his kinsmen "to the death" or he might prejudice the captain against him.

How graciously God had overruled! An uprising had hindered Paul from offering the sacrifices he was about to make, which would largely have nullified his testimony. And now, on account of that same uprising, he is given an opportunity to address his countrymen in greater numbers than could have been arranged in any other way. Such a meeting could never have been called, nor could any building have held so great a multitude. How else could so many Jews from Jerusalem and of the dispersion have been gathered together to hear a final testimony to Christ? And what circumstances would be better calculated to gain their most profound attention? This was his opportunity. Could he turn them to Christ and proclaim to them "the good news of the grace of God"?

As the apostle "beckoned with the hand unto the people" with that characteristic gesture which more than once gained him the attention of his audiences (See [Acts 13:16](#) and [26:1](#)) the multitude "made a great silence" (Ver. 40). Yet, here was a vast audience which would put to a test the power of that voice already strengthened by much public speaking.

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE THE MULTITUDE

¹⁹ One highly honored by the Roman government.

HE RECOUNTS THE STORY OF HIS CONVERSION

"Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defense which I make now unto you.

"(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city In Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

"And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

"As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

"And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?

"And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

"And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of that spake to me.

"And I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

"And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, came into Damascus.

"And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

"Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

"And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know Ms

will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth.

"For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

-Acts 22:1-16.

The Book of Acts contains no less than three accounts of Paul's conversion. The first is a simple narration of the story by Luke in Chapter 9, but the other two are apologetic in character, as Paul defends himself, first before the multitude here at Jerusalem and then before Agrippa.

Tactless preachers, who hinder their usefulness by blunt outspokenness which is more apt to offend than to convince, would do well to study this address by the Apostle Paul. The remarkable fact about it is, not that he failed to persuade his hearers, but that in his God-given skill to adapt himself to his audience, he was able to keep them listening with rapt attention as long as he did. Certainly we have here one of his most remarkable addresses, for its sympathy and tact, its sincerity and honesty and its persuasive force.

The apostle's gesture had quieted the tumult, his use of the Hebrew had gained for him a breathless silence, and now his words are calculated to conciliate his hearers and draw them into sympathy with himself and his point of view.

He addresses them respectfully as "brethren and fathers," thus claiming kinship with them. He had told the Roman Lysias that he was a "Jew of Tarsus ... *no mean city*" (21:39) but to this audience he points out that while he had been "born in Tarsus," he was "*brought up in this city [Jerusalem]*" (22:3). Tarsus falls into the background and Jerusalem is given prominence. Indeed, he was "taught," or trained, in the "perfect," or exact "manner" in which the fathers had observed the law (Cf. [Gal. 1:14](#)) "at the feet" of no less a rabbi than Gamaliel, "a doctor of the law," held "in reputation among all the people"²⁰ (5:34). Surely, then, his present course could not have been lightly adopted as the result of some idea of his own.

He shows that he understands perfectly this outburst of zeal for God and His law: "I ... was²¹ zealous [Lit., a zealot] toward God, as ye all are this day" (Ver. 3, Cf. 21:28). Indeed, he had outdone them in his determination to stamp out what he had considered a heresy.

In his reference to his training at the feet of Gamaliel he hints that he was a Pharisee, but he does not say so, lest the Sadducees, including most of the priesthood, start the uproar all over again. But he does openly appeal to the testimony of the high

²⁰ Indeed, still considered one of the greatest rabbis Israel ever produced.

²¹ Note how skillfully he implies that he is no longer such (Cf. Gal 1:14) while Acts 21:20 informs us that even the Jewish *believers* in Judaea were still zealots for the law.

priest and "all the estate of the elders"²² as to his commission to have the believers at Damascus punished. And here again, adroitly, he tells them that he "*received*," not "*desired*" as in 9:1,2, letters of authorization to Damascus. This would demonstrate the confidence which the Hebrew leaders had placed in him. And these letters, he says, were addressed to the "*brethren*" at Damascus, a term he does not, in this address, use even of his fellowbelievers in Christ.

To show further that he had not merely been an opinionated young man trying to start something new, he stresses the miraculous in his conversion. He points out, as Luke's account does not, that it was "about noon" when "a great light," brighter than the midday sun, shone round about him and that he "could not see for the glory of that light." And at this, he says: "I fell to the ground." He had been *humbled* by God, not puffed up by a little knowledge. It was nothing less than a miraculous and divine revelation that had led him to change his course and to say to the One whom he had so bitterly persecuted: "*What shall I do, Lord?*"²³

The cause of the great uprising that followed Paul's address should be kept in mind as we read this part of the narrative. The multitude raised no commotion as the apostle related how he had found Jesus to be the Messiah. Tens of thousands in Jerusalem believed this and the rest tolerated it (See 21:20). What enraged them was Paul's preaching of the *finished* work of the *now-risen* Christ and the consequent replacement of law by grace sufficient for uncircumcised Gentiles as well as Jews (21:28). This was the issue even among the *believers* at Jerusalem (See 21:20,21).

And this is still the great issue today. "Christianity" as an offshoot of Judaism, with believers in Christ under the law, is tolerated, but true Christianity, with its freedom from the law and its riches of grace cannot be countenanced! Even some leaders of Fundamentalism pronounce it anathema. This, the glorious all-sufficiency of Christ, is what Satan hates and opposes most bitterly.

It was at the very time of Paul's conversion that the Lord Himself had commissioned Paul to go to the Gentiles (26:17) and Ananias too had been told that Paul was "a chosen vessel" to bear Christ's name "before the Gentiles . . ." (9:15) but, tactfully, the apostle here saves any mention of the Gentiles until the account of his return to Jerusalem. Acts 22:21,22 show clearly enough why it was wise to refrain, as long as possible, from saying what was almost certain to arouse the anger of his hearers again.

In his reference to Ananias the apostle again demonstrates his superb tact. The account in Acts 9 depicts Ananias as a "disciple" in close communion with Christ, but here Paul does not even mention (though he implies) his faith in Christ. Instead he refers to him as "*a devout man according to the law*" and "*having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there*" (Ver. 12) which was also, of course, true. This would give them

²² Evidently a larger body than the Sanhedrin (though including it) and identical with "all the senate of the children of Israel" in Acts 5:21.

²³ There is no contradiction between Acts 9:7 and 22:9. Paul's companions *heard* the voice, but did not hear "the voice of Him that spoke to me," i.e., they did not understand anything being said.

a feeling of kinship with Ananias and would assure them that he would not have fellowship with a blasphemer, nor even with a former persecutor, except upon clear evidence that *God* had changed his heart.²⁴

Further pursuing his conciliatory approach, the apostle recalls how Ananias had called him "*Brother Saul*" and had declared: "*The God of our fathers hath chosen thee* " And now is the time to explain that he was the chosen vessel to usher in a new dispensation, for Ananias had been instructed to inform him that he had been chosen of God 1.) to "*know His will*,"²⁵ 2.) to "*see that Just One*," Christ, 3.) to "*hear the voice of His mouth*" and 4.) to "*be His witness*" of what he had it seen and heard.²⁶

But now once more he approaches a dangerous point. *To whom* was he to bear witness of what he had seen and heard? As we have already seen, it was mainly to the Gentiles. How dexterously he touches upon this here, using the phrase "*unto all men*"!

Finally he relates how Ananias had instructed him:

"And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Ver. 16).

We have already discussed the baptism of Paul (see notes on Acts 9) but there are a few additional points that should be stressed here.

First, it is evident that Paul was thoroughly converted on the road to Damascus, yet *at that time* water baptism was still required for salvation ([Mark 16:16](#)) thus he was called upon to "wash away his sins" by water baptism, not that water in itself could wash away sins, but as an expression of faith. When God said water baptism was necessary to salvation faith would respond *by being baptized*.²⁷

Second, this passage bears witness to the fallacy of the "watery grave" theory of our immersionist brethren. We do not - nor did they then bury people in water. Does the reader suppose that in the cases of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian jailor and in Paul's case here, they just happened to have vessels large enough to hold sufficient water to *bury* people in? Certainly there is no indication in any of the above cases that they went out and got the equipment or conducted the applicant to any place where they might find such facilities. This crude theory of burial in water comes from the false notion that Rom. 6:4 and Col. 2:12 refer to water baptism.²⁸

Water baptism is a natural symbol for *washing*, or *cleansing* as this passage and

²⁴ Ananias' objections to visiting Paul confirm this to be true (See Acts 9:13,14).

²⁵ This could not refer to His will *for Paul*, for why should he be chosen" to know that? Who else should it be revealed to? Clearly it refers to the will of God spoken of In Eph. 1:9,11; 5:17, His will, or program, in view of Israel's rejection of Christ

²⁶ See the author's book entitled: *Moses and Paul*, Pp. 20-28.

²⁷ See the author's chapter on *The Principles and Dispensations of God*, in his book *The Fundamentals of Dispensationalism*.

²⁸ For a fuller discussion of this subject see *Real Baptism*, by Charles F. Baker.

many others indicate (Cf. [Mark 7:1-5](#) where *baptizo* is twice rendered *wash* and where it is used alternately with *nipto*, another word for *wash*; also Heb. 9:10, where the original word is *baptismos*)

Third, it should be observed that Paul here relates what took place *at the time of his conversion*. He was converted under the dispensation when water baptism was required and, symbolically, he was baptized to wash away his sins, but later, using the very same word rendered "wash" here (Gr., *apobuo*) he had written to the Corinthians:

"And such were some of you: BUT YE ARE WASHED, but ye are sentenced, but ye are justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and BY THE SPIRIT OF OUR GOD" (I Cor. 6:11).

And still later he was to write to Titus:

"NOT BY WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH WE HAVE DONE, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY HE SAVED US, BY THE WASHING OF REGENERATION, AND THE RENEWING OF THE HOLY GHOST" (Tit. 3:5).

Though the apostle's address is not yet finished, this concludes the account of his conversion. Before leaving it we again point out that whereas the twelve had "seen and heard" Christ only in His ministry *on earth* and were commissioned to be witnesses of these things ([Acts 4:20](#)) Paul had seen and heard Him in His glory "far above all" and had been commissioned to bear witness to this and to other revelations he was still to receive of and from the glorified Lord (26:16). Indeed, the closing words of this address at Jerusalem deal with one of these revelations.

UNTO THIS WORD

"And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

"And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.

"And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee:

"And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

"And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

"And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

"And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air,

"The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging, that he might know wherefore they cried so against him."

-Acts 22:17-24.

Paul's purpose in addressing the multitude at Jerusalem was not merely to tell them the story of his conversion. There was more to be said and he must come to the point.

Cautiously he explains how, *after* his conversion and commission to tell "*all men*" what he had seen and heard, he returned again to Jerusalem and went to the temple to pray. And it was there, in the House of God, while engaged in prayer, that, in a trance,²⁹ the Lord bade him hasten to leave Jerusalem, since they would not receive his testimony concerning Him. We know from the record in Acts 9 that his very life was in danger at that time (Ver. 29) but it would not be wise to bring this up here. Rather, the apostle shows how he longed to stay and labor with his people by recalling how he had argued the case with the Lord Himself, citing the fact that these people knew, how he had imprisoned and beaten those who had believed on Christ and how he had even had a part in Stephen's death, guarding the clothes of those who stoned him, so that surely they would listen to *his* testimony.

How unjust and untrue, he implies, is the charge that he has been *against* the people, *against* the law and *against* the temple! Yet, in his references to his persecution of believers in Christ and the stoning of Stephen we find a noble example of one seeking to make public reparation for public sin, largely blaming *himself* for their unbelief.

But he recalls how the Lord would not permit him to stay, commanding him summarily:

"Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Ver. 21).

Surely this could not refer to some particular journey which Paul was to take, but to the field of labor which henceforth was to be his. Certainly the multitude understood it so.

Thus the apostle acknowledges that the Lord Himself had instructed him to leave Jerusalem; that they would not listen anyway, yet here he was pleading with them - and under such circumstances! Could he offer greater proof of his love for them?

Indeed, the apostle would have gone on to cap his address with a proclamation of God's grace (See 20:24) and a plea to his hearers to accept that grace, but this is another one of the interrupted addresses of the Book of Acts. They did not permit him to finish.

²⁹ Gr., *ekstasis*, a carrying outside of one's self.

He had avoided mentioning the Gentiles until now, deferring this until he had first showed the Jews how he loved *them* and how only at the divine command, specific and repeated, had he left the favored people to go to the Gentiles. But they "gave him audience" only "unto this word" and then, as when fire is set to an explosive, they burst forth in a demonstration of uncontrolled rage that immediately terminated the apostle's address.

They should have been interested in the salvation of the Gentiles (See [Gen. 22:18](#); [Isa. 56:6-8](#)) but their intense national pride had blinded them to all else the apostle had said, so that they cried: "*Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live!*" And "as they cried out" they "cast off their clothes"³⁰ and threw dust into the air."

Gentiles! So this was to be the climax! Now he had gone too far! Imagine this apostate from the law, this traitor to his nation, alleging a vision from heaven and a trance in the temple as his defense in flinging open the doors of divine worship to these "sinners of the Gentiles," these dogs of the uncircumcision! They would not hear another word. This man must be put to death.

Alas, Paul's hopes and prayers regarding Jerusalem had not been realized. His "heart's desire and prayer to God ... that they might be saved" (Rom. 10:1) had not been fulfilled. He had not been permitted to proclaim "the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24) to them. He had not been "delivered from those who did not believe in Judaea," nor had the sacrificial ministrations from the Gentile churches been "accepted of the saints" there (Rom. 15:30,31). If they accepted the *money* (which we are not told) it had certainly not served to bring them closer to their Gentile brethren in Christ.

If the unbelieving Jews were Paul's bitter enemies then "James and the elders," along with any of the twelve apostles who were present, were his very doubtful friends. Neither now, nor later, do we find one of them standing at his side, even though James, Cephas and John had officially and publicly acknowledged him, some years back, as the apostle of grace and the apostle to the Gentiles.

Indeed, the compromise which James and his party had persuaded Paul to make had produced nothing - but, this uproar - while *they* stayed in the background.

Yet the apostle had acted only out of love for his kinsmen and his Lord, and it was thus, in the providence of God that Israel received one final touching testimony to Christ from the lips of one who had even been instructed to leave them to their fate.

Surely Isaiah's inspired prediction had been amply fulfilled:

"But to Israel He saith, ALL DAY LONG HAVE I STRETCHED OUT FORTH MY

³⁰ I.e., their outer garments. The apostle well knew what meant. They were prepared to stone him if only the chief captain would hand him over to them (See 22:20).

HANDS UNTO A DISOBEDIENT AND GAINSAYING PEOPLE" (Rom. 10.21).

But now the apostle was to face another test. His address, delivered in Hebrew, had borne the air of a confidential communication to the Jews alone, with the result that Lysias and his soldiers could only listen with vain curiosity and perhaps impatient suspicion. And now, at this renewed and persistent uproar, Lysias evidently suspected that Paul was guilty of some grievous crime.

He therefore commanded that the apostle be brought into the castle to be "examined by scourging" (Ver. 24). This was far more brutal than our so-called "third degree." It was a series of whippings inflicted to extort an admission of crime.

PAUL AGAIN ASSERTS HIS RIGHTS AS A ROMAN CITIZEN

"And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?"

"When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest; for this man is a Roman.

"Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.

"And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.

"Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

"On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them."

-Acts 22:25-30.

The apostle was by now a battle-scarred warrior for Christ. Already he had suffered "stripes above measure." "Of the Jews" he had "five times received ... forty stripes save one."³¹ "Thrice" he had been "beaten with rods," by the Roman lictors (See [II Cor. 11:23-25](#)). Now it was to be the Roman whip.

³¹ Forty were not permitted, lest the victim die.

But as they bound him to the whipping post, with "thongs,"³² doubtless having stripped him to the waist (Cf. 16:22) he asked the centurion who stood by: "*Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman - and uncondemned?*"

Note the emphasis here. A twofold illegality had been committed.

If it was --- and it *was* - a violation of Roman law to scourge a Roman citizen, how much more flagrant a violation to scourge him without even a hearing!

The effect of Paul's quiet question was instantaneous! The centurion into whose hands the brutal examination had evidently been entrusted, went immediately to the chief captain and exclaimed: "What are you about to do? This man is a Roman!"

This brought the chief captain himself to the scene with the astonished inquiry: "*Art thou a Roman?*" He had been surprised to hear him speak Greek; then again to hear him speak Hebrew. Now was he a Roman citizen too? Paul's brief, perhaps curt reply, "Yes," may have expressed censure of the captain's hasty action.

Embarrassed, Lysias becomes friendly, even confidential with Paul, explaining how it cost him a great sum of money to become a Roman citizen.³³ But Paul, still pressing his advantage, answered simply: "*But I was born [a Roman].*"

With this, *all* those who had stood ready to "examine" him "departed straightway." No one wanted to be involved. And the chief captain, who had given the original order for the scourging, "was afraid."

Not far from this spot the Lord Jesus Christ had been scourged by the Romans, yet Paul now could and did claim exemption as a Roman citizen. Indeed the record of the Acts depicts him, on several occasions, standing on his rights as a Roman. There were several reasons for this but the *dispensational* significance is perhaps most important, for the Spirit would thus emphasize the Gentile character of his apostleship and ministry.

This faithful servant of God had earnestly testified to the chosen people as "a Jew" (Ver. 3) and they had gone about to slay him. But when he represented himself to the Gentiles as "a Roman" (Ver. 25) his word was instantly accepted and he was treated with respect.

But there is a further dispensational lesson for us here. Paul, the former enemy of Christ now reconciled by grace and standing here as "a Jew" and "a Roman" in one

³² Lit., straps. The word is thrice rendered "latchet" with reference to the straps of our Lord's sandals (Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:27).

³³ Some feel that Lysias brought up this matter, doubting that a poor Jew could possibly have been a Roman citizen. We reject this because 1.) Paul was plainly not the type to bluff for temporary advantage and thus risk greater punishment, 2.) Roman citizenship was conferred upon many poor people for varied reasons and 3.) we do not believe Paul was poor at this time, as we will show when we deal with his financial status at this period of his ministry.

"man," is the natural representative of the Church of this present dispensation, the "one new man," composed of Jews and Gentiles reconciled to God in one body by the cross (See Eph. 2:14-16). That this dispensation had dawned and the "one Body" was being formed, is evident from what he had already written to the Corinthians and the Romans (See I Cor. 12:13,27; Rom. 12:5).

Paul's magnificent self-composure in all this had again, under God, placed him and his cause in an advantageous position. Indeed, Lysias would have been glad if, like the Philippian magistrates, in similar embarrassment, he could have let the apostle go with an apology,³⁴ but Jerusalem was not Philippi. Down there was the angry multitude, clamoring for the apostle's execution. At least Paul's protest would stiffen the chief captain's determination to see justice done.

Still in the dark as to the Jews' complaint against Paul, Lysias "loosed him from his bands"³⁵ (Ver. 30) the next day and called for a meeting of the Sanhedrin, setting Paul before them, that formal charges might be made against him.

Probably this session was not held in the regular chambers of the Sanhedrin, or Roman soldiers would not have been allowed inside, nor in the castle, for Lysias, and his soldiers, later had to go "down" to it (See 22:30; 23:10). Perhaps it was held in some neutral place.

The fact that a mere "chief captain" over a thousand Roman soldiers could summon the Jewish Sanhedrin to a meeting indicates how subservient Israel, and even its Supreme Court, had become to Rome.

³⁴ See notes on Acts 16:35-40.

³⁵ A different word than "bound" in Ver. 25. It was not illegal to hold a Roman prisoner in chains (See 26:29; Col. 4:3; II Tim.2:9).

Chapter XLII - ACTS 23:1-11

PAUL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

"And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

"And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

"Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?

"And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?

"Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

"But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

"And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

"For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

"And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man, but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

"And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."

-Acts 23:1-11.

A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE

Paul has now evidently abandoned all hope of receiving justice at the hands of his countrymen, for his attitude and conduct toward even the members of the Sanhedrin now changes abruptly.

Only yesterday he had addressed the multitude as "Men, brethren, *and fathers*," speaking to them in the most conciliatory manner.

Now, on trial before the Sanhedrin, *he* opens the proceedings himself, addressing them as "Men and brethren," thus placing himself on the same level with them and, fixing his eyes intently upon them, avows that *he*-could *they* say as much? has lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

When the high priest commands those standing by to smite him on the mouth for this he answers with a stinging rebuke, and when reprimanded for *that*, he explains that he had not realized that it was the high priest who had given the order to strike him, but he does not apologize to the high priest or take back one word of what he has said.

Indeed, he goes even farther, deliberately dividing the Sanhedrin by "crying out" that *he* is a *Pharisee*.

But let us begin at the beginning. Actually the Sanhedrin could have no final authority in this case. They had not assembled to consider some charge made against Paul by the Jews. It was Rome who had taken Paul into custody for an apparent breach of the peace and Lysias, the chief captain, had merely asked the Sanhedrin to hear him so that *he*, the chief captain, might ascertain the cause of the uprising and decide whether a formal charge could even be brought against him.

Paul, quick to take this in, began addressing *them*, not waiting for them to arraign him in formal trial. He had more reason to expect justice from Rome.

This alone might anger the high priest, but what Paul said, and the manner in which he said it, enraged him. Addressing them as his equals (Ver. 1, ctr., 4:8; 7:2) the apostle fixed his eyes on them with searching gaze³⁶ and cast reflections on their integrity by earnestly asserting that *he* had lived "before God in all good conscience until this day"³⁷ (Ver. 1).

This the high priest could not endure, betraying his true character by commanding those who stood by to smite Paul on the mouth. How true the saying: "The more liberty taken by despots, the less they allow their subjects."

This brutal insult, illegally ordered by a judge, drew from Paul the indignant accusation that he was a "whited wall," i.e., a hypocrite (Cf. [Matt. 23:27](#)) to sit there as a judge, yet command the defendant to be smitten contrary to the law.

³⁶ Some suppose that the apostle merely strained to see the Jurors because of defective eyesight, but the word *atenizo* is used rather in the sense that we give it here (See Luke 22:56; Acts 3:4, 12; 11:6; 13:9, etc.).

³⁷ In the light of Rom. 7:15-25 and the Scriptures as a whole, he could not have been referring to all the details of his conduct, but to *his adopted course*, in first persecuting then serving Him and proclaiming His saving grace among Gentiles.

Fault has been found with the apostle for not showing the same humility as had his Lord when similarly outraged. In this connection it should be observed that our Lord had come to earth especially to take the blame and bear the penalty for the sins of others and particularly for His people, Israel, while on this occasion Paul faced Israel's rulers after their final demonstration of apostasy against Messiah. The actions of both our Lord and Paul on these two occasions are therefore representative; the one of God's mercy to Israel, the other of His judgment upon them.

The apostle's answer to those who upbraided him for rebuking the high priest, has been understood by some as sarcasm. How, they ask, could Paul have failed to recognize the president of the Sanhedrin? He must, therefore, have meant: "I did not know that one who would do this could possibly be the high priest."

We do not accept this interpretation, however. Apart from a consideration of the exact wording in the original here, it is doubtful that Paul's words could have been intended as a sarcastic rebuttal. In the first place, it would not be like Paul to "speak evil of dignitaries." Second, Israel's high priests, at this time of her history, were appointed with gross irregularity, partly due to national apostasy from God's commands and partly to Rome's intrusion, so that one illegitimate high priest after another held office and the council was even presided over, at times, by substitute "high priests."³⁸ Under these circumstances - and Paul having been in Jerusalem but a few days - it is quite understandable that he would not recognize the high priest.

Others take Paul's "wist not" to mean: "did not take into consideration." Paul's words would then be a confession that he had spoken hastily, failing to take into consideration the dignity of Ananias' office. But in addition to this being a strained rendering of the original, it is logical that in such a case Paul would have apologized *to the high priest*.

Had the apostle known that it was the high priest who had ordered him smitten he would have refrained from rebuking him in view of the command in Ex. 22:28. But having done so he merely explained how this had come about and retracted neither his rebuke nor his prediction. The more shame that the *high priest* should be guilty of so brazenly violating the basic rules of justice.

Paul's words, then, were representative of God's attitude toward Israel and her rulers at that time, and indeed if history is correct Paul's prediction was soon fulfilled, for not long after Ananias was slain by an assassin.

It is possible that an outrage so undeserved rankled the Pharisees too, coming as it did from the high priest. It must be remembered that whereas the Pharisees were the more popular and the more numerous in Israel, the Sadducees were the more rich and powerful, and the high priestly party were of this sect (See [Acts 4:6](#); [5:17](#)).

Now the Pharisees were the "strict" sect (Acts 26:5) and while their deep prejudices

³⁸ Lightfoot refers to this very high priest as "a man who had the semblance of the high priest's office without the reality."

sometimes warped their sense of justice, they could not approve the Sadducees' crude and flagrant disregard for even the form of justice, nor appreciate their high-handedness.³⁹

Paul knew too that there was a deep doctrinal division between the Pharisees and the Sadducees and, taking advantage of the situation, he cried out: "*Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee,⁴⁰ of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question*" (Ver. 6) thus directing the jurors' attention to a subject on which he knew the Pharisees would be on his side. This maneuver had an instantaneous effect. Almost immediately "*there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees*" and "*the multitude was divided*" and "*there arose a great cry; and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose and strove*" for the apostle's acquittal, till the "*dissension*" was so "great" that the chief captain became concerned "*lest Paul should have been pulled in Pieces of them*" and sent his soldiers down to take him from them by force. Thus Paul was brought again under the jurisdiction - and protection - of the Roman government.

What a change from the respectful, sympathetic, conciliatory approach of yesterday to the "rough-and-tumble" tactics of today! To extricate himself from the legal power of an apostate Sanhedrin, he grasps the initiative and *keeps* it, addressing them before he is even accused, rebuking a jurist for ordering an illegal abuse and crying out that he is a Pharisee, so as to divide and confound them.

The apostle's declaration has been challenged, though, on two counts: Was it quite truthful of him to say that he *still* was a Pharisee and that it was concerning the hope of the resurrection that he had been called in question?

The answer to the first objection is that he had qualified his declaration clearly enough. It was with regard to the doctrine of the resurrection that he was a Pharisee, just as with regard to the doctrine of the believer's eternal security we might say: "I am a Calvinist." The apostle's statement was in no way misleading for his hearers understood perfectly that he was not now associated with the organized body of Pharisees.

As to the second objection, Paul was indeed getting down to the *basic* reason why the Jews hated him so bitterly - and here is an important dispensational lesson to learn.

The circumcision apostles and the multitudes of Jewish believers at Jerusalem had for years believed and proclaimed the resurrection of Christ, yet the unbelieving Jews, even now, tolerated them. Why this great outcry against Paul. Ah, it was because he had, by revelation, preached the resurrection of "the Seed of David" in a new light as the basis for a proclamation of *freedom from the law and salvation by grace to Jew and Gentile alike* (See [II Tim. 2:7-9](#); [Rom. 4:22-25](#); [10:9](#), etc.). This was what they so bitterly opposed.

³⁹ For a comparison of the Pharisees' and Sadducees conduct in this connection, John 7:51; 11:47-50.

⁴⁰ Some of the best MSS have "Pharisees," making him the offspring of a *line* of Pharisees.

More than this, Paul's affirmation before the Sanhedrin was more than a subtle stroke to cause division and save his own skin; it was a declaration of the basis for accepting or rejecting Christ.

THE LORD ENCOURAGES PAUL

The trying experiences through which the apostle had gone in the past weeks and especially the last two hectic days, may well have left him exhausted and downcast. What would be the final outcome of this uprising against him? Would Lysias free him or would there be more trouble about it? If Lysias did acquit him what would he do then, how could he escape from Jerusalem alive? What about his plan to carry the gospel to Rome; would this now be prevented? The outlook was dark.

It was that night, as thoughts such as these troubled the weary apostle that - "*the Lord stood by him.*" How beautiful! It does not appear that any of his companions were with him nor, evidently, did the church at Jerusalem or its leaders do anything to help him. He was alone. But "*the Lord stood by him, and said:*

"Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Ver. 11).

Many difficulties might still lie ahead and the road might be long, but he *would* reach Rome with the gospel. Ah, *this* is how God prepares His servants to pass through ordeals! How serene the scene has suddenly become! A raging tempest just behind him; an unknown plot to murder him just ahead, but *he* can rest in the care of Him "who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will."

Let us not read more into this passage than it says, however, or construe it as an endorsement of *all* Paul had done at Jerusalem. Whatever his failures there, he had nobly testified of Christ, and he is now given divine assurance that opportunity will be granted him to do the same at Rome.

This is not the only crisis in which Paul was given supernatural encouragement. He had been thus sustained in the dangerous days at Corinth (18:9,10) and would be again in the fearful storm on the way to Rome (27:22-24) and at his first appearance before Caesar (II Tim. 4:16,17).

Chapter XLIII - Acts 23:12-35

A CONSPIRACY UNCOVERED

"And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

"And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

"And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

"Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

"And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

"Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him.

"So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

"Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?

"And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul tomorrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly.

"But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee."

-Acts 23:12-21.

THE PLOT TO AMBUSH PAUL

"And when it was day . . ."

How the apostle would need the assurance received from the Lord only last night!

No more had the sun risen than the most determined attempt upon Paul's life so far

was launched as more than forty zealots conspired together to take the law into their own hands and assassinate him.

Doubtless they justified themselves for this, feeling they were carrying out the will of God. It looked as if Paul might go free, and should the uncircumcised Romans be allowed to obstruct the just punishment of a traitor against the law?⁴¹

Thus they bound themselves with a solemn oath, declaring that they would "neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul" (Ver. 12). Indeed, their report of this to the leaders of the Sanhedrin shows the intensity of their bitterness, for they said, literally: "*We have cursed ourselves with a great curse*" (Ver. 14).

It was to the Sadducean party of the Sanhedrin that they revealed their plan (Ver. 14, Cf. 5:17) urging them to persuade the rest of the council (Ver. 15). It was a bold plan, by which the assassins were placing their own lives in jeopardy, not only of starvation but of the Roman sword. The chief captain would not, they were sure, deny the Sanhedrin an opportunity to enquire further into Paul's case, especially since he, the chief captain, had failed to obtain the desired information from the session held on the preceding day. The council, therefore, was to request Paul's presence for such further investigation, and the forty-odd assassins would waylay him and slay him as he was being escorted to the council chamber.

The agreement of the leaders of the Sanhedrin to take part in this plot (Ver. 20) shows the depth of infamy to which cultured and religious people can sink (Cf. [Matt. 26:4](#); [Acts 6:11](#), etc.) and the very fact that the assassins could go to the chief justices of Israel's Supreme Court, divulge their plot to them and seek their complicity in it, indicates how notorious was their contempt for the law they pretended to uphold. Once again Paul was in peril by his own countrymen.

In the apostle's experiences on this occasion we see again the dispensational trend so evident in the Book of Acts. Twice, on previous occasions, Peter had been miraculously delivered from prison as angels appeared to open the doors ([Acts 5:19](#); [12:7-10](#)). Indeed, Paul himself had seen prison doors fly open and his fetters fall miraculously off some years before at Philippi, but now, when such a miracle would seem to serve so great a purpose, no miracle takes place. God has "stretched forth His hands" long enough to this "gainsaying people"; why increase their condemnation by allowing them to close their eyes to still further evidence?

But this trend is further seen in the fact that during Peter's imprisonment in early Acts, the whole Judaeian Church prayed "without ceasing" for him. But now, though the number of Hebrew believers had multiplied into "myriads" and the Jewish Church had become strong in Jerusalem, there is not a single hint that any of them - even of their

⁴¹ Thus has the Roman church again and again absolved its subjects from allegiance to civil rulers, ignoring the Spirit's declaration that "every soul" should be "*subject unto the higher powers,*" since "*the powers that be,*" whether good or bad, "*are ordained of God*" and whoever "*resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God*" (Rom. 13:1,2).

leaders - did one single thing to help Paul.

THE PLOT DISCOVERED

Ah, but God, while not directly intervening, was *overruling*. He who had "stood by" Paul to reassure him last night was standing by today to see His promise through.

The apostle had a sister, whose son, in the providence of God, was in Jerusalem at this time. Whether he *lived* there with his mother is not known, but if so it may indicate that they were not believers, since Paul had not lodged with them on this visit, nor do we read that he had any contact with them.

The apostle did have believing relatives in Rome ([Rom. 16:7,11](#)) but there is no indication that any of his immediate family were saved, nor any reason to assume they were, for truth does not run in families.

Perhaps the lad, like so many others, was in Jerusalem only for the feast days, but the point is that God had just the right person there at just the right time to hear about the plot on Paul's life.

Whether the lad was sympathetic to Paul's cause or not, this was his own flesh and blood and he could not allow him to be thus slain in cold blood. Moreover, the record indicates that he was still very young, so that he would not soon be suspected of treachery, either by Paul or by Lysias.

The apostle, being still an uncondemned prisoner, was evidently detained under only a moderate form of military custody, for it appears that his nephew had free access to him (Ver. 16; Cf. 24:23; 27:3; 28:16,30).

The calm presence of mind and level-headedness with which Paul received and acted upon the lad's report was characteristic of him. God had assured him that he *would* reach Rome, but he did not therefore dismiss the report as representing no threat to his safety. He realized that while God is sovereign, human responsibility and effort form part of His plans (Cf. [Acts 27:24,31](#)). Calling one of the centurions, therefore, he said, simply: "*Bring this young man*⁴² *unto the chief captain, for he hath a certain thing to tell him*" (Ver. 17).

The centurion then conducted the lad to Lysias with his message from "Paul the prisoner," a designation henceforth to become familiar to many. The chief captain hereupon "took him by the hand" to more private quarters and there asked what it was he had to say.

The manner in which Lysias received the lad would seem to indicate further the lad's youth and Lysias' sympathetic interest in Paul.

⁴² Gr., *neanias*, youth.

The lad related with some feeling the facts he had learned about the plot, beseeching the chief captain: "*Do not thou yield unto them, for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men*" (Ver. 21).

THE PLOT THWARTED

"So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me.

"And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night;

"And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

"And he wrote a letter after this manner:

"Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting.

"This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

"And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council.

"Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds.

"And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

"Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris.

"On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

"Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him.

"And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia;

"I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall."

Even a casual reading of those passages in the New Testament which deal with officers in the Roman Army must impress upon our minds the commendable qualities of character which they, as a class, possessed. Perhaps the discipline of their military training brought out these good traits. The centurion at Capernaum, the centurion at the cross, Cornelius and Julius, the centurion of Augustus' Band, are some examples that stand out in our minds.

Lysias, the chief captain at Fort Antonia, was another who, heathen though he was, possessed qualities of character which stand out in striking contrast to the evil treachery of the religious leaders of Israel.

Already we have seen his justice and even kindness to Paul; and if, in the excitement of the uprising, he had committed an illegality in binding Paul for scourging, it was doubtless only because he had assumed that one in Paul's position would have claimed his Roman citizenship immediately had he been a Roman.

The fact that Lysias took Paul's nephew "by the hand" would indicate further that beneath the soldier's rough exterior there was a kind and gentle heart.

At the same time the chief captain exercised the official caution appropriate to his position. First, he heard the lad "privately." Then he dismissed him without indicating what action he would take, merely cautioning him: "*See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me*" (Ver. 22).

Then, too, Lysias acted with the dispatch of a well-trained army officer. He was responsible, not only for the safety of a Roman citizen, but also for the protection of the public peace. Convinced that the lad had told the truth and realizing that something like this was just what some Jewish zealots were likely to do, he issued immediate orders to two of his centurions to assemble two hundred regular infantry (probably heavily armed) along with seventy cavalry and two hundred spearmen.⁴³ The total army of four hundred seventy men would thus be prepared to meet various forms of attack, and their departure was delayed until nightfall (9 P.M.) so that none could pursue until the city gates were opened again at six o'clock in the morning. By that time they would be nine hours' march away.

The large number of soldiers engaged to conduct Paul to Caesarea may indicate how dangerously unsettled the situation was at Jerusalem, but on the other hand Lysias, whose sympathies by this time were clearly with Paul, may have given him this large escort to raise his prestige and at the same time show the Jews how he would protect a Roman citizen from their hostility.

How graciously God had overruled the designs of Paul's enemies-not by some

⁴³ The translation here is probably correct. The exact term in the original is "right hand graspers," doubtless referring to those who hurled spears with the right hand.

miraculous demonstration, but by the most natural chain of circumstances. How the Lord's "Be of good cheer" must have rung in his ears as just after nine that very evening he was on his way to Caesarea with an escort fit for a king! And imagine the chief priests' chagrin when, instead of obtaining permission to bring Paul in for further questioning, they were turned away with the curt response: "I have sent him to the governor at Caesarea; you are to go and make your complaint against him there"!

Lysias' letter to Felix demonstrates further his character and ability as a Roman officer, though in it he yields to the natural human inclination to protect himself from blame and place himself in the best possible light before Felix - even to some misrepresentation of the facts.

Addressing Felix as "Your Excellency," the chief captain correctly places Paul's case in a favorable light and that of his accusers in an unfavorable one, while at the same time changing a few facts to his own advantage.

Lysias' statement that he had already commanded Paul's accusers to appear before Felix, was doubtless legitimate. It is easily possible that the chief priests had already requested Paul's presence for a further hearing (Ver. 21) and that Lysias had given them his reply, but in any case he must have done so before his letter could be read by Felix.

Marching through the night, Lysias' troops conducted Paul safely to Antipatris, some forty miles distant, doubtless waking the townsfolk all along the way. Having brought him thus far the four hundred infantry and spearmen marched back to Jerusalem leaving the cavalry to convey the apostle the rest of the way to Caesarea. There was no need to leave the Castle of Antonia too lightly manned.

It would appear from the record that the cavalry doubtless after a period of rest, pressed on to make the remaining twenty-five miles to Caesarea that same day, reaching the city while it was still daylight.

What must have been the thoughts and feelings of the Caesarean believers as the weary cavalcade rode into the city with *Paul* in their midst! Only a few days ago Agabus had warned him of the dangers at Jerusalem, predicting that he would be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, and they all, along with Paul's own companions, had pleaded with him not to go (21:8-12). Now already Agabus' prediction had been fulfilled and their fears were realized. And what thoughts must have filled Paul's heart and mind! But God was in it all, for in this way Paul was to bear the name of Christ before "kings," as predicted in Acts 9:15, and fulfil a still greater ministry among the Gentiles.

If Paul's would-be assassins held true to their oath they must all have died of starvation, but Lightfoot shows from the Talmud that such vows could be easily annulled.

When the soldiers had presented Paul and the letter from Lysias to Felix, the

governor enquired what province the prisoner came from. Learning that he was a Cilician, Felix then promised him a full hearing⁴⁴ when his accusers should arrive, and kept him meantime in Herod's praetorium.

⁴⁴ It is doubtful that Felix' territory could have included Cilicia, but since this was not a neighboring province and the uprising had taken place in Judaea, Felix doubtless felt justified in taking the case.

Chapter XLIV - Acts 24:1-27

PAUL BEFORE FELIX

TERTULLUS' ACCUSATION

"And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

"And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence,

"We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness.

"Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

"For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes:

"Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

"But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands,

"Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge all these things, whereof we accuse him.

"And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so."

-Acts 24:1-9.

The Jews lost no time in pursuing the man who had thus far eluded their grasp. It was only five days after Paul's departure from Jerusalem that Ananias and the elders⁴⁵ appeared at Caesarea to prosecute him. This may be ascertained from the fact that this was the twelfth day since his arrival at Jerusalem (Ver. 11) and he had been in Jerusalem for about seven days (21:27; 22:30; 23:11,12).

It must have been unusual for the high priest in person to attend trials at Caesarea, nearly seventy miles distant, but he had a personal interest in the prosecution of the man who had called him a "whited wall."

⁴⁵ Or "certain elders."

The judge before whom they were to make their complaint was anything but a man of justice or integrity. Historians tell us that he was a former slave, elevated to his present position as governor of Judaea only through the influence of his brother Pallas, a favorite of the Emperor, but was recalled and tried at Rome for maladministration, finally to be acquitted by Nero only, again, because of his brother's intercession. Josephus tells of his injustice and cruelty and Tacitus says that "in the practice of all kinds of lust and cruelty he exercised the power of a king with the temper of a slave" (*Hist.* V, 9) This all agrees with what the Scriptures tell us about him.

Many commentators believe that Tertullus, the counsel for the prosecution, was an Italian lawyer, engaged by the Jews because of his knowledge of Roman law and for the effect his procurement might have upon the Roman governor. If this is so - and it may well be - the Scripture does not make this plain nor make any point of it, for Tertullus stands here representing Israel and Israel's attitude toward Christ and His servant Paul.

In accordance with Roman law, the charges against Paul were not heard until Paul had been "called forth" to meet his accusers "face to face" (Ver. 2; 25:16). Then the orator, Tertullus, presented the formal complaint before Felix.

Tertullus' extravagant flattery of the wicked Felix stands in sharp contrast both to his vicious and unscrupulous attack upon Paul and to Paul's thoughtful and factual response. He would not have dared to praise Felix for integrity, justice or benevolence, or the looks on the faces of the Jewish elders (who thoroughly detested Felix) might have betrayed his insincerity and angered the governor, so he lauded him instead for the "quietness" which Judaea, in some measure, had enjoyed under his reign, and the "excellent measures" instituted by his "providence" - a term usually reserved for the gods and the Emperor. For all this Tertullus assured him of the uninterrupted and universal gratitude of the Jews (Ver. 3).

Long years before Moses had declared, by inspiration of God, that if Israel rebelled against Him:

"The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low ... he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43,44).

This process was rapidly taking place as the chosen people declined in power before the ascendancy of Rome. Even a few years previous, at their rejection of Christ, the Council had largely taken matters into their own hands and had driven Pilate to do what they wished, as "the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed, and Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required" (Luke 23:23,24). Now they come with abject flattery to a ruler they despise, careful not to be "tedious," to him and beseeching him out of his "clemency" to hear them a "few words" (Vers. 2-4).

The strategy which the prosecution employed is not hard to discern.

First, they made three charges against him: one of *sedition*, against Roman law, another of *heresy*, against Hebrew law, and a third of *sacrilege*, against both.

Paul was "a pest," "a plague,"⁴⁶ Tertullus declared, stirring up sedition "among all the Jews throughout the world." Apart from the base untruth of this charge it would be of interest to enquire since when the Jews had become such patriotic Roman subjects! Who could deny that the chief priests themselves would have been genuinely pleased to have any one stir up opposition to Rome "among all the Jews throughout the world"?

Then too, Paul was supposed to have been "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."⁴⁷ This charge came nearest to the truth, though Paul was something higher than the "ringleader" of a "sect." He merely proclaimed the truth about Christ and this was supposed to be heresy against the law of Moses which, in turn, Rome had pledged itself to respect.

Finally, Paul was charged with having "gone about to profane the temple." This accusation was, of course, utterly false, but it was calculated to weigh heavily with Felix, since it was to Rome's advantage to preserve inviolate the sanctity of the temple.

But the Jews' strategy went farther than the formal charges,⁴⁸ involving the propriety of Lysias' having sent Paul to Felix for a Roman trial. In another brazen departure from the truth Tertullus declared that the Jews had apprehended Paul and would have judged him according to their law, but that Lysias had come and "with great violence" had taken him out of their hands, commanding them to make their complaints before Felix.

This, of course, was flatly contradictory to Lysias' report and an obvious attempt to turn the tables on *him*, making him the disturber of the peace, so that Felix might be induced to give Paul back into their hands - and that the assassins might yet have their opportunity to strike.

Finally, Tertullus suggests that Paul be examined by torture,⁴⁹ whether or not Felix delivers him into their hands, indicating further that their motive in all this was purely revenge.

Before leaving Tertullus we may observe an example of the human trait of twisting the truth to one's own advantage. By now we have had three conflicting accounts of what happened in the uprising at the temple.

⁴⁶ The word is a noun in the original, "*fellow*" having been supplied by the translators In A. V.

⁴⁷ A contemptuous term for believers in Christ. The word "sect" here is *hereseos*, or "heresy" as in ver. 14

⁴⁸ The passage from the word "whom" in Verse 6 to "unto thee" in verse 8 is omitted from some of the earliest MSS but not from the Syriac, which antedates our oldest MSS. From the context, also, it appears to belong to the text.

⁴⁹ *Anakrino* is used forensically of a searching examination by torture (See John 19:1, Cf. Luke 23:14; Acts 22:24,29, etc.). Since the Greek relative is in the singular Tertullus could not have been suggesting such an examination of the Jews, nor, in the context, could he have meant that Lysias should be thus examined. The "whom," then, refers to Paul.

The first is Luke's account in Acts 21 to 23, inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore correct:

Certain Jews had "stirred up all the people" against Paul and had "laid hands on him" (21:27). Having "dragged him out of the temple" they is went about to kill him" (Vers. 30,31). Then "when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers they left beating Paul" (Ver. 32).

Lysias then took the apostle into custody and "demanded who he was and what he had done" but "could not know the certainty for the tumult" (Vers. 33,34). Later, therefore, Lysias "bade that he should be examined by scourging" only to discover that he was about to illegally scourge a Roman citizen (22:24,25). Finally, he had commanded the Sanhedrin to meet and decide on a charge or charges against the apostle, but this too had proved inconclusive as Lysias was again forced to rescue Paul from their hands as they fought among themselves and almost pulled him to pieces (22:30-23:10).

In Lysias' letter to Felix, however, the facts are strangely altered to his own advantage. Explaining how the apostle had been seized by the Jews and might have been killed by them, he continues: "Then came I with an army⁵⁰ and rescued him, *having understood that he was a Roman*" (23:27). This last was, of course, untrue, for Lysias had not learned that Paul was a Roman citizen until he had already given orders to examine him by scourging (22:24-28). This was simply a shrewd attempt on Lysias' part to obviate, if possible, having to face a charge of illegal conduct toward a Roman.

Lysias gives the impression, further, that *having brought Paul before the Hebrew council*, he had learned what they had against him when, as a matter of fact, Lysias had failed to learn anything from this investigation, for the judges had fought so fiercely among themselves that he had been obliged to send troops down to rescue Paul a second time (23:10). But it would not be wise to let Felix know that he had been frustrated in his attempts to learn what the Jews had against Paul.

But now the Jews' account of the incident, as related by Tertullus, is different again. He says, with reference to Paul: "*Whom we took, and would have judged according to our law, but the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands*" (24:6,7). "And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so" (Ver. 9).

According to their testimony everything had gone smoothly and they were just about to give Paul a fair trial when Lysias "came upon them" and with great violence took him away"! This was a more brazen misrepresentation than anything Lysias had written, for not only were they about to kill Paul when Lysias rescued him, but they had almost tom him to pieces a second time and had finally taken part with more than forty assassins in a vicious plot to do away with him (21:31; 23:10,12,20,21). Indeed, it was Lysias who

⁵⁰ Or, "my troops."

had commanded them to give Paul a hearing and they had then fought so among themselves that Paul's very life had again been endangered (22:30; 23:7-10).

PAUL'S DEFENSE

"Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself:

"Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.

"And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city:

"Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophet:

"And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

"Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation and offerings.

"Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

"Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

"Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council,

"Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. "

-Acts 24:10-21.

The simple, dignified manner in which Paul opened his defense before Felix stands out in sharp contrast to Tertullus, false and servile flattery. Having received the governor's signal to offer his reply, the apostle began by saying simply and truthfully, that it pleased him to be heard by one whose unusually long tenure of office in Judaea had given him so much experience in its affairs.

Similarly the apostle's plea was based solely on simple facts, simple logic and the justice of his cause, as he dealt fully with the charges made against him.

First, there was one basic fact which Felix could easily "ascertain"⁵¹ for himself. It was now but twelve days since Paul had come to Jerusalem. This, as Felix knew, was the beginning of the Feast of Pentecost, and it would help to establish his argument that he had come "to worship," or "worshipping" (Ver. 11). Under James' persuasion he had, of course, become more deeply involved in Judaism than he had intended, but the issue now was only whether or not he was guilty of the charges of sedition, heresy and sacrilege.

Granted, the feast time might have been chosen as an opportune time to stir up sedition, but he effectively disposes of such a possibility by pointing out that they had not found him disputing or stirring up the people, either in the temple or in the synagogues or anywhere in the city (Ver. 12).

This at the same time exposed another flaw in Tertullus' accusation. Tertullus might accuse him of stirring up insurrection "throughout the world," but Felix was governor of *Judaea* and the question was what he had done at Jerusalem during the past days. As to the rest, the apostle answered simply: "*Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me*" (Ver. 13).

But the apostle answers the charge of heresy with still greater effectiveness and embarrassment to his opponents.

"This I confess,"⁵² he says, "that after the way which *they* call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets" (Ver. 14). His faith in Christ was not apostasy from the Old Testament Scriptures but *obedience* to them. *They* were the heretics for refusing to believe the Scriptures and for rejecting their own Messiah. Even the finished work of Christ, which Paul had been proclaiming, was no contradiction to the Old Testament but rather the culmination of its message and program. The doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone did not make the law void; it *established* the law and offered the *only* basis upon which God could be just in justifying sinners (See [Rom. 3:24-26,31](#)).

But the apostle is not yet through with his answer. He will place his accusers with their backs against the wall.

"Believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets," he says: "I] have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Vers. 14,15).

It should be observed that a few days previous, before the Sanhedrin, he had made

⁵¹ Not "understand," as in A. V.

⁵² The Greek word used here does not mean *to admit guilt*, but to *speak freely*.

an issue of the Sadducean denial of the resurrection and had exposed the disunity among Israel's rulers. He might have done this again before Felix but refrained, doubtless out of respect for his nation and for the testimony he and they could both give before Felix. Since the majority in the Sanhedrin and the vast majority of the Jews believed in the resurrection since this was the traditional Hebrew faith and the teaching of their Scriptures, he could truthfully say: "which they themselves also allow," leaving them to face secretly the embarrassing fact that the heretics were to be found among *them*, his accusers, and at the same time leaving them speechless lest they expose before Felix the deep discord that prevailed among them. *He* believed the Old Testament Scriptures as to the resurrection, while some of them, even their chief priests, did not-and will they now charge *him* with heresy?

But while the apostle had demonstrated to them the weakness of their position, he was not even yet through answering the charge of heresy. Using the very truth which some among them denied, he would press home *their* guilt, probing their consciences still more deeply.

Proceeding with his defense, the apostle declares that it is *because* there will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust; because all will have to face God some day, that "*I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men*" (Ver. 16).

Less than a week before he had told the Sanhedrin, with searching gaze, that he had been living "in all good conscience before God," for which the high priest had commanded those who stood by to "smite him on the mouth" (23:1,2). Now, before Felix, where the high priest cannot do the same, Paul again presses home the matter of conscience.

There was a significant reason for this. The great issue between Israel and Paul was no longer theological, but moral. They had by now been surrounded by overwhelming proofs that Jesus was "the Christ, the Son of God," but in spite of it all they still stubbornly rejected Him. They were violating their consciences and closing their eyes to the truth.

This is largely so with those who oppose the Pauline message today. They have been faced with facts so undeniable and surrounded with proofs so overwhelming that they can no longer answer us by the Scriptures, yet they continue to stage a delaying action against this great truth and oppose, in various ways, those who proclaim it. As with the religious leaders of Paul's day, it is no longer a question of theological interpretations, but of *conscience*. Such should ask themselves how they will answer to Him before whom all of us shall one day give an account.

And now the apostle touches upon one of the most important reasons he had come to Jerusalem, i.e., "*to bring alms to my nation, and offerings*"⁵³ (Ver. 17). This fact could

⁵³ An examination of the occurrences of the Greek *prosphora*, and especially of its verb, *prosphero*, will show that the word "offerings" here by no means necessarily refers to sacrificial offerings, but to offerings of any kind.

be fully substantiated and was in itself an answer to all three charges made against him.

Furthermore, it was certain Jews from *Asia* who had originally charged him with wrong-doing, though they had found him "purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult." Why, then, were they not here before Felix to make their complaint? Could there be a clearer proof of the weakness of their case than their absence from this trial?

And those who *had* made formal charges before Felix had no personal knowledge of wrongdoing in the apostle, otherwise he argued, "let these same here say if they have found any evil doing in me while I stood before their council" (Ver. 20) boldly challenging them to state before the governor the results of that trial.

And to further press home to *them* the bankruptcy of their cause, he brings up again the matter which had stirred up such fierce animosities among them at his trial in Jerusalem that they might have killed him had not the Roman soldiers rescued him.

He brings the matter up as sort of an acknowledgement, but one which effectively closes their mouths, saying: "*Except it be for this one voice [utterance], that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day*" (Ver. 21).

ALL CHARGES REFUTED

Thus the apostle answered his accusers step by step so effectively that it put *them* on the defensive and, indeed, closed their mouths completely.

As to the charge of *sedition*: It was only twelve days since he had arrived at Jerusalem. Half that time he had been engaged in fulfilling a Jewish ritual and the other half he had been in Roman custody. Furthermore, his known conduct had disproved this charge, nor was there an iota of testimony or evidence that he had engaged in sedition.

As to *heresy*: He had never swerved from faith in the writings of Moses and the prophets. The heretics were to be found among *them*.

As to *sacrilege*: He had come to bring alms and offerings to his nation; why would he profane their temple? Indeed, his enemies had found him "purified" in the temple, "neither with multitude nor with tumult."

The Jews from Asia had no case against him, else they would have been present to testify against him. Neither did the rulers at Judaea have a case against him or they would have accepted his challenge to tell what evil doing they had found in him.

ACTION DEFERRED

"And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.

"And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him."

-Acts 24:22,23

Felix, both because of his position as governor of Judaea and because his wife was a Jewess, had "a more perfect knowledge of that way" than to be convinced that the charges made against Paul were true. Moreover, none of them had been substantiated by firsthand testimony. Yet he did not dismiss the case but only "deferred" it pending Lysias' arrival to testify.

Whether Felix actually had any intention of calling for Lysias, so as to learn "the uttermost" of the matter, is doubtful. There is no record that he ever did send for him; indeed, it seems quite evident from what is recorded that he detained the apostle for less honorable reasons.

He had learned that Paul had come to Jerusalem with large sums of money. Could he get some of it? Would Paul's friends perhaps, be willing to pay well for his release? At any rate he would see that they were permitted to visit him without restriction.

Thus the apostle was placed in *custodia militaris*,⁵⁴ with special instructions to the centurion "that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him" (Ver. 23).

Had the Jews not pressed the case against Paul to begin with, he would doubtless have been liberated, but the Lord would now keep him as His prisoner for the Gentiles (Eph. 3:1).

PAUL BEFORE FELIX AND DRUSILLA

"And after certain days, when Felix came with wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

"And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

⁵⁴ There were three forms of custody for uncondemned prisoners under Roman law 1.) *custodia publica*, or confinement in the public jail, 2.) *custodia militaris*, under a soldier or soldiers responsible with their lives for the prisoner's safe keeping, and 3.) *custodia libera*, or free custody under the supervision of some notable person. The first was the most severe and the third so mild that the accused could go free at the custodian's assurance that he would appear for trial. The second is evidently the one which, on several occasions, applied in Paul's case.

"He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

"But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound."

-Acts 24:24-27

It will be observed that the text says that "after certain days ... Felix *came* with his wife Drusilla." Literally, the term is "*having arrived*."

This harmonizes with historical accounts which indicate that it was about this time that the wicked Felix, with the aid of Simon, a magician from Cyprus,⁵⁵ succeeded in enticing the beautiful Drusilla away from Azizus, king of Emesa, whom she had some six years previous, married at the age of fourteen. Now about twenty, she already had an infamous past. She was the daughter of Herod Agrippa I (of Acts 12) the sister of Herod Agrippa II (of Acts 26) and was a little girl at the time her father had accepted worship as a god and had been suddenly stricken dead ([Acts 12:22,23](#)).

This Drusilla was "a Jewess" (Ver. 24) and, upon her "arrival" with Felix, would naturally be interested in Paul's case. She had doubtless heard of him since childhood and would wonder why he had so suddenly turned to the Christ whom he and his nation had despised and rejected, and why he now served him with such passion. At any rate, upon Felix' arrival with Drusilla, he sent for Paul and heard him,⁵⁶ not concerning the accusations recently made against him, but "concerning the faith in Christ" (Ver. 24).

Nearly all the circumstances now were vastly changed. This was not a trial but a private interview with two exalted but guilty wretches, and it was his solemn responsibility to witness before them in such a manner that their souls might, if possible, be rescued from death. And who can fail to admire both the moral courage and the tact with which the apostle met this responsibility?

Addressing the one person who, humanly speaking, had the power to liberate him, Paul began by speaking of *righteousness*, which Felix had habitually ignored, of *temperance* (or self-control) which he had signally failed to exercise, and of *judgment to come*, from which there was neither escape nor appeal.

The apostle could have used a different approach, to be sure, perhaps winning Felix as a friend of his cause and gaining his own freedom, but Paul was a man quite unlike his accusers, who would "compass sea and land to make one proselyte" (Matt. 23:15). He had stated that it was his aim "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men" (Ver. 16) and now he was proving it. What Felix - and Drusilla - *needed* was *regeneration*, and this could never be the result of friendly persuasions regarding the merits of the "cause" he represented. He must reach their *consciences*; he must show them their guilt, their peril, their need. And this the apostle did, until Felix

⁵⁵ Supposed by some to be the *Simon Magus* of Acts 8.

⁵⁶ The implication seems clear that Felix, with Drusilla *now present*, heard Paul.

was terrified.⁵⁷

Yet the apostle did all this in a way so tactful that the governor could have no reason to be offended.⁵⁸ Though Felix was guilty of the vilest sins and the blackest crimes, including private murder and public massacre, the apostle did not accuse or berate him. He would let the Spirit and Herod's own conscience do that. Instead he spoke of "*righteousness*" - in the abstract; the nature of righteousness, the requirements of righteousness, righteousness as related to our fellowman and to God-and God's own essential and infinite righteousness. Then he proceeded to discuss a subject which followed in natural and logical sequence: the "*self-control*" which man is obligated to exercise in view of the requirements of righteousness. Though the guilty governor knew little of self-control he could hardly take offence, for such subjects were freely discussed in all the schools of philosophy. Yet the *truth* was boring deep into his conscience as he was, perhaps for the first time, confronted by his *sin*.

But the apostle, to be faithful, must go still farther than this. He must show Felix and his Jewish paramour the *urgency* of their need. Thus he proceeded to a subject not discussed by the philosophers of the day, but only in the Hebrew Scriptures: the "*judgment to come*." Felix had already learned of the apostle's convictions as to this, for his declaration that there would be "a resurrection ... both of the *just* and *unjust*" (Ver. 15) carried the direct implication that those thus raised would be called to account before God. But now the apostle pressed this truth home, doubtless by citing passages from the Holy Scriptures, until the governor became so alarmed that he suddenly cut the interview short, saying: "*Go your way for now; when I find an opportunity I will call for you.*"

Some have carelessly concluded that Paul was preaching "kingdom" truth here, that this address was not compatible with "the gospel of the grace of God." But such overlook the fact that we have here another of the interrupted discourses of the Book of Acts. What Paul had been saying formed the introduction to the gospel of the grace of God, for still today, no man truly proclaims grace who does not proclaim it against the background of the righteous wrath of God against sin. Any who may question this should consider prayerfully such passages as Eph. 2:1-10 and the early chapters of Romans.

Paul had hoped that, having shown Felix his need, he could now show him God's gracious *provision* for that need, but the governor would listen no further. Here he stands in sharp contrast to the Philippian jailor who, trembling also, asked: "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" (Acts 16:29, 30) with the result that he was gloriously saved. But Felix, trembling, sent the man of God away, promising to hear him further when he should find an opportunity. In this he has had multitudes of followers who, convicted by the Spirit of their sin and need, have resisted instead of yielding, hoping for another chance.

⁵⁷ Gr., *emphobos*.

⁵⁸ Paul's God-given wisdom in addressing individuals and audiences so diverse in character and background, over so wide a ministry, would make a study in itself.

The depth of human depravity is seen in the fact that though Felix did call for Paul again, many times, he actually did so in the hope that he would be offered a bribe to release Paul. So had he hardened his conscience. As the wretch calls for Paul increasingly and communes with him, we can almost hear him subtly hinting, promising, threatening - but all to no avail. Paul would not stoop to means so dishonorable to gain his release, neither would he permit his dearest friends to do so for him.

And so two long years slowly passed by with Paul still in custody at Caesarea. Yet the long hours, with the disappointment of delay, must have been measurably shortened by refreshing visits from Philip and the Caesarean brethren. Perhaps, also, Luke was still on hand, along with Aristarchus ([Acts 24:4](#); Cf. 27:2). Then too there must have been many Hebrew believers in the vicinity who showed compassion on him in his bonds ([Heb. 10:34](#)).

Thus did God care for Paul and give him opportunity for fellowship, prayer, meditation on the Word and rest. Yet, while we have no record of any converts gained while at Caesarea, or of a single letter he wrote from there, it is inconceivable that he should remain largely idle for two whole years. Doubtless he carried on a wide ministry all the while.

After two years, in which Felix conversed with the apostle many times, he was still as unscrupulous as ever. Vacating his office in favor of Porcius Festus, he still left Paul bound though it was customary on such occasions to release uncondemned prisoners. He did this to "show the Jews a pleasure" (though he hated them roundly) for, if history is correct, he was being called to account by Nero for maladministration of his government, and he would need as much Jewish friendship as he could win. Thus he sacrificed an innocent man's liberty at the altar of his own selfishness. Nor was he the first Roman provincial ruler to cater to the citizens of turbulent Judaea. At their clamor Pilate had given Jesus into their hands ([Luke 23:22-24](#)). Herod Agrippa I had killed the Apostle James and "because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also" ([Acts 12:1-3](#)). Here Felix leaves Paul bound to win the Jews' favor ([24:27](#)) and in a short time his successor, Festus, will similarly seek to sacrifice Paul's rightful interests for Jewish favor ([25:9](#)).

PAUL'S FINANCIAL STATUS AT THIS TIME

It is quite evident that Paul was not financially straitened during this period of his ministry. He had brought with him at least eight others from Greece ([20:1-5](#)) mostly by ship. He had agreed to bear the cost of no less than twenty sacrificial offerings required to complete the vows of four Nazarites ([21:23,24](#); Cf. [Num. 6](#)). His treatment at the hands of both Lysias and Felix indicates that they did not consider him a poor Jew. Poor men have seldom received much attention in civil courts and this was notoriously so in Paul's day, yet he, though not released, was treated with marked respect from Jerusalem to Rome. Lysias became friendly with him, Felix with Drusilla gave him at

least one private audience, Agrippa and Bernice desired to see him, Felix hoped for a bribe from him and a rich Roman official would scarcely look for a small gift - and as we proceed to the end of Acts it will still be evident that Paul had, or had at his disposal, some considerable amount of money.

How to account for this is not so simple a matter. Surely he would not have agreed to the diversion of any of the funds he had labored so long and earnestly to collect especially for the saints at Jerusalem. Whether his beloved Philippians had given him personal gifts before his last journey to Jerusalem, or whether his tent-making had gained him enough for all this, or whether he had come into a family inheritance, or whether any combination of these or other circumstances gave him this command of funds, we are not told. We note only that he was evidently not in financial need and would probably not be for some time to come, with the Roman government bearing the expenses of his food, lodging and transportation.

Chapter XLV -Acts 25:1-22

PAUL BEFORE FESTUS

"Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

"Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him,

"And desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

"But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither.

"Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

"And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.

"And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

"While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended anything at all.

"But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?

"Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.

"For if I be an offender, or have committed anything worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.

"Then Festus, when he had conferred with the Council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go."

-Acts 25:1-12.

Sacred and secular history both show Festus in a much more favorable light than

Felix. Both show him to have been basically reasonable and just, as well as active and energetic in the discharge of his duties as governor of Judaea, which position he held for only two years before his death.

Having arrived at Caesarea, he lost no time in becoming acquainted with those over whom he was to reign. After only three days he went up to Jerusalem, evidently to meet the rulers of Israel.

No sooner had he arrived upon the scene, however, than he found himself involved in a characteristic web of intrigue. Immediately the Jewish leaders began "informing" and "beseeching" him with regard to Paul and, if his own account of it may be trusted, "all the multitude of the Jews" set up a clamor "crying that he ought not to live any longer" (Ver. 24.).

Indeed, the rulers brought this pressure to bear upon Festus to back up their request that, as a *favor*, he would send for Paul to be tried at Jerusalem. Actually, however, they had no intention of letting Paul reach Jerusalem alive, for their plan was to have him ambushed and killed *en route*.

How corrupt and wicked mere religion can be! Two years had passed since these spiritual leaders had first invented their false charges against Paul, clamoring for his execution and even plotting to murder him. Now, after all this time, their hate is as bitter and relentless as ever and they are still as determined to destroy him, if not by false accusation and trial, then by the assassin's dagger.

The governor's response to their petition, however, was dignified and just. Paul would be kept at Caesarea, he said and, since he himself was soon to go there, those in power, or more powerful,⁵⁹ among them, could go down with him and make their complaints there at the Roman seat of authority. If in this case too, Festus' later account is to be trusted, he also pointed out that it was not the "manner of the Romans" to deliver an uncondemned man up to his accusers as a mere favor (See Ver. 16).

In fulfilment of his promise Festus went back to Caesarea "not more than eight or ten days" later (See Ver. 6, R. V.) and, on the very next day, commanded Paul to be brought before him.

This was no private interview but a public trial, for the governor occupied "the judgment seat" and the Jews, who had already appeared on the scene, "stood round about" charging Paul with many grave crimes centered, however, in the three major charges of the previous trial, as his defense indicates (Ver. 8).

Once more they were unable to produce evidence, however, that he was actually guilty of either heresy, sacrilege or sedition. He, therefore, merely stood firm in his denial that he had committed any offence, either against the law of Israel, or against the temple, or against Caesar.

⁵⁹ Gr., *dunatoi*.

If the number and the gravity of their charges against Paul had made Festus suspicious, their failure to produce legitimate evidence had fully convinced him of the bankruptcy of their case against Paul. Festus himself acknowledged this later (Ver. 25).

Yet there was much to be considered at this, his first court session in Judaea. If history is correct, the Jews had been responsible for Felix' removal by Nero. If Festus acquitted Paul and released him now, he would bitterly antagonize the Jewish rulers at the very outset of his reign, when he most needed their friendship and support.

He therefore made a proposition which, though designed to appease the Jews, still showed that he did not mean to be wholly unjust: Would Paul agree to go up to Jerusalem and there be tried in Festus' presence, or at least under his supervision?⁶⁰ He understood perfectly that Paul need not agree to this, so left the decision with him.

But that would still be a trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin and Paul knew, as Festus may not have known, how utterly hopeless it would be to look for justice there. Thus he responded to the governor's suggestion by standing firmly on his rights as a Roman citizen: "*I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged,*" he said, explaining that if he had committed any crime worthy of death, he would have accepted the sentence manfully, but since, as Festus very well knew, the charges against him were false, no one had the right to deliver him up to his accusers.

And then the apostle pronounced those words which surprised and upset Festus as they placed him in an even more embarrassing position:

"I appeal unto Caesar."

There is historical testimony to the fact that certain, if not all, Roman citizens at that time had the right to suspend trials in which they were involved in the lower courts by appealing directly to the Emperor. Thus the apostle now, doubtless judging this was his only escape from sure death on the one hand, or another long imprisonment on the other, availed himself of this right. Perhaps he also remembered the promise of the Lord that he should testify at Rome ([Acts 23:11](#)) and felt this was the course He would have him take.

But this left Festus in an embarrassing predicament, for it would hardly help him, in the eyes of Imperial Rome, to have his first official act as governor thus challenged. He therefore conferred with his assessors,⁶¹ evidently to make sure that Paul's Roman citizenship could not be questioned and to see if there were any other possible escape from his dilemma.

But the governor *dare not* deny the apostle's appeal, and we detect a tone of

⁶⁰ The trial itself, however, would then be by the Sanhedrin, as Verses 11 and 20 indicate.

⁶¹ The "council" of Ver. 12 is not, of course, the Sanhedrin, for they were not even present. Moreover a different word, *sumboulion*, is used.

resentment as well as derision in his reply, as he says: "*Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.*" "Little do you know," he intimated, "what an appeal to Caesar means."

Now the case was out of Festus' hands. There remained only the official report to the supreme tribunal, with all the records and documents involved, and a review of his own judgment in the case. He was responsible, too, to see that the defendant was taken safely to Rome.

Thus Israel is left farther and farther behind in the apostle's ministry and experience, and he emerges more and more distinctively as "*the apostle of the Gentiles.*"

HEROD AGRIPPA VISITS FESTUS

AGRIPPA'S INTEREST IN PAUL'S CASE

"And after certain days King Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.

"And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

"About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him.

"To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

"Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.

"Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed:

"But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.

"And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters.

"But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.

"Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. Tomorrow, said he, thou shalt hear him."

Festus was now faced with an embarrassing problem. The formal charges brought against Paul had not been sustained by one iota of firsthand testimony. They should therefore have been thrown out as invalid, the case should have been dismissed and Paul should have been liberated. Yet, how could Festus anger the Jews now? And - was there something more behind all this clamor for Paul's life? Was there some *other* charge which might be validly made against him?

The "many and grievous complaints" made against Paul - all unproved (Ver. 7) had left Festus in a quandary as to what it was they really had against him and, to make matters worse, Paul had taken the case out of his hands by appealing to Caesar. What kind of a report could Festus now send to the Emperor without making himself appear a most incompetent judge (Vers. 26,27)? This would be bad so soon after assuming office in Judaea.

It came to pass at this time, however, that Herod Agrippa II and Bernice appeared upon the scene, having come, evidently, to give formal recognition to the new procurator.

Agrippa II, the last of the Herods, was not even, like his predecessors, "King of the Jews." Luke calls him simply "the king" (Ver. 14, Ctr. [Luke 1:5](#)). The domain which Caesar had first granted Herod the Great, had been cut in two, so that Archelaius was "ethnarch" over *half* the province. This half had again been cut in two, so that Herod Antipas was a "tetrarch," or governor over one quarter of a province. And the present Herod had been given even less territory, including part of Galilee, but not Judaea, so that he was not even "King of the Jews." The title "king" was conferred upon him only as a courtesy. History does record, however, that he was the appointed guardian of the temple with the right to nominate the high priest.

In this all we have further evidence of the steady decline of the nation Israel. For years the kings of Israel, who should have come from the royal line of David, and the high priests, who should have come from the priestly line of Aaron, had been *appointed* by heathen emperors; the Emperor directly appointing the king, giving the king, in turn, the power to name the high priest. But these Herods not only lacked the royal blood of David's line; they were Idumaeans, aliens by birth, though they did go through the motions of embracing the Jewish religion.

Since Agrippa represented at least some of the people of Israel, it was advisable for him to maintain the best possible relations with the Roman procurator at Caesarea. Hence this visit. Furthermore, Festus needed him too--especially now--for his knowledge of the Jewish religion and Jewish laws and customs.

Again we have a wicked couple before us. Herod, of course, came from wicked parents and had a dark, infamous past. Bernice, who is mentioned three times as with him (Vers. 13,23; 26:30) was none other than the sister of Drusilla, Felix' depraved

paramour, and thus *Herod's own sister*, with whom he lived in incestuous relationship.

It was "many days" (Ver. 14) before Festus got round to mentioning Paul's case to Agrippa; days spent, doubtless, in processions and festivities in honor of "the king." But finally the time came when Festus related his problem concerning Paul to the man he hoped could help him.

His account of the case, while basically factual, betrays more than his ignorance of Jewish religion and law; it betrays his utter spiritual blindness.

He stated that the charges brought against Paul were not such as he had expected. Yet Paul had been charged with profaning the temple (which was under Roman protection) and even with *sedition*. Were these not such charges as he should have been able to deal with? The answer is evidently that the accusers had so completely failed to produce evidence of the truth of these charges that Festus had considered them invalid.

The Jews, said Festus, really had "certain questions" against Paul "of their own superstition,"⁶² and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul Jew affirmed to be alive" (Ver. 19).

Festus' reference to "one Jesus" shows that he knew little or nothing about Christ, though he had observed that Jewish feeling at Paul's trial had most deeply concerned this One, who, in his opinion, was evidently dead, but "whom Paul affirmed to be alive." However Paul's accusers might try to misrepresent the real issue - *this was it*.

But why Paul should insist that this Jesus was alive, or why the Jews should so bitterly object to this, or how a court decision about it would solve anything, was more than Festus could see.

Poor blind pagan! He did not see that it was not a question of "their religion" or "our religion," but of *the truth*. He did not see that these "questions" affected *him*. He did not see that man's redemption - *his* redemption - depended on whether or not Christ really was alive.

How many "respectable" people today are as blind, spiritually, as Festus! Let others hold to "their religion" if they will; let them consider these "questions"; let them deny or believe that Christ rose bodily from the dead, but "how does this concern me?" Thus millions pass lightly over the most vital truths - truths essential even to their own salvation.

Festus did not tell the truth, at least not the *whole* truth, as to his reason for suggesting a Jewish trial to Paul, for Luke's inspired record does not indicate that Festus had felt that a trial at Jerusalem would be more *just*, but rather that he sought "to

⁶² *Deisidaimonia, fear of the demons*, was *their* word for *religion*. Festus would not offend his royal visitor, himself a Jew, by calling the Jewish religion *superstition*. See our notes on Acts 17:22 and the R.V. on both passages.

do the Jews a pleasure" by giving Paul into their hands (Ver. 9).

Agrippa, unlike Festus, had heard a great deal about Jesus, and doubtless also about Paul. This latter is indicated by his remark: "*I also was wishing to hear the man myself*"⁶³ to which Festus responded: "*Tomorrow ... thou shalt hear him*" (Ver. 22).

⁶³ See R. V. margin.

Chapter XLVI - ACTS 25:23-26:32

PAUL BEFORE HEROD AGRIPPA

"And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

"And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

"But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him.

"Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O King Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

"For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him."

-Acts 25:23-27.

Since Festus had invited Agrippa to hear Paul on the morrow, he evidently decided to use the occasion to show himself friendly to the military and civil leaders of Caesarea at the same time. They would be interested in Paul's case.

Thus, at the appointed time, we find Agrippa and Bernice arriving at the Audience Hall "with great pomp," along with the military chiefs and leading citizens of the community.

After Paul had been brought into the chamber Festus addressed the entire audience, frankly explaining the awkward position in which he had been placed, having to send a prisoner to Caesar without being able to supply any definite infirmity as to his case.⁶⁴

Festus' opening words: "*Ye see this man,*" lends pathos to the scene. There stands the great apostle, who should have been lavished with high honors rather than accused of crimes - there he stands before all these dignitaries, a prisoner in chains.

Did they pity him? Perhaps, but he surely pitied them, as we shall presently see.

⁶⁴ Note that Festus not only calls Nero *Augustus* (*the august one*) but *kurios*, "*my lord*" (Vers. 21,26). This - is another instance of Luke's accuracy, for while the earlier Augustus and Tiberius had refused this title, Nero had accepted and used it.

And what of Herod Agrippa, in his purple robes, with Bernice, bedecked with jewels beside him? They had entered upon the scene in splendor and pageantry. But now as Agrippa beheld Paul, did he recall his great grandfather, Herod, and the slaughter of the innocents? ([Matt. 2:16](#)). Did he recall his great uncle, Herod Antipas, and the murder of John the Baptist? ([Matt. 14:1-11](#)). Did he recall his father, Herod Agrippa I and the murder of James? ([Acts 12:1,2](#)). Did it occur to him that all these ancestors of his had died or been disgraced soon after their commission of these crimes? Did the "great pomp" of his own parade to the Audience Hall remind him of the time, sixteen years ago, when the people had shouted that his much-more-powerful father was a god, and how he had been instantly stricken with death and eaten by worms "because he gave not God the glory"? ([Acts 12:21-23](#)). When we consider the extreme vanity and self-importance of this phantom king, it is doubtful that *any* of these things even entered his mind.

Here was Paul before a different audience from any he had ever been called upon to address. Festus, the Roman Procurator, King Herod Agrippa II, high ranking military officers and eminent civic leaders were all in his audience that day. The Lord was fulfilling His promise: *"He is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before ... kings..."* ([Acts 9:15](#)).

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA

We come now to the third account of Paul's conversion in the Book of Acts. The first is Luke's inspired record of it in Chapter 9, the second is Paul's account before the multitude at Jerusalem in Chapter 22 and the third is Paul's account before Herod Agrippa, here in Chapter 26.

Paul's hearing before Agrippa was not in any sense a legal trial. His accusers were not there to prefer any charges, nor did either Festus or Agrippa have any right to pass sentence upon him since he had appealed to Caesar. This was rather a special hearing before one who was better qualified than Festus to judge the merits of Paul's case, and Festus had called for it so that he might be better able to send a report to Caesar.

Paul, however, would not be benefited by helping Festus explain the charges laid against him! Thus, as in his private hearings before Felix, he scarcely refers to these charges, but takes advantage of the opportunity to seek to win his hearers to Christ.

THE QUESTION AT ISSUE

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:

"I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching an the things whereof I am accused of the Jews.

"Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are

among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

"My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews;

"Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.

"And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers:

"Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?"

-Acts 26:1-8

As honorary chairman of the session, Agrippa now invited Paul to tell his side of the story, and Paul, with that characteristic gesture of his, "stretched forth the hand"⁶⁵ beckoning all those present to hear him.

In this situation, as well as in others which we have already considered, we find the apostle completely objective in his outlook. The pomp and pageantry connected with the occasion, the vanity of the "royal" couple, the presence of military and civil dignitaries, the fact that *he* stood before them in chains: all this does not appear to have distracted him for one moment. At perfect ease throughout the hearing, the apostle used the opportunity to offer his defense, of course, but, as we have seen, even more to win his hearers to Christ.

In his introductory remarks we find again that combination of candor and courtesy which so become the man of God. He does not flatter the wicked Agrippa, nor commend him for either character or accomplishments, but he does sincerely express his gratification at being granted a hearing before one so intimately acquainted with Jewish affairs. And this acknowledgement of Agrippa's qualifications in the case opens the way naturally for the apostle to request the king to hear him "patiently."

Again the apostle pleads that his "*manner of life*" was well known to all the Jews (Ver. 4.) He had been brought up among them at Jerusalem as one of that promising and privileged group of young men who studied under Gamaliel, the renowned doctor of Moses' law (22:3). He had "profited in the Jew's religion above many of [his] equals ... *being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of [his] fathers*" (Gal. 1:14). His accusers well knew, though they would not testify, that from the beginning he had lived a Pharisee, following the teachings and customs of the very strictest sect in Israel ([Acts](#)

⁶⁵ This very hand, as well as the other, may have been chained to a Roman soldier. We gather this from the use of the plural in ver. 29: "*these bonds*" (Cf. Acts 12:6 "*two soldiers ... two chains*").

26:5).

And now he stands trial - *for what?* For repudiating his faith in God's promise to the fathers? No! but *for proclaiming the very hope upon which that promise rested* (Ver. 6).

A DISPENSATIONAL BLUNDER

We pause here to take note of a blunder into which extreme dispensationalists sometimes fall in studying this passage.

If the failure to observe dispensational *distinctions* in the Scriptures has brought harm and loss to the Church, the failure to recognize the *unity* of God's plan for the ages, and to observe dispensational *connections* is fraught with peril fully as great.

Those who jump to hasty and extreme conclusions, dispensationally, generally see some "distinctions" which do not exist. The result, interestingly enough, is that in seeking to establish non-existent "distinctions" they generally blunder back into the camp of those who fail to note some of the *most basic distinctions*.

An example of this is seen in the erroneous contention that Paul here asserts before Agrippa that it is for proclaiming the kingdom of Messiah that he has been accused of the Jews. During Paul's early ministry, it is argued, he preached practically the same message as the twelve, and his special ministry *for us* did not begin until after Acts 28:28. Strangely, the question why the remaining members of the twelve were not then suffering along with Paul, does not seem to occur to these brethren. But we pose it here. If the Jews were so angry at Paul for proclaiming the kingdom, how is it that the multitudes of those who believed and proclaimed this very message in Jerusalem and Judaea went on unmolested at this time?

The fact is that from the beginning Paul's apostleship and commission had been separate and distinct from that of the twelve or any other - and he says this in Acts and in his early epistles (See [Acts 20:24](#); [Eph. 3:1-3](#); [Gal. 1:11,12](#); [2:2,7,9](#); etc.).

Now, considering the passage before us, it must be carefully observed that the apostle does *not* say that he was being judged for proclaiming "the promise" made to the fathers. To the fulfillment of this promise (the millennial kingdom) the "twelve tribes" themselves "hoped to come." Why, then, should they find fault with him for believing and proclaiming it?

It was for proclaiming "the *hope* of the promise" that he was hated and persecuted. And what was "the hope of the promise?" It was *the resurrection* in general, and *the resurrection of Christ* in particular. The Sadducees - poor apostates! - who had so bitterly opposed him, did not see that the resurrection, and particularly the resurrection of Christ, was the only basis for any expectation of the promised kingdom. Christ alone was - and is - the rightful King, and the thousands of believers gone before could not see that kingdom unless they were raised from the dead.

The Pharisees, of course, joined the Sadducees in their persecution of Paul because he had further pointed out how the resurrection of Christ was a proof of a *finished* redemption and of justification by grace without religion or works.

But his purpose here was to point out that he had been opposed by the Jews for proclaiming a doctrine which was the very - *the only* - hope of the fulfillment of a promise to which the twelve tribes⁶⁶ themselves hoped to come (Vers. 6,7). They "served" God intensely, day and night, offering prayers and sacrifices and ablations, longing for the establishment of the kingdom long promised. But the resurrection, especially the resurrection of Christ, was the hope of that promise and, mark well, the apostle repeats that this is what the Jews opposed:

"For now I stand and am judged for the HOPE of the promise.... For which HOPE'S sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews" (Vers. 6,7; See also 23:6; 24:15; 25:18,19; 26:22,23).

And "why," he asks, "should it be thought a thin incredible with you [Jews] that God should raise the dead?" (Ver. 8). In posing this question the apostle directly confronts Agrippa with many obvious arguments for the resurrection. Did not the Scriptures teach it? Did they not record instances of it? Did not all nature bear witness to it, and strongest argument of all-does not the very name *God* comprise a myriad of miracles? Would He be *God* if He could not raise the dead? "*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that GOD should raise the dead?*"

Doubtless Paul thus faced Agrippa directly with the question of the resurrection because he felt Agrippa might have a closer relationship with the Sadducees, some of whose high priests he had nominated.

PAUL'S FORMER ENMITY AGAINST CHRIST

"I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

"Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.

"And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."

-Acts 26.9-11.

⁶⁶ This passage shows the fallacy of the theory of "Anglo-Israelism," that the ten northern tribes of Israel never rejoined Judah and Benjamin after their exile, but wandered to more distant parts and turned up as the Anglo-Saxon races.

In Paul's testimony before Agrippa he shows how perverted the human conscience can become. He verily thought "*with himself*" that he "*ought*" to do "*many things*" against Christ - that is, that he ought to oppose Him in *every way possible*.

Our Lord Himself had forewarned His disciples: "... *the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service*" (John 16:2). Did this, then, justify Saul in his actions? By no means. He could and *should* have known that Jesus was the Christ, for the Scriptures were clear enough as to this, but as the Pharisee of Luke 18:11 had "prayed with himself," so the Pharisee of Acts 8 and 9 had "thought with himself," and his conclusions, though *sincerely* arrived at, made him an enemy of God and a murderer of His people.

No, Paul's sincerity did not excuse him, though it did afford God grounds for showing him mercy ([I Tim. 1:13](#)).

Paul doubtless had a threefold purpose in referring to his former bitter enmity against Christ. First, it would indicate that he had not *lightly* changed his attitude toward Christ. Second, it would indicate that if one so utterly sincere could be so wrong, the position of his hearers, in God's sight, might be far worse. Third, his "*I verily ... myself*" expresses the apostle's sympathy with his hearers and his hope that God might save them too.

And with this the apostle proceeds to recall some of the details of his persecution of the followers of Christ at Jerusalem. He not only "thought," he "*also did*" many things contrary to the name of Jesus.

"Many" of Christ's followers he had "shut up"⁶⁷ in prison, by "*authority from the chief priests;*" (who now opposed him) and when these disciples were condemned to death he cast his vote⁶⁸ against them.

Paul's testimony that "many" of the saints were thus imprisoned and put to death, indicates that Stephen was not the only martyr during this period. Doubtless Stephen's martyrdom is the only one mentioned by Luke because it was crucial and representative in Israel's history, but Luke does inform us that Stephen's murder touched off a "*great persecution*" in which Saul "*made havock of the church*" (Acts 8:1,3) and went forth "breathing out *threatenings and slaughter* against the disciples of the Lord" (9:1). Moreover, at his conversion, the Jews at Damascus exclaimed: "Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem?" (9:21). Finally, Paul himself later wrote to the Galatians: "*Beyond measure I persecuted the church of God and wasted it [Lit., laid it waste]*" (Gal. 1:13). Thus there is no reason to doubt Paul's testimony before Agrippa, or to conclude that it is contradicted by the fact that Luke records Stephen's martyrdom alone.

⁶⁷ This intense term, *katakleio*, is used only here and in Luke 3:20, and shows how vexed he was with the believers.

⁶⁸ "Voice," Gr., *psephos*, a stone used for voting. See R. V. The fact that Paul could cast such votes would seem to indicate further that he was a member either of the Sanhedrin or of the larger body, "the estate of the elders" (Cf. Gal. 1:14).

But it was not enough that those apprehended for their faith in Christ were imprisoned, tried and executed, for Saul had first tortured many of them to force them to recant. "I punished them oft," he says, "in every synagoge [in Jerusalem, Ver. 10 and 22:18,19] and *compelled*⁶⁹ them to blaspheme" (Ver. 11).

And the flaming leader of the rebellion against Christ was not satisfied even with this. Jews in other cities must learn to dread the worship of Christ as a plague. Maddened with raging fury against the believers, he "persecuted them *even unto strange cities*"⁷⁰ (Ver. 11) seeking to stamp out the worship and memory of Jesus of Nazareth.

This is Paul's considered analysis of his former state as he recalls it before Agrippa and the others present. He states it thus that he might be seen as one who has come to know *the truth* - to know *Christ* - and has thus come to his senses.

The apostle's bid for the souls of his hearers is further seen in the fact that he now calls those whom he had so fiercely persecuted "*saints*" (holy or consecrated ones) and states that he punished them to make them "*blaspheme*" - blaspheme *Christ*, of course. Could he imply any more clearly that he *now* looked upon Christ as *God*?

HIS CONVERSION TO CHRIST

"Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests,

"At midday, O King, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

"And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

"And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

"But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou has seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;

"Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

"To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them

⁶⁹ This refers to the *object*, rather than the result of the punishment for the imperfect tense *Is* used. Those tortured did not necessarily yield, otherwise "many" would not have been "put to death."

⁷⁰ This proves that his journey to Damascus was not the first and only such venture, but the last of many like it.

which are sanctified by faith that is in Me."

-Acts 26:12-18.

It was without question Saul himself who had kindled the persecution that raged against Messiah's followers. According to the record it was he who had "made havock" of the church (8:3) who had "destroyed" the believers at Jerusalem (9:21) who had "persecuted the Church of God" and had "laid it waste" (Gal 1:13). It was he who had gone to the high priest *asking* for letters of authority to bind any of Christ's followers in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment.

But it must not be assumed from this that the chief priests were not more than glad to have this young zealot stir up hatred against Christ and His followers, and Paul is careful to stress this fact. In his account of his conversion given before the multitude at Jerusalem he had referred to "the high priest ... and all the estate of the elders" as witnesses of his persecutions, and had added: "*from whom also I received letters ... to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem for to be punished*" (Acts 22:5). And now in his second account, before Agrippa he likewise declares that he had persecuted the saints "*having received authority from the chief priests*" (26:10) and that it was "*with authority and commission from the chief priests*" that he had gone to Damascus to bind the believers there (Ver. 12). Thus he had gone forth as the appointed representative of Israel and her rulers, and his bitter enmity against Christ and His followers was but the expression of theirs.

It is in this account of Paul's conversion that he says that the light which shone from heaven was brighter than that of the noonday sun. Only those who know the blinding glare of the Syrian sun at high noon can begin to appreciate this. This was no subjective vision, experienced by the apostle alone. The light from heaven shone round about Paul *and his companions* that day (Ver. 13) as actually as the glory of the Lord had shone round about the shepherds at Christ's birth (Luke 2:9). And like the shepherds, they were all "sore afraid"⁷¹ and all fell to the earth (Ver. 14).

This fact alone indicates how important an event in history was the conversion and commission of Paul.⁷² Indeed, a comparison of the narrative in Luke 2 with that which we have here will emphasize this still further.

The glory of the Lord which shone about the shepherds appeared "by night" (Luke 2:8,9) but the glory that blinded Saul - and opened his eyes - eclipsed the noonday sun. It was the glory from the face of Him who had been exalted "*far above all heavens*" (Eph. 4:10; Cf. Eph. 1:20,21; Phil. 2:9; Heb. 7:26) whom Paul had been blindly persecuting, but who now appeared to him in love and grace.

It is in this account, too, that we learn that the Lord addressed Paul in the sacred tongue of his fathers, "*the Hebrew tongue*," tenderly asking him: "*Saul, Saul, why do*

⁷¹ "The glory of the Lord" *would* make men afraid, since "*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom. 3:23).

⁷² For a fuller discussion of this subject see the opening pages of Volume II.

you persecute Me?" (Ver. 14).

Again it is in this account that we learn of the Lord's gentle remonstrance: "*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks [goads]*"⁷³ (Ver. 14). And this reveals to us a fact hitherto not made known: that the persecutor of Christ had not been quite sure of himself, at least at the time just preceding his conversion.

His inability to *answer* Stephen (Acts 6:10) Stephen's transformed countenance before the Sanhedrin (6:15) his testimony about seeing "the Son of man" (7:56) his prayer for his murderers (7:60) and a hundred other such incidents in connection with those he had persecuted and helped to put to death, may well have brought about an uncertain inward condition which his stubborn determination had failed to overcome.

Finally, in this account of Paul's conversion we have the fullest report of what the Lord said to him from heaven.

First it should be observed that Saul was not, like those saved under the ministries of John the Baptist and the twelve, a repentant Jew. He had not sought Christ or wished to know Him. His salvation was clearly by *sovereign grace*. The Lord had appeared to Paul in his obstinacy, not to punish him but to *save* him and commission him as His apostle.

Secondly we learn that the truths he was to proclaim were to be further made known to him in a series of revelations in which the Lord Himself would appear to 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" (Ver. 16; Cf. [II Cor. 12:14](#)).

This refutes the teaching that Paul's "revelation ministry" did not begin until after Acts 28:28. The apostle, in his first revelation of Christ, had already seen the Lord in a glory far excelling that in which the twelve had ever seen Him. *They* had known only the Christ on earth; Paul, from the beginning had known only the Christ "exalted far above all" and had seen Him in His heavenly glory. They had been sent to proclaim His kingdom rights, even after His ascension (See [Acts 1:6-8](#); [3:19-21](#); etc.). *He* had been sent "to testify *the gospel of the grace of God*" (Acts 20:24). Hence the apostle never speaks of "*my gospels*" (in the plural) but always of "*my gospel*" ([Rom. 2:16](#); [16:25](#); [II Tim. 2:8](#)); nor does he ever say or imply that the revelations of Christ to him concerned *different* messages, but rather that *one* message was gradually committed to him in a series of revelations ([Acts 20:24](#); [26:16](#); [I Cor. 9:17](#); [II Cor. 12:1-4](#); [Gal. 1:11,12,15, 16](#); [Eph. 3:1-4](#); [Col. 1:24-26](#); etc.).

Third, we learn from this passage that from the day of Paul's conversion he was chosen from Israel and from the Gentiles as Christ's apostle to both.

⁷³ Expressing *futile resistance*, as when oxen kick against the goads of their drivers. This phrase is not found at 9:5 in most texts.

The word "delivering" (Verse 17, A.V.) is almost certainly an incorrect rendering of the Greek here, for Paul was *not* "delivered" from the Gentiles in the sense that would be intended here; in fact he was finally beheaded by Nero. The Greek *exaireo* means simply *to take out*. Thus it can refer to deliverance, as in Acts 23:27, where it is correctly rendered "*rescued*." But surely it could not be rendered "rescue" or "deliver" in Matt. 5:29. In *this* passage it is correctly rendered: "And if thy right eye offend thee, *pluck it out*, and cast it from thee." Neither, we believe, is "delivering" the correct rendering here. Dean Howson translates it: "thee have I chosen," in *Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (P. 673). And J. N. Darby, in his *New Translation*, renders it: "*taking thee out*."

This is a more consistent rendering, for Paul was indeed *chosen* and *taken out* from both his own people⁷⁴ and the Gentiles, and sent back to both⁷⁵ with the message of grace. This distinguishes him, too, from the twelve. *They* represented the *twelve tribes of Israel* (Matt. 19:28). *He*, as *one* apostle, represents the *one Body* (Col. 1:24; Eph. 4:4).

And how complete a representative! He was a *Hebrew*, a *born Hebrew* and intensely Hebrew (Phil. 3:5). He was also, as we have seen, a Roman (Acts 22:25) a born Roman (22:28) and intensely Roman (21:39; 25:9-11). Here, then, we have a Hebrew and a Roman in one person! Moreover, he was a former enemy, reconciled to God by *grace* - "*exceeding abundant*" *grace*! What an ideal representative of the believing Jews and Gentiles in this dispensation, who have been "reconciled to God in one body," who have "the forgiveness of sins *according to the riches of His grace!*"

The Book of Acts, of course, is primarily the account of the fall of the nation Israel, *not* "the history of the founding of the Church," but the record of Acts does confirm the testimony of Paul's early epistles that the reconciling of believing Jews and Gentiles to God in one body began with *Paul*, during his early ministry. Further, the Lord's words: "unto whom *now I send* [Gr., *apostello*] thee" (Ver. 17) indicate that Paul was commissioned as an apostle on the very day of his conversion.

But, despite the pageantry of the scene, the apostle is speaking here to a depraved half-Jewish king with a poor fallen woman at his side, along with a heathen governor and many other lost souls. Thus he does not discuss God's plan to form the Body of Christ but deals rather with basic moral and spiritual matters.

"The glorified Christ said to me on, at day," he recalls:

"Thee have I chosen from the house of Israel and from the Gentiles; unto whom now I send thee:

⁷⁴ The term "the people," in Scripture, refers to Israel (See Psa. 2:1 and cf. Acts 4:25,27).

⁷⁵ Some hold that the "unto whom" refers only to the Gentiles, not *both*. It is true that Paul was sent especially to the Gentiles, as over against the nation Israel, but his ministry to the end, included both Jews and Gentiles (See Ver. 20; I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:14-18; etc.).

"To open their eyes

"and to turn them from darkness to light,

"and from the power of Satan unto God,

"that they may receive forgiveness of sins,

"and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me" (Vers. 17,18; Cf. Life and Epistles of St. Paul, P. 673).

How Agrippa, Bernice, Festus and all the rest should have been touched by this progressive unfolding of what the rejected, but glorified, Christ was willing to do for them! Blindness dispelled, light beheld, sins forgiven, riches of grace bestowed. All this and more could now be theirs for the asking.⁷⁶

HIS MINISTRY SINCE HIS CONVERSION

"Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision:

"But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

"For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come:

"That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles."

-Acts 26:19-23.

The apostle does not recall, merely, that he was *obedient* to the heavenly vision. He says: "I was *not disobedient*," indicating that the only alternative to the course he had taken would have been to *disobey* orders direct from heaven, received under such arresting circumstances. This would have been unthinkable, yet it was because he had not disobeyed the divine commission that the Jews had gone about to slay him. This, of course, was calculated to have its effect upon those present too, including especially Agrippa himself, as indicated by the earnest manner in which Paul addressed him personally.

In the apostle's brief account of the carrying out of his commission it should be noted

⁷⁶ The phrase "by faith *that is in Me*," however, does not refer to *their* faith but to *His faith, or fidelity*. The word *faith* here is used *subjectively* rather than *objectives* (Cf. Rom. 3,3; Gal. 2:20; etc.).

that the word "then" in Verse 20 is supplied by the translators in the Authorized Version; it is not contained in the original. Albert Barnes comments on this:

"It would seem from that word [*then*] that he had not preached 'to the Gentiles' until after he had preached 'at Jerusalem and throughout all the coasts of Judaea,' whereas, in fact, he had, as we have reason to believe ... before then 'preached' to the Gentiles in Arabia" (*Barnes at Acts 26:20*).

While Barnes does not prove even in his notes on Acts 9, that Paul *preached* in Arabia, his general argument is correct. For one thing, after his return to Jerusalem from Damascus (Gal. 1:17,18) he "*came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia*" (Gal. 1:21) apparently in connection with his journey to Tarsus (Cf. [Acts 9:29,30](#)). Evidently this was the occasion of the founding of Gentile churches there, for later we find letters being sent along with Paul and others, to the Gentile believers there, to confirm them in grace (Acts 15:23-27).⁷⁷ Now all this time, Paul himself tells us, he "*was still unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ*" (Gal. 1:22, R.V.). He could not, therefore, have preached "throughout all the coasts of Judaea" before going to the Gentiles. His ministry in Judaea more probably took place at the time when the Gentiles at Antioch sent financial "relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea" (Acts 11:29, 30) or else on one of his subsequent visits to that region.

The order of the reading in the Greek, at Verse 20, would indicate that the word "first" refers to *Damascus*, where he began to witness for Christ. It *is true* that wherever he went, until the end of Acts, he consistently ministered to the Jews first, but he surely did not go "first" to the Jews in Palestine and "then" to the Gentile regions.⁷⁸ The meaning of Verse 20 is simply that he ministered to *both* Jews and Gentiles.

But Verse 20 presents still another problem.

Paul's declaration that he had taught Jews and Gentiles alike "that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance," has led some to the unwarranted assumption that the apostle, during this period, had preached "the gospel of the kingdom," even as John the Baptist, our Lord and the twelve had done.

Such a conclusion would be contrary to the whole record, however. A moment's reflection will show that the true soul winner, still today, will seek to persuade men to "repent," lit., "change their minds" and "turn to God" and then "do works" consistent with that change. This is still so, even though the *theme* of our message is the finished work of Christ and the riches of His grace.

In the presentation of Messiah to Israel, however, the *emphasis* was placed upon repentance. Most of the Jews rested in the fact that they, as Abraham's descendants, were God's people regardless of their conduct. Hence their need to change their minds and do works consistent with this change. It is doubtless because Paul was particularly

⁷⁷ See our notes on Gal. 1:21, In Vol. II, Pp. 61-63.

⁷⁸ See our notes on this in Vol. II, P. 60.

addressing one with a Jewish background that he put the matter in this way.

It was because of Paul's obedience to the divine commission that the Jews had sought to kill him (Ver. 21) - this latter now attested in the legal records which Festus had in his possession. Paul no doubt brought up this fact to emphasize to the judges the poverty of the Jews' case against him. It was evident, as John Calvin points out, that "their cause and conscience were both evil" (See *Acts*, Vol. II, P. 348) otherwise they would have granted him a fair trial.

But Paul had obtained the help that was from God,⁷⁹ and had continued to that very day his course unchanged.

ANOTHER DISPENSATIONAL BLUNDER

Extreme dispensationalists, seeking to prove that Paul *did* preach a kingdom message during his early ministry, have often cited Acts 26:22 to prove their point.

"Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, SAYING NONE OTHER THINGS THAN THOSE WHICH THE PROPHETS AND MOSES DID SAY SHOULD COME."

Does not this prove, they argue, that Paul *could not* have proclaimed the mystery before Acts 28? Does he not say he had proclaimed nothing which the prophets and Moses had not already foretold? Here these brethren show again their inability to think a subject through or to follow it through in Scripture.

Paul had, up to this time, proclaimed numerous truths which cannot be found in the writings of either the prophets or Moses. Neither the prophets nor Moses had foretold the salvation of the Gentiles through the *fall* of Israel, nor the gospel of the grace of God," in which neither circumcision nor the law was to have any part. Nor had they even hinted that Jews and Gentiles would be baptized into one body by the Spirit. Nor had they said-or known - anything about believers being "caught up" to heaven by "the Lord Himself." Yet all this had been proclaimed by Paul prior to this time ([Rom. 11:11, 12](#); [Acts 20:24](#); [I Cor. 12:13](#); [I Thes. 4:16,17](#)).

And had not Paul written of "*the mystery*" and its associated "*mysteries*" in his early epistles? ([Rom. 11:25](#); [16:25](#); [I Cor. 2:6,7](#); [4:1](#); [15:51](#)). Is the mystery to be found in prophecy - that which was "hidden" and "kept secret," in that which had been "made known"?

Indeed, even if we were to admit that Paul proclaimed the kingdom during his entire Acts ministry, he would then still have taught more than "the prophets and Moses did say should come," for even in "the gospel of the kingdom," our Lord uttered things which had been "*kept secret from the foundation of the world*" ([Matt. 13:35](#)); truths which

⁷⁹ This is the mine of the original, the definite article appearing before "help."

neither the prophets⁸⁰ nor Moses had even known about.

Do the facts, then, contradict Paul's statement before Agrippa? In no wise. The trouble is that our extremist friends have quoted only half his statement. The first part of his statement, in Verse 22, is clearly qualified by the remainder, in Verse 23:

"THAT CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER, AND THAT HE SHOULD BE THE FIRST⁸¹ THAT SHOULD RISE FROM THE DEAD, AND SHOULD SHOW LIGHT UNTO THE PEOPLE, AND TO THE GENTILES."

In other words, the facts that Christ should suffer, rise from the dead and show light to Israel and the Gentiles, were nothing but what the prophets and Moses had already predicted. Why then should the Jews so bitterly oppose Paul's ministry to the Gentiles? This alone was Paul's argument.

It is always difficult for us to understand how any sound teacher of the Word can quote Acts 26:22 alone, making it an unqualified statement by Paul that until that time he had preached *nothing* but what the prophets and Moses had predicted. Both the rest of Paul's statement here and the rest of his early teachings and writings, would seem to pronounce them guilty, not merely of misinterpreting but of *misrepresenting* his plain words. This is especially so since most of them have been faced again and again with these facts.

PAUL'S DEFENSE INTERRUPTED

"And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

"But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

"For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

"King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

"And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

"And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice,

⁸⁰ It is true that our Lord Himself was a prophet, but Paul clearly refers to the prophets whom Agrippa believed (Ver. 27).

⁸¹ Not in time, but in rank. See I Cor. 15:20,23 and Col. 1:18.

and they that sat with them:

"And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.

"Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar."

-Acts 26:24-32.

This passage in Acts has caused some to look upon Festus as a coarse, rude individual. What we have seen of him thus far, however, indicates that he was anything but rude. The fact that he interrupted Paul *"as he thus spake,"* and did so *"with a loud voice"* evidently indicates that he was deeply agitated.

It is true that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2:14) and that the proclamation of "Christ crucified" is "unto the Greeks foolishness" (I Cor. 1:23). It is true that, *apart from the working of the Holy Spirit,* all this about One who had died, rising again to "show light" to the nations, along with the story of Paul's miraculous conversion, would have seemed to Festus as the sheerest superstition. But Imperial Rome sanctioned the fanatical superstitions of many religions. Why then, should Paul's words have caused such an outburst by Festus before Agrippa and all the other dignitaries present?

Whether Festus was himself moved by Paul's stirring testimony, and sought to cover up his feelings by this outburst, or whether he was concerned about the effect it was having upon the others present, we cannot, perhaps, tell, but surely the incident indicates the spiritual power of Paul's address as he spoke of darkness and light, the power of Satan and of God, the forgiveness of sins and Christ, the only Savior.

The translation: *"much learning doth make thee mad,"* is doubtless further responsible for misconceptions about Festus' character. The Greek word *"gramma"* simply means *"writings"* and is twice used of the Holy Scriptures (John 5:47; II Tim. 3:15). Surely a man of Festus' character and position would not object to *learning.* It was evidently to the "writings" which Paul held so dear, that Festus referred. These Paul quoted fluently; these he cited as final authority on many a question, and these he had doubtless been studying diligently during his two years' confinement at Caesarea, especially in connection with the further revelations he had received from the glorified Lord.

Thus what Festus really said was: *"Your many writings are turning you mad."*

Paul, understanding Festus' agitation, replied with calm and simple dignity: *"I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness"* (Ver. 25) then immediately referring himself back to the king. This combination of firm protest with courtesy is characteristic of Paul. He treats Festus with deference, yet firmness, as a strong man might treat a weak opponent, and proceeds to demonstrate to him that his

deep earnestness comes, not from madness, but from "*truth and soberness*."⁸²

In an adroit use of adverse circumstances, the apostle explains to Festus that King Agrippa knows about these things; that he can speak freely before him, and that he is convinced that the details of his account have not been "hidden" from him, since they were not done "in a comer."

Unquestionably Paul was correct in this, for Agrippa had not only been brought up in the Jewish religion, but had long been intimately associated with Israel politically. Surely, then, the conversion of Saul, the persecutor, to Christ and the apostle's widespread ministry and the phenomenal spread of the gospel could not have been unknown to him.

And now he does something more likely to convince Festus than any argument in his own defense. Addressing Agrippa personally, he asks: "*King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?*" and then immediately adds: "*I know that thou believest*" (Ver. 27).

To have waited for an answer would, under such circumstances, have been improper as well as foolish. *He*, not Agrippa, had been called for a hearing, and to put the king in an embarrassing position would only have angered him. Thus, tactfully, the apostle immediately answers his own question. He *knows* King Agrippa believes the Old Testament writings - and surely Festus would not call *Agrippa* mad! Nor could Agrippa, in his position, deny this and accept Festus' opinion of the sacred Scriptures. Thus with superb tact the apostle appeals to Agrippa himself and uses him as his witness, at the same time driving home the truth of his argument.

WAS AGRIPPA "ALMOST PERSUADED"?

There has been a great deal of controversy about the significance of Agrippa's response to Paul's appeal: "*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*" The various views on the subject are substantially as follows:

1. That the Greek "*en oligo*," or "*in a little*," gives the sentence the meaning: "*in brief, you would persuade me to become a Christian.*"
2. That the words "*en oligo*" refer to Paul's argument, making the sentence to read: "*With a little [a brief argument] you would persuade me to become a Christian.*"
3. That he said in *sarcasm*: "In a little while you will persuade me to become a Christian."
4. That the words "*en oligo*," here, *do* have the sense of "*almost*," and that he meant, either in *sarcasm*, or in greater or less sincerity: "*Almost you persuade me to become a Christian.*"

⁸² The Greek *sophroneo* indicates *soundness of mind* (See Mark 5:15; Luke 8:35; II Cor. 5:13).

5. A few translators and commentators hold that the word "persuadest" refers to Paul, and that Agrippa actually said: "*In a little you will persuade yourself to make me a Christian.*"

It is held by some that the phrase "thou persuadest me," would be more correctly rendered: "thou *wouldest* persuade me," but other commentators reject this view and a considerable majority of our Bible translations fail to bear it out.

In view of this fact, and considering the emotional effect which Paul's address had upon Festus, we reject interpretations 1, 2 and 3. We also reject interpretation 5 as lacking support.

As to interpretation 4, the idea of "almost" fits more naturally with Paul's reply in Verse 29. Also, while in his reply Paul may simply have ignored any sarcasm on the part of Agrippa, the circumstances again: Paul's moving address, his appeal to the Scriptures, the stirring account of his conversion, the evident power and effect of his ministry, Festus' emotional outburst-all this, leads us to believe that Agrippa was experiencing the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, even though he may have meant to brush this off by a remark *apparently* sarcastic. Thus he becomes the symbol of all those who are never *quite* persuaded to trust in Christ as their Savior.

Whatever the degree of Agrippa's sincerity in the matter, Paul was quick to take advantage of the situation. Revealing his burden of heart, not only for Agrippa, but for Festus, Bernice and *all* those present, he replied with great feeling:

"I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Ver. 20).

What a truly great servant of God the apostle was! How deeply in earnest: "*I would to God.*" How large-hearted: "*not only thou, but also all that hear me this day.*" How self-effacing: *He* is in chains, but longs for *their* salvation. How triumphant: "I wish *you* could be as *I* am." How powerful his plea: "Almost" is not enough. It must be "*altogether.*"

And the most exquisite touch of Christian courtesy and grace is found in his words: "*except these bonds.*" He had suffered much for Christ, but he wished none of *that* for them. He wished them to know only the peace and -assurance and joy in his heart. He may have added this phrase with a twinkle in his eyes, too, for it indicated he *was* sane; he did *not* enjoy his chains.

Conviction was doubtless taking hold - perhaps of many there present. The unbelieving heart says it must not go too far. Agrippa, as chairman of the session rises and, with the others, leaves the chamber. How many since have followed his example!

Discussing the matter between themselves they all agreed that Paul was worthy neither of death nor bonds, and Agrippa remarked that he might have been set free had

he not appealed to Caesar. Festus had not told him how this had come about, indeed, had actually misrepresented the case ([Acts 25:25](#)).

This was not the first time Paul's innocence had been confirmed (Acts 23:9; 23:29; 25:25) yet he had not been released. And now he could not be released. There was no retreat for either him or Festus. To Caesar he must go and Festus is responsible to see to it that he arrives safely at Rome.

Chapter XLVII - Acts 27:1-44

THE VOYAGE TO ROME

ANCIENT SHIPPING AND NAVIGATION

We come now to one of the most exciting episodes in the history of Paul's ministry: the voyage to distant Rome, with its long weeks of hardship and peril on a storm-tossed sea.⁸³ Before discussing this section in detail, however, we would do well to acquaint ourselves somewhat with the shipping and navigation of those days.⁸⁴

It is evident from II Cor. 11:25 and other Scripture passages, that the sailing vessels of ancient times foundered in far greater proportion than those of more modern times.

This was largely due to their construction. Besides having a less streamlined hull, the ancient vessels used little or no more than one large mast with its mainsail and, perhaps one or two smaller sails, located near the center of the ship. Rather than distributing the strain on the ship in strong winds, this naturally centered all the strain amidships, tending to spring the planks below and cause leakage.

This explains why "they used helps,⁸⁵ undergirding the ship," in the storm we are soon to consider (Ver. 17). It also explains why, in the storm in which Jonah figured, the mariners "*cast forth the wares that were in the ship ... to lighten it of them*" (Jonah 1:5) and why in this storm they cast overboard much of the cargo, and even "*the tackling of the ship?*" (Acts 27:18,19) when one would suppose that ballast would have been the more necessary in a storm.

It is a mistake, however, to suppose that these primitive vessels were necessarily small in size. The ship in which the apostle sailed from Myra to Melita accommodated 276 passengers and crew *besides her cargo*, and the next ship sailing from Melita to Italy, accommodated all these 276, *besides her cargo and her own passengers and crew*. Indeed, Josephus refers to a ship on which he sailed with 600 passengers aboard. Many ancient merchant vessels, then, were large sea-going craft, capable of carrying heavy cargoes and hundreds of passengers.

It would be a mistake, too, to assume that the simple rigging on these ancient ships

⁸³ The reader is used to consult the map on Page 10 in the study of this section of Acts.

⁸⁴ One of the most complete studies of this subject is to be found in *The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*, by James Smith of Jordanhill, England, one of the first to consider this passage from the viewpoint of a seaman. Smith's book appeared in 1848, when England's Interest In sailing vessels was at its height. It is to this and its author that we are chiefly indebted for the nautical information we give in connection with Paul's voyage to Rome.

⁸⁵ These consisted of cables, chains, or even heavy ropes, passed around the hull to prevent it from going to pieces. This procedure has been called "frapping" by earlier seamen of the British and American Navies. With the appearance of more modern sailing vessels and then steamers, however, these measures became unnecessary.

would prevent their working to windward. On the contrary, the passage we are to consider may well confirm the contention of some naval authorities that they could sail against the wind to within perhaps 8 points of a 32-point compass,⁸⁶ for they did make a considerable part of this journey *against* the wind, obviously by "tacking."

It is true, however, that the very nature of the rigging, while advantageous to a quick run before the wind, would prove a disadvantage when sailing *against* the wind.

In this connection it is well to observe again that the prevailing wind in the Levant blows from the northwest most of the year, becoming stronger in the autumn months and blowing up fierce storms in the winter. Thus winter voyages, from November to March were avoided in those days, all navigators seeking harbors in which to "winter" (Cf. Ver. 12).

DISPENSATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE VOYAGE

We have long ago learned in these studies that Acts is more than a spiritual story book. Like any other book of the New Testament it has a distinct line of teaching. Furthermore, presenting as it does, the transition from the kingdom program to that of the present day, it has a peculiar and important *dispensational significance*.

Luke was not inspired to go into such detail and make so much of this voyage to Rome merely to provide us with a thrilling and dramatic narrative.

Paul was a seasoned traveller and had already faced many grave dangers; among them, "perils in the sea" (II Cor. 11:26). Indeed, some years previous to this voyage he had already been able to write: "... *thrice I suffered shipwreck; a day and a night I have been in the deep*" (II Cor. 11:25). But this voyage to Rome had a peculiar dispensational significance, hence more is made of it.

Paul had gone to Jerusalem, among other reasons, "to testify the gospel of the grace of God," but had found the nation hardened in its rejection of Christ, and the believers there farther then ever from a true understanding of grace (21:20). And now, for the last time, he leaves his countrymen behind to go to Rome, as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for [the] Gentiles."

But his departure as a prisoner by no means signifies that he has walked off the stage of history into oblivion. On the contrary, he is more than ever to occupy the center of the stage. God's plan revolves around him while, for the present, Israel and Judaism are left behind and the *world* looms into view.

Already his great message has been proclaimed far and wide. Already he has written letters to establish the saints in grace. And now, from Rome, he will send more

⁸⁶ Though Roman and Greek navigators did not use compasses but went mostly by the stars when out of sight of land.

letters, containing truths which have been rightly called "the capstone of divine revelation," and which are to lead the Church into the blessings of full-orbed grace.

Thus Paul's departure from Jerusalem to Rome is significant of the transfer of God's blessing from Israel to the Gentiles. Soon the apostle's ministry will no longer be to "the Jew first." When he arrives at Rome he will tell the Jewish leaders there that "*the salvation of God has been*⁸⁷ *sent unto the Gentiles*" (28:28). The Gentile is now to occupy the prominent place in the purpose of God as more Gentiles than Jews worship Israel's God and His Christ.

Those who find difficulty in reconciling this with the doctrine of the one joint body should observe that while abundant grace is *offered equally* to Jew and Gentile and the merits of Christ crucified *apply equally* to both (Rom. 10: 12) and while believing Jews and Gentiles are indeed reconciled to God in one body by the cross (Eph. 2:16) yet *practically* speaking, this is a Gentile dispensation, for the simple reason that Israel, as a nation, has rejected Christ and believing Jews in the Body form so small a minority. This is why God's work today is called: "*this mystery among the Gentiles*"⁸⁸ (Col. 1:27).

Further, since Acts is the story of the fall of *Israel* it is not strange to find this voyage teaching a *figurative* dispensational lesson too, for signs, parables and figures have always been significant in Israel's history.

Thus the passage depicts the voyage of the Church⁸⁹ through the present dispensation, as it leaves Judaism behind. The sea symbolizes the unsaved masses (Isa. 57:20); the contrary wind, the antagonism of Satan⁹⁰ (Eph. 2:2). The ship is finally wrecked, but all who sail with Paul are brought safe to shore (Ver. 44).

Paul is the outstanding figure aboard ship. He gives advice as to the journey (Vers. 9,10) and when this is rejected and trouble results, he rebukes them saying: "*Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me*" (Ver. 21). It is *he* who cheers his fellow-passengers as, by divine revelation, he declares that all those sailing *with him* will survive the storm (Vers. 24,25) and it is *he* who persuades them finally to partake of food and presides in the giving of thanks (Vers. 34-36).

These dispensational lessons must be borne in mind as we proceed to study the account of the apostle's voyage to Rome.

THE LAST FAMILIAR SCENES

"And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.

⁸⁷ This is the correct sense.

⁸⁸ The fulfillment of *prophecy* among the Gentiles awaits Israel's conversion (See Zech. 8:13; Rom. 15:8-10; etc.)

⁸⁹ The *professing* Church, *within which*, in this present dispensation, are the members of the Body of Christ.

⁹⁰ Thus our Lord "*rebuked*" the wind (Mark 4:39). In the passage before us the wind is always *against* them, except once, when it deceives them (Vers. 13,14).

"And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica being with us.

"And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

"And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.

"And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

"And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria into Italy; and he put us therein."
-Acts 27:1-6.

The time had at length arrived to leave the military barracks at Caesarea and begin the journey to Rome, for "a ship of Adramyttium" lay in the harbor, ready to sail to the coasts of provincial Asia, of which **Adramyttium** lay at the far north. There connections might be made for the rest of the journey to Italy. From Verse 9 we conclude that this voyage, which was to have so great an effect upon the history of mankind commenced sometime near the end of August.

The prisoners being sent to Rome were in the custody of one Julius, "a centurion of Augustus' band,"⁹¹ but Paul, as we have said, is the central figure of the narrative. It is written about *him*. In Julius' custody are Paul and "*certain other prisoners*"⁹² (Ver. 1). Indeed, besides Paul and Julius, only two others are identified: Luke (See the "we" and "us" of Vers. 1,2) and Aristarchus, *Paul's attendants*.⁹³ He gives advice, rebukes, cheers, commands, promises safety and presides over the famous "meal in the storm." Moreover Julius shows him respect and even some affection, permitting him to go ashore at Sidon to visit his friends and later risking his life to save him.

Thus the Lord provided for His apostle by giving him a position of unique influence aboard ship, along with a sympathetic centurion, two devoted believers as his companions in travel - and Christ's own promise of safe passage ([Acts 23:11](#)) to further sustain him.

⁹¹ Perhaps a centurion of some local cohort named after Augustus, but more probably one of the Praetorian Guard, who may the vicinity in connection with Festus' installation into office.

⁹² It would appear that these, unlike Paul, were already condemned to death and now probably sent to Rome to fight with wild beasts for the amusement of Nero and the Roman populace.

⁹³ For other references to these two, see Acts 19:29; 20:4; Col. 4:10; Phile. 24; II Tim. 4:11. There is no indication that these were *prisoners*. Pliny writes how a man "of consular rank" was permitted attendants in such cases (Epist. III. 16). Since Paul was not being sent to Rome as a criminal, but had himself demanded trial by Caesar, Luke was evidently permitted to attend him as his physician, and Aristarchus as his servant. This is another indication that the apostle was probably not in the poorest circumstances, financially, at this time. Unlike the other prisoners, he was doubtless responsible for his own fare to Rome. Luke, on the other hand, may have secured free passage as a physician, but Aristarchus could hardly have gone along free of charge.

The first part of the journey would still bring the apostle into contact with familiar scenes and faces. As we have seen, the ship was scheduled⁹⁴ to sail to the coasts of provincial Asia, but there was first one stop to be made at Sidon, about seventy miles to the north.

That Julius held Paul in high esteem, and was even affectionately disposed toward him, already becomes evident in Verse 3 of this passage. There we read that he treated Paul with kindly affection,⁹⁵ giving him liberty to go ashore to his friends and refresh himself" (Lit., "be cared for").

After two years in prison the apostle would hardly possess the necessities for a long sea voyage. Also, he may have suffered physically from his long confinement, for he was far from robust. This special consideration, then, with the material help and Christian fellowship it afforded, must have heartened him greatly. It was one happy day with friends ashore to prepare him for many fearsome weeks on a storm-tossed sea.

The centurion's kindly feeling toward Paul was not unique in the apostle's experience. Other Roman officers, both civil and military, had shown him similar kindnesses, as Julius also would again (See [18:14,16](#); [19:31,37](#); [24:23](#); [28:16,31](#); etc.). This speaks well of Paul's character as a Christian.

But many discouragements lay ahead. From here on the voyage was one long series of delays, perils and accidents which ended, after two months, in fearful shipwreck on the rocky shores of Malta.

Luke explains that they sailed "under" (Lit., "in the lee of") Cyprus, "because the winds were contrary" (Ver. 4). Ramsay states that Luke's explanation "stamps him as a stranger to these seas" (*St. Paul the Traveller*, P. 317) since, according to Ramsay it was *normal* at this time of the year to avoid navigation in the open sea. But Ramsay is surely wrong here. Not only is this an *inspired* record, but Luke's amazing accuracy of detail and his familiar use of nautical language indicates that he was no stranger to sea travel and was, indeed, familiar with this part of the Mediterranean.

Evidently the original plan had been to sail south of Cyprus by the open sea straight to the southern coast of "Asia," but because the strong westerly winds had begun to blow unseasonably early, it had been decided to sail to the north and east of Cyprus so as to get more protection from the wind. That they did *not* sail south of Cyprus, as some conclude from the word "under," in Verse 4, is evident from the fact that they reached Myra by way of the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia (Ver. 5, and see [map](#), P. 10).

While the wind in these waters was already contrary," the *current* is said to flow always westward. This would afford some help, so that we read of no *extraordinary* difficulty encountered sailing north of Cyprus to Myra.

⁹⁴ The word here rendered "meaning" refers to the vessel, not the company boarding it.

⁹⁵ More than "courtesy." The Greek word in *philanthropos*, from *philos*, "loving," *anthropos*, "man."

The first lap of the journey had, however, taken longer than expected. The same winds which had previously sped Paul so prosperously from Patara to Tyre (See Vol. III, notes, P. 260, and [map](#), P. 146) were now "contrary," keeping him for a considerable length of time in familiar territory. To the north lay his native Cilicia and to the east, Antioch, from whence he had departed on his first apostolic journey, while to the south lay Cyprus, the island on which he had first labored after leaving Antioch. Many memories must have crowded the apostle's mind as the navigators sought, with difficulty, to make headway against the wind.

Finally they arrived at Myra, where the centurion was fortunate - or, as it turned out, *unfortunate* - enough to find "a ship of Alexandria," bound for Italy. Its presence in the harbor of Myra may be accounted for by the same early winds which had baffled the mariners of the coastal vessel from which the centurion and his prisoners had just disembarked.

It is also possible, however, that Myra was ports of call, for this ship bore grain.⁹⁶ Egypt was then the granary of the world, and a local inscription has described Myra as "*harrea*," a "storehouse of corn."

Probably this Alexandrian ship was a seagoing vessel, considerably larger than the previous coastal vessel, for the Egyptian sea freighters are reputed to have been the largest on the Great Mediterranean.

It was in this great vessel that the direst perils were soon to be encountered.

TROUBLE AHEAD

"And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone,

"And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The Fair Havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

"Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them,

"And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.

"Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.

"And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter,

⁹⁶ It may have been either corn or wheat, for the Greek *sitos*, used in verse 38, may apply to either.

which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west."

-Acts 27:7-12.

The wind still "contrary," it took the vessel is many days" to cover the short distance from Myra to Cnidus, on the southwest coast of "Asia." And having managed "with difficulty"⁹⁷ to bring the ship over against" Cnidus, they were evidently unable to enter its harbor, "*the wind not suffering*" them (Ver. 7).

Some have supposed that this last phrase refers to their inability to continue their course to the north of Crete, but we conclude that it refers to their inability to enter the harbor at Cnidus, for the following reasons:

1. The term "*over against Cnidus*," coupled as it is with: "*the wind not suffering us*," seems to imply that they could get no *closer* to it than they did.

2. They brought the ship "over against" Cnidus only "with difficulty." Why should they try so hard to get that close to Cnidus if they did not mean to enter its harbor?

3. After struggling with contrary winds for "many days" it would be natural to seek a harbor on the mainland.

4. Cnidus was evidently a prosperous city with a large harbor and it would have been folly, under the circumstances, to pass it by with only the *hope* of making some smaller harbor on the island of Crete.

Beaufort says of Cnidus: "Few places bear more incontestable proofs of former magnificence The whole area of the city is one Promiscuous mass of ruins; among which may be traced streets and gateways, porticoes and theatres" (*Karamania*, P. 81). And to this Howson adds: "But the remains which are the most worthy to arrest our attention are those of the harbors ... because these remains have been less obliterated by violence or decay" (*Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, P. 694).

Evidently, then, the navigators would have entered the harbor at Cnidus, had the wind permitted it, but they were compelled by the force of the gale, to turn southward, hoping to round Cape Salmone, on Crete's eastern extremity, and so gain the protection of the island's lee shore (For A.V. "under," see above).

This they managed to do, but again "with difficulty," arriving at length at "The Fair Havens," evidently a roadstead more than a harbor, where they might at least lie at anchor. A bit to the west of The Fair Havens lay Cape Matala. Had they rounded this they would again have been exposed to the full force of the gale. It was necessary therefore, to wait at The Fair Havens for the wind to change.

"Much time was spent," however, waiting in vain for a favorable wind-so much time

⁹⁷ Not "scarce." The same word is rendered "hardly" in Ver. 8, but both should be "*with difficulty*."

that "sailing was now dangerous, because the fast⁹⁸ was now already past" (Ver. 9). The sailing had already been difficult because of the unseasonably early northwest gales, but even if the winds changed, it would now be dangerous to venture forth because the Autumnal Equinox had ushered in the season when no favorable breeze could be depended upon and sailing was invariably hazardous.

As they still waited for the wind to change, therefore, Paul "admonished" the seamen not to venture further. The apostle was by now a veteran traveler and seaman. Thrice he had been shipwrecked and on one occasion he had spent "a night and a day" in the deep, doubtless clinging to some floating object, so he was well acquainted with perils in the sea" (II Cor. 11.25,26).

He declared, therefore, that he "perceived" that this voyage, if pursued further, would bring "hurt" (Lit., *violent injury*) and "much damage" (or *loss*) not only to the cargo and the ship, but to their lives as well.

That Paul's advice was even considered⁹⁹ by the centurion and those in charge of the vessel, indicates that they held him in high regard. Perhaps they also knew by now that he was a traveler of considerable experience.

While there was a small town some seven miles from their present "haven," there lay beyond Cape Matala the city of Phenice,¹⁰⁰ with a well-equipped harbor. This was only about forty miles distant and it was hoped that, should the wind turn favorable, they might make this harbor and winter there.

To both the "master" (the navigator in charge) and the "owner" of the ship, it seemed worth the risk. Furthermore, Paul had claimed no supernatural guidance in this matter. He had simply said that he "*perceived*" danger ahead. His declaration was a *warning*, not a prediction.

The centurion,¹⁰¹ therefore, can hardly be blamed because he was "convinced" ("believed," in A.V., is incorrect) by the professional seamen aboard, even though Paul eventually proved to have been right in the matter. Also, because "the haven was not commodious to winter in," the majority of the crew, or passengers, or both (doubtless excluding the prisoners) urged that they "depart thence also," and attempt to reach Phenice. They had already survived many dangers; they would survive this one too, they hoped, and thus spend the winter in more acceptable surroundings - but they were wrong, with the result that the pilot and owner lost their vessel and cargo and all aboard would probably have lost their lives had not the Lord promised Paul their safety.

⁹⁸ Doubtless that of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29) which fell about October 1st.

⁹⁹ We fail to see, as some suppose they do, any evidence of a formal ship's council in which Paul was invited to take part. It was obviously Paul who took the initiative in the matter (See ver. 9)

¹⁰⁰ Identified as the modern *Lutro*.

¹⁰¹ It appears that he had final authority in the matter. This would lend support to the view that he was one of the Praetorian Guard.

There is one technical problem in Verse 12 which should be explained before we proceed further with our study of the voyage. The harbor of Phenice, we are told, "*lieth toward the south west and north west.*" First, how could it lie in *two* directions? The answer is simply that an island lay at its mouth, so that it might be entered from *two* angles. But, it may further be asked, would it not be folly for the mariners, already fighting strong winds from the west, to seek haven in a harbor open to those very winds? The explanation to this problem is found when we adopt the *sailor's* viewpoint. The passage does not state that the *mouth* of the harbor faced southwest and northwest; it simply states that the harbor lay in that direction. Now, the harbor did lie to the southwest and northwest *as the seamen approached it*. A ship would have to turn its bow either to the southwest or to the northwest to enter the harbor, depending upon the direction it had come from. Thus the *mouth* of the harbor actually faced toward the southeast and northeast, sheltered from the winds that had given them so much trouble.¹⁰² This is another reason why the attainment of this harbor was so much to be desired.

THE GREAT TYPHOON

"And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.

"But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.

"And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

"And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat;

"Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

"And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship;

"And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.

"And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away."

-Acts 27:13-20

¹⁰² R.V. renders this passage: "looking north-east and north-east." and gives as an alternate rendering: "down the south-west wind and the north-west wind." While both these renderings are doubtless correct *interpretations* from the *landsman's* point of view, they are still interpretations and not, as far as we can ascertain, faithful renderings of the text. Leaving the text as it is, the passage is simply explained as above.

DECEIVED BY THE WEATHER

Ah, this soft south wind! Just what they had been waiting for!

It was only thirty-odd miles to the port of Phenice, and, while the south wind would make it somewhat more difficult to round Cape Matala, it would prove a great advantage all the rest of the way.

And so it was that "loosing thence" (Lit., *weighing anchor*) they "sailed close by Crete" (only to round the cape, of course). At last they were on their way, presumptuously anticipating a carefree voyage across the bay to Phenice, perhaps indulging in a good-natured laugh at Paul for the advice which might have caused them to throw away such a golden opportunity. So confident were they in this warm, soft breeze, that they even left their skiff, or row boat,¹⁰³ towing behind.

A SUDDEN STORM

Little did they realize, as the great ship sailed smoothly along in the balmy breeze, that all of a sudden they would find themselves in a fearful crisis.

The words "arose against it," in Verse 14, give the impression that a wind had come up against the ship. This is incorrect. The words are *ebalen kar autes*: "came down it." The idea is that a storm swept down Crete, whose mountains at this point tower to more than 7000 feet. The fierce storms in this part of the Mediterranean often begin in the same way today, with strong down drafts from the mountains.

This was no ordinary storm, for the word here rendered "tempestuous," is the adjective *tuphonikos*. It was a wind of typhonic force - a typhoon, locally named *Euroclydon*, or *The Northeaster*.¹⁰⁴ Today it is called *The Levanter*, because it blows from the Levant.

So suddenly had this fierce storm swept down upon them that there was no time to furl the great mainsail or to do anything to control the ship. They had been "caught" in a tempest so fierce that it was impossible to "bear up into the wind," (Ver. 15) or heave to, as we would call it. There was nothing to do but let her drive madly before the gale.

It was fortunate for them that the storm had not begun any later than it did, or they would have been driven into the island of Clauda, some 20 miles to the southwest. As it was they cleared the island, running "under," it, or in the lee of its southern shore. The narrow escape must have been a frightening experience.

In the lee of Clauda, the mariners exhibited excellent seamanship, using the

¹⁰³ That mentioned in Vers. 16 and 30. Doubtless of considerable size.

¹⁰⁴ Actually often blew from the East North East, but on this occasion it must have blown more from the North East, as is evident from the course along which they had already drifted, and from their fear of being driven upon Syrtus Major (Ver. 17).

temporary and comparative calm to attend to three matters of pressing importance.

First the skiff must be hauled aboard – and as quickly as possible. Whether this was already waterlogged or not, the record does not reveal, but we do know that in this storm sea, the task of hoisting it aboard was not easily performed (See Ver. 16). From the “we”, in Verse 16, we conclude that Paul and his two associates, or at least Luke, helped in this.

Second, the ship must be “frapped” or undergirded with cables or ropes,¹⁰⁵ to keep her from going to pieces. This, of course, was no work for a landlubber. “They” executed it without help from the passengers.

Third, there was great danger that the northeast wind might drive them upon “the quicksands”¹⁰⁶ off the coast of what is now known as Tripoli, and definite precautions must be taken against this. They therefore “strake sail” or, literally, “lowered the gear” (Ver. 17). It is evident from the context that this does not mean that they took down all the sails. To do this would have been a sure way to run into Syrtis for the wind was already driving them in that direction. Furthermore, to allow the ship to drift along the breakers would be to invite it to capsize into a trough of the sea. She *must* be hove to, or brought to face the wind as directly as possible.

They must therefore have taken down the great mainsail and any higher sails and gear, leaving only a small storm sail, or sails, to help steady the ship. Indeed, navigators of more modern sailing vessels insist that the very term: “lower the gear,” under such circumstances, would imply the setting of a storm sail, or sails.

Their object was not so much to make progress but to weather the storm and avoid Syrtis. From the course which the ship now followed, it is evident that she was facing as near as possible into the wind, with her right, or starboard, side to the wind, and the storm sail so set that she kept drifting astern but always forging northward¹⁰⁷, and so was “driven,” as the map shows, about 8 degrees north of west, at an average rate of perhaps one and a half miles per hour,¹⁰⁸ bringing her to the island of Malta in about thirteen days, or fourteen from Fair Haven (Ver. 27).

NO SMALL TEMPEST

As the fierce storm continued unabated through the first night and the passengers and crew were 'exceedingly tossed,' it became necessary to "lighten" the ship. Actually,

¹⁰⁵ The procedure explained in chapter XLVII. It is interesting to observe that the noun here rendered “helps” is found in only one other place in the New Testament: Heb. 4:16, where it should also appear as a noun: “*that we may find grace for timely help.*” Thus we go to the throne of grace, often in times of desperate need, to obtain the grace that will undergird us and keep us from going to pieces.

¹⁰⁶ Gr. *The Syrtis*, designated on most maps as *Syrtis Major*, an extensive area of shoals and reefs in which many sea-going vessels were caught.

¹⁰⁷ In such a case “the direction in which the ship drifts is not that in which she appears to sail, or toward which her bow is turned” (Conybeare and Howson).

¹⁰⁸ Smith and Penrose agree that this would be normal.

the original word is in the imperfect tense, and indicates that they *kept* lightening it (by casting overboard whatever could be missed) a probable indication that leakage had already begun.

But matters were to become still worse. The picture is one of growing panic. "The third day," says Luke, "we cast out with our own hands the tackling¹⁰⁹ of the ship" (Ver. 19). Every man was pressed into service. All that was not necessary to survival must be cast overboard; beds, luggage, chests, cables and sails doubtless included, and perhaps even some of the cargo. Evidently the ship was taking more water. Furthermore, they had no compasses in those days, and without sun or stars to take reckonings by they were at still another grave disadvantage. And this continued day after day, night after night.

The ship now reduced to a leaky, battered, dismantled hulk, imagination fails us as we try to picture the physical and mental state of the hopeless, godless souls aboard. There was no relief from the fierce gale, the pounding sea, the drenching rain and spray. No fire could be lighted, no cooking done, no one could relax, until the weary, famished wretches began to give up hope. Luke closes this portion of his inspired record with the words:

"And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away" (Ver. 20).

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

"But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have heartened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

"And now I exhort you to be of good cheer; for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

"For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

"Saying, Fear not, Paul, thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

"Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.

"Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island."

-Acts 27:21-26

It was in this situation of grim despair that Paul was used of God to offer hope and assurance, by a declaration, which at the same time teaches a valuable spiritual and

¹⁰⁹ The Greek word for "tackling" here is evidently used in a broader sense than to include only the rigging.

dispensational lesson to the Church.

"After long abstinence" on, the part of all, the apostle "stood forth in the midst" to address all those aboard. While they, doubtless (except Paul's companions) had been crying to their heathen gods (as in [Jonah 1:5](#)) Paul had been in communion with *God* and had received further assurance of safe arrival at Rome - and that for those who traveled with him as well.

"Sirs," he cried above the noise of the storm, "Ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss" (Ver. 21).

It was not like Paul to thus embarrass the captain and his crew, the owner of the ship and Julius, the centurion, before all, but the present circumstances called for such measures so that they all might *now* heed his words.

How similar is the situation in the Church today! It is because believers, and especially their leaders, have ignored Paul's God-given instructions that the Church is "tossed to and fro" and has suffered so much harm and loss. And once more, as the dispensation of grace appears to be drawing to a close, it is Paul who cries: "Ye should have hearkened unto me."¹¹⁰

And now the apostle exhorts his hearers to be of good cheer, assuring them that there will be no loss of life among them, but only of the ship. This can as surely be said of the Church which is Christ's Body. Not one of its members shall be lost, though the organization will go down a dismal failure.

But how had Paul received this assurance? Hear him tell it as he stands there in the raging storm:

"For there stood by me this night the angel of God [Lit., "an angel of the God"] whose I am, and whom I serve,"¹¹¹

"Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, GOD HATH GIVEN THEE ALL THEM THAT SAIL WITH THEE" (Vers. 23,24).

Again there is a striking spiritual and dispensational analogy. In the present dispensation, all those who sail with Paul, and *only* those, are saved and safe. Ill-taught preachers may mix law and grace, prophecy and the mystery, the kingdom and the Body, but their hearers are saved only as they hear and receive the Pauline revelation regarding the finished work of Christ and salvation by grace through faith alone. Indeed the *hearers*, by erroneous association, may read these truths into passages which do not actually teach them, but the fact remains that they are saved through *these truths* of

¹¹⁰ Note the analogy with Eutychus, who fell asleep under Paul's teaching, plunged from his position in "the third loft" and was then restored through Paul's instrumentality (Acts 20:6-12; see Vol. III, Pp. 217-227 of hardback copy.)

¹¹¹ Cf. I Kings 17:1: "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand."

the glorious revelation committed to Paul. Certain it is that they are not saved by bringing sacrifices, as was Abel (Gen. 4:4,5) nor by efforts to keep the law, (according to Ex. 19:5 and Lev. 18:5) nor by repentance and water baptism (according to Mark 1:4 and Acts 2:38) but only by "the preaching of the cross" and "the gospel of the grace of God."

This scene in Acts closes with a most remarkable demonstration of faith: a man standing on a storm-battered deck, crying above the roar of a raging sea to more than two hundred seventy famished, fainting men:

" ... SIRS, BE OF GOOD CHEER; FOR I BELIEVE GOD, THAT IT SHALL BE EVEN AS IT WAS TOLD ME" (Ver. 25).

Doubtless, the prediction that they should be "cast upon a certain island" was made so that they might be assured that their deliverance had not been by chance.

THE LAST DREADFUL NIGHT

"But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria,¹¹² about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country,

"And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.

"Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

"And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship,

"Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

"Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off."

-Acts 27:27-32

But there was still more anxiety to endure, as the battered ship was "driven up and down in Adria." This clause, in Verse 27, is not meant to indicate that their course was not fairly steady, however. We have seen that the vessel was headed as directly as possible into the northeast wind, with her starboard side toward the wind and her storm sail, or sails, set so that she kept drifting astern, yet always forging northward. According as the velocity of the gale rose and fell, therefore, she would be "driven up and down," though in a general direction of about 8 degrees north of west.

¹¹² This designation then included not only the Adriatic Sea, but that part of the Mediterranean which lies to the south of it.

And now, on the fourteenth night of this raging tempest, the practiced senses of the seamen, discerned that "some country was approaching,"¹¹³ either by the sound of breakers on the shore, or a glimpse, now and then, of their phosphorescent whiteness.

In the daytime such a discovery might have been welcome indeed, but on a pitch black night in a howling storm, the sudden realization that land was near would be anything but comforting.

Quickly they let down the lead and found the depth to be twenty fathoms and, a little farther on, fifteen fathoms. This meant that immediate action must be taken to prevent their being driven upon the rocks. Four anchors must be dropped from the stern at once (Ver. 29).

But why from the *stern* rather than from the bow, the more usual place? The reason for this has by no means been agreed upon.

The majority of commentators, it seems, hold that the vessel was probably anchored from the stern lest she swing round and strike rough or rocky places, and also that in the morning she might be in a position for the sailors to weigh anchor and beach her more easily should this be possible.

It appears to us, however, that most commentators have "followed the leader" here, failing to take several important factors into consideration.

First, it is quite generally agreed that the land which the vessel now approached was the island of Malta (Cf. 28:1) and that she now lay opposite what has since come to be called St. Paul's Bay. But this bay is located on the northeast side of the island and the reader will recall that the ship had also been facing in this general direction, into the northeast wind and hence *away* from the shore.

We conclude, therefore, that the mariners cast anchor from the stern so that the ship *would* swing round to face the shore. In such a gale the first anchor would, of course, have effected this result and then three more would have been dropped to insure her against slippage. Fifteen, or even ten fathoms¹¹⁴ of water would doubtless have offered plenty of depth to effect this maneuver.

But, even having done this, their position was still perilous. The anchors might give way, for who knew what they were holding to? And even if they held, billows from astern might engulf the sinking ship or, weakened as she was, the very fact that anchors were holding her against the gale might cause her to fall to pieces. Little wonder that, having done all they could, they "wished for the day" (Ver. 29).

¹¹³ This is the literal rendering and again expresses the viewpoint of the mariner, to whom the ship is the center of everything. The land approaches it!

¹¹⁴ One fathom, approximately six feet.

It is evident that the mariners did not expect the vessel to survive, for in the darkness of that stormy night they formed a desperate plot which was utterly unworthy of their traditions and responsibilities.

They let down the skiff, ostensibly to carry¹¹⁵ anchors out from the bow and drop them there to steady the ship. Actually, however, they planned to use the skiff (evidently large enough to hold them all) to desert the ship and its passengers.

But Paul, suspecting their purpose, took immediate action to intercept it. How could the difficult maneuver of beaching the ship be effected *without the crew?*

With the alertness and presence of mind so characteristic of him,¹¹⁶ the apostle simply spoke a few quick words to the right people and the cowardly plan was thwarted.

Had he remonstrated with the sailors themselves, they might well have escaped in spite of his words. He therefore spoke "to the centurion and to the soldiers." And he showed God-given wisdom in his approach to *them*. Taking into consideration the human instinct for self-preservation, he said: "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Ver. 31).

The result was instantaneous. Without further discussion, the soldiers cut the ropes, let the boat fall into the water, and another crisis was passed.

Paul's moral ascendancy on this voyage is worth observing. To begin with he was permitted the company of two attendants, and the centurion treated him with kindly affection. Then at Fair Havens, while the centurion (who had final authority aboard) did not ultimately accept his advice, it is significant that this advice should even have been heard and weighed against that of both the "master" and the "owner" of the ship. But as, through fearful experience, they all learned the truth and wisdom of his warning, his influence among them grew steadily greater, until he, the passenger and prisoner, could stand and address all aboard and rally them to new hope and courage, and could issue a warning to the centurion and his soldiers which had the practical effect of an order.

Many words have been wasted in connection with the so-called contradiction between Verses 22 and 31. The simple fact, however, is that the response to the warning of Verse 31 *did not* render the prediction of Verse 22 untrue, for the sailors stayed with the ship and all *were* saved. Indeed, God's promise in Verse 22 was realized as the *sailors* "ran the ship aground." Thus their action was *included* in his prediction. This bears out a principle which we observe both in Scripture and in human experience: that human agency is deeply involved in the fulfillment of God's sovereign purposes.

¹¹⁵ The term rendered "cast" in Verse 30 is not the same as that used in verse 29. It means, literally, "to stretch out."

¹¹⁶ Paul is probably the foremost Scriptural example (excepting Christ Himself) of that which he urges upon his son Timothy: "Be instant, in season, out of season" (II Tim. 4:2).

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE FINAL ORDEAL

"And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

"Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

"And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

"Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat.

"And we were in all in the ship two hundred three-score and sixteen souls."

-Acts 27:33-37.

In the fearful night spent off the coast of Melita, Paul had been used of God to foil the attempted escape of the sailors and to keep them with the ship. This victory, however, carried with it another danger, for men whose plans have been thwarted are apt to be sullen and uncooperative.

In this new and critical situation we again see the apostle's practical insight and presence of mind as well as his human sympathy. Grasping the situation clearly and realizing that now, if ever, the soldiers, sailors and all needed to be drawn together and encouraged, he took prompt action.

As the early dawn began to reveal the haggard faces of the exhausted wretches who had now spent thirteen days in this awful storm, Paul did the one thing most apt to help them both physically and emotionally: He proposed, yes urged, that they take the time to partake of food.

We do not suppose that Verse 33 indicates that they had eaten *nothing whatever* these thirteen days, but rather that they had prepared no regular meals. With the ship rolling and pitching in the storm, with the almost constant need for action and with life itself in the balance every fearful moment, it is to be doubted whether anyone had much time or even appetite for food. Doubtless they had snatched, now and then, only what they felt was absolutely necessary to their physical survival and often had gone without even that.

Imagine, then, the reaction as Paul began to urge them to pause to eat, reasoning: "This is for your deliverance,"¹¹⁷ and assuring them confidently: "*There shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you*" (Ver. 34). And imagine the effect as he then proceeded to show his confidence in the truth of his declaration by taking bread, giving thanks to

¹¹⁷ This is the correct rendering of Verse 34.

God for it in the presence of all and then beginning to eat it.

Ah, such courage, or "pluck," as Plumptre calls it, is fully as contagious as fear! "Then were they all of good cheer," says the record, and joining him, also partook of food (Ver. 36).

It is here that Luke records the number of those aboard. Perhaps this is because it was most natural to count them under such circumstances, but the Holy Spirit doubtless led him to do this at this point so as to impress upon us the wonder of the scene: two hundred seventy-five men, having come to the end of their own resources, now cheerful and ready to face grave dangers calmly, under the divinely-appointed leadership of one faithful and fearless man of God.

Oh, that the Church would come to the end of herself; to the end of her efforts to save the organization, now being tossed to and fro and foundering in a stormy sea! Oh, that she would heed the instructions of Paul, her God-appointed leader! ([Rom. 11:13](#); [I Cor. 3:10](#)). How united and ready she would be to face the opposition of the adversary! (See [Phil. 1:27,28](#)).

SAFE TO LAND

"And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

"And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship.

"And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

"And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmovable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

"And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

"But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land:

"And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land: "

-Acts 27:38-44.

Thanks, under God, to the apostle's confidence and leadership, the darkness of this last early morning, the most critical of all, finds the efforts of those aboard best coordinated.

The few hours before they could see land were to be used to the best possible advantage in preparing the ship for a possible run ashore.

When they had "eaten enough,"¹¹⁸ and were strengthened, they began to lighten the ship by unloading their cargo of grain, or whatever was left of it, into the sea. They must get the ship floating as high as possible, for the less her draft the farther she could be run ashore should it be possible to beach her.

Nothing is said of the food brought along for *provisions* and, not yet having been able to determine whether or not they were near *inhabited* land, it is doubtful that they would have disposed of this. Perhaps the ship could be beached and these provisions salvaged for their sustenance.

The light of dawn finally revealed the land, but no one aboard recognized it. They did, however, see, through the rain (Cf. 28:2) "a certain bay,"¹¹⁹ with a beach" (Ver. 39). Here, it was hoped, the ship might be run aground, and plans were made accordingly.

Here the *Authorized Version* again fails to give the true picture. First, the original does not say that the anchors were "taken up," but "cut," or "cleared" away. What would have been gained by retrieving four heavy anchors when the ship was to be run aground and they had just lightened her for this purpose? Second, the word "themselves" (in Verse 40) is supplied by the translators and erroneously so. Third, the Greek indicates that they did three things *simultaneously*.

A better rendering of Verse 40, therefore, would be: "*And having cut away the anchors they left them in the sea. At the same time, having loosened the rudder bands, and having hoisted the mainsail to the wind, they made for the shore.*"

Indeed, to avoid disaster in a situation of this kind, they *must* have done these three almost simultaneously.

Most commentators seem to feel that it was a "foresail," rather than the "mainsail" that was hoisted to the wind at this time. We question this, however, for the following reasons: First, there is little or no proof that the word *artemon* must or may signify a *foresail*. Second, there is no indication, and little probability, that the ship *had* a foremast (See notes on P 153.) Third, we know that the mainsail had been lowered (Ver. 17) and that this was then used as a storm sail, or that a small storm sail was set. Finally, it was naturally their purpose to run the ship as far ashore as possible. It would appear, therefore, that a larger sail would afford the *force* needed to accomplish this.

¹¹⁸ The Greek term describes a full and hearty (if simple) meal.

¹¹⁹ "Creek" is wrong. The word *kolpos* is rendered "bosom" in Luke 6:38, but was also the nautical word for *bay*.

Even so, they failed to achieve their purpose, for, heading toward shore they ran aground on a shoal formed by two opposing currents (Ver. 41, "where two seas met").

Here, for the first time, the usual word for ship (*plouin*) gives way to another (*naus*). The vessel was no longer a ship, but a mere floating hulk. Thus, with its bow stuck fast in the mud, the stern of what had been a great sea-going vessel immediately began breaking to pieces under the violent pounding of the waves.

Now quick decisions must be made, especially with regard to the prisoners. The severity of Roman military discipline caused the soldiers to urge their immediate execution, for should any of them escape, it would then cost the soldiers *their* lives. These soldiers were as ready to sacrifice the lives of others to save their own as the sailors had been on the previous night! (Ver. 30).

One of these prisoners, however, had already been signally used to save all their lives and Julius, the centurion, was too just, or thought too much of Paul, to permit his execution. The word "willing," in Verse 43, indicates far more than acquiescence. He *willed* to save Paul, and thus kept the soldiers from carrying out their plan. And so again Paul becomes, indirectly, the deliverer of others so that all may be brought safe to land.

But in all this there was no panic. The centurion issued orders for all who could swim to dive overboard first (Ver. 43). These would then be in a position to help the rest to shore. This may well have been Paul's suggestion, for he had already experienced three shipwrecks ([II Cor. 11:25](#)). Those who could not swim were then instructed to get to shore as best they could on planks and "pieces" (not necessarily *broken* pieces) of the ship.

"AND SO IT CAME TO PASS THAT THEY ESCAPED ALL SAFE TO LAND" (Ver. 44).

"The calm, the breeze, the gale, the storm,
The ocean and the land,
All, all are Thine, and held within
The hollow of Thy hand."

-Edward A. Dayman.

The measures taken under lee of Clauda, the thwarting of the sailors' plot, the help and inspiration of "the meal in the storm," the final measures taken to beach the ship, the centurion's determination to save Paul - all these had but formed parts of God's gracious purpose, which had now been completely and wonderfully fulfilled.

Chapter XLVIII - ACTS 28:1-16

MELITA AND THE APPROACH TO ROME

THE LANDING ON MELITA

"And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

"And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire and received us every one, because of the present rain and because of the cold.

"And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

"And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

"And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.

"Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly; but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god."

-Acts 28:1-6.

MELITA THE MODERN MALTA

It is now all but certain that the 276 survivors made the shore of what is now known as the **Island of Malta**, that rocky citadel that successfully withstood such continuous bombing during World War II.¹²⁰

There is another Melita in the Adriatic Sea, off the coast of Illyricum, high up in the Gulf of Venice, but the arguments identifying this island with Paul's shipwreck are so trivial as to be hardly worth considering, while the arguments *against* it are irrefutable.

With a gale blowing from the northeast, so fierce that it was only barely possible to keep the ship under control, how could they possibly have arrived at a point so far to the north, and that with a comparatively narrow channel to navigate between Italy's heel and Macedonia and many islands in their path to make their passage still more precarious? Also, if they landed at the northern Miletta, how could they then have traveled *north* to Rome, as they clearly did, by way of Syracuse, Rhegium and Puteoli

¹²⁰ In April of 1942 alone the enemy flew 5715 sorties, dropping 6,728 tons of bombs on this small island without defenses.

(Vers. 11-13).

On the other hand there is remarkably conclusive evidence that they landed at Malta, and even at the site traditionally known as St. Paul's Bay. This evidence is, in part, as follows:¹²¹

1. The direction and rate of drift, as we have described it, would have brought the vessel to the vicinity of Malta, and approximately in this length of time.

2. In the direction of their drift they could very well have arrived off the coast of Koura Pt., the eastern boundary of St. Paul's Bay, without having previously neared any other part of Malta's coast.

3. Breakers from the northeast would strike this point violently, yet a ship could come within one quarter of a mile of it without striking sunken rocks. This is evidently why the sailors "deemed" that they were approaching land, yet the ship did not immediately run aground.

4. The depth off Koura Pt., within hearing distance of the breakers, is about 20 fathoms, and a little farther on - in the direction of their drift - it is about 15.

5. The old *English Sailing Directions*, used before the turn of the century, say of this area: "While the cables hold, there is no danger, as the anchors will never start," so firm is the bottom there.

6. On the farther side of the bay, the rocky coast descends to a sandy, or pebbly, beach, such as that toward which the sailors finally headed the stricken craft.

7. This bay on the northeast coast of Malta has traditionally been called "*St. Paul's Bay*," while there is no such tradition in favor of the northern Melita.

8. The presence of another ship of Alexandria, which had wintered there on its way to Italy (28:11) is strong evidence that the island was Malta. Malta lay in the usual path of navigation from Alexandria to Italy, while the other "Melita" was altogether out of the way.

THE RECEPTION AT MELITA

Paul had already suffered three shipwrecks (II Cor. 11:25); now, by the grace of God, he had survived a fourth.

It is in connection with this landing at Melita that we first read of the "rain" and the "cold." It must therefore have been heartening to the 276 survivors, chilled and drenched as they were, to find that the island was inhabited with people, of a foreign

¹²¹ Much of this evidence is gleaned from Smith's *Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul*.

tongue,¹²² indeed, but eager to show them "no little [Lit., *unusual*] kindness."

Luke records, gratefully, that they "received us *every one*." It made no difference to these generous-hearted people whether the survivors were soldiers, sailors, passengers, or even prisoners; they were men in distress and needed help. Immediately therefore, they started a blazing fire (perhaps in one of the island's many caves) so that all might gather round to warm and dry themselves. This was the first comfort they had enjoyed for fourteen long days and nights and we doubt not that with many, or most, of them, long pent-up anxiety now gave way to tears of grateful relief.

But there was still one strong, firm soul among these wretched survivors, extending his hand to steady the rest; helping while others were being helped and doing what he could to alleviate the sufferings of his fellows, apparently unmindful of his own. His was a courage that the centurions and soldiers of the Roman army could admire. Little wonder he had so many friends among them!

But the sticks the apostle had gathered for the fire concealed a poisonous serpent, a viper, and as he lay the wood on the fire the beast leaped out from the heat and fastened itself upon his hand.

Ordinarily this would have resulted in widespread inflammation and sudden death, and as the Melitans saw the viper hanging on his hand they concluded among themselves that he was doubtless a murderer who, though having escaped the sea, was about to be executed by *Vengeance*, or *Justice*, the goddess who supposedly sat beside *Jupiter* and disposed of such cases.

But the apostle shook the viper back into the fire and felt no harm,¹²³ so that the Miletans, looking in vain for him to die, now concluded he must be a god! Their feelings had changed as suddenly and completely as those of the Lystrians in the opposite direction, where first it was sacrifices, then stoning ([Acts 14:11-19](#)).

This incident in the last chapter of Acts is followed by others, which prove that the era of miraculous demonstrations had not even yet passed. Also, it is another of those narratives in the Acts record which have a striking symbolic significance.

A VIPER'S BITE AND THE GRACE OF GOD

It is highly significant that a *viper* should leap out of the fire to attack Paul just as Israel was about to be set aside in the purposes of God.

That Israel's rulers, and especially the Pharisees, at this time, were considered as

¹²² The term "barbarous people" is not used in a derogatory manner. The Greek *barbaroi* means simply, *people of another tongue*, and referred to all who were not Greek in language or culture. The *Scythians* were the uncivilized savages who lived beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire (See Rom. 1:14; I Cor. 14:11; Col. 3:11.)

¹²³ This was not a fulfillment of Mark 16:18. The taking up of serpents should rather be associated with Ex. 4:2-5.

vipers in the sight of God is evident from the inspired record. Three times in the Gospel according to Matthew we find them called vipers.

In the first instance John the Baptist, detecting their hypocrisy in coming to his baptism, rebukes them with the words:

“O GENERATION [OR BROOD] OF VIPERS, WHO HATH WARNED YOU TO FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME?

“BRING FORTH THEREFORE FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE” (Matt. 3:7, 8).

In the second, our Lord Himself, after they had blasphemed Him, showed why they *could* not bring forth good fruit, saying to them:

“O GENERATION OF VIPERS, HOW CAN YE, BRING EVIL, SPEAK GOOD THINGS? FOR OUT OF THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART THE MOUTH SPEAKETH” (Matt. 12:34).

In the third, after pronouncing woe after woe upon them, He says:

“...YE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THEM WHICH KILLED THE PROPHETS.

“FILL YE UP THEN THE MEASURE OF YOUR FATHERS.

“YE SERPENTS, YE GENERATION OF VIPERS, HOW CAN YE ESCAPE THE DAMNATION OF HELL?” (Matt. 23:31-33).

Even after the resurrection and ascension of our Lord, the rulers of Israel continued their relentless opposition against Him. They threatened His apostles, scourged them and cast them into prison. And when Stephen dared to say: “Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost,” they dragged him out, stoned him to death, and waged “a great persecution” against the saints at Jerusalem (Acts 7:51, 58, 59; 8:1).

All this does not indicate, however, that their bitter campaign against Messiah was succeeding. On the contrary they lost round after round of the contest, and never even got to settle on a consistent plan of attack. While the apostles pursued a course which was straight as an arrow, the rulers tried first this and then that, only to be defeated and embarrassed again and again.

Peter answers the members of the Sanhedrin with such spiritual power that his accusers are turned into defendants and before he and John leave the chamber of Israel's Supreme Court, they serve them notice that they intend to *continue* preaching Christ (Acts 4:5-21). When the apostles are imprisoned again (more of them this time) an angel delivers them, and when the Sanhedrin convenes and commands that they be brought from prison for trial, it is discovered that they are in the temple preaching, the manner of their escape from prison remaining a mystery. And again the apostles

declare that they will go right on preaching Christ (Acts 5:17-32). Then Gamaliel advises the rulers to “leave them alone” (5:38) but this proves even less effective, for now we read that “...daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (5:42).

And as for the stoning of Stephen and the persecution which followed, God countered that with the greatest blow of all: the conversion of Saul,¹²⁴ which robbed them of their most outstanding and aggressive leader. At this stinging defeat, we find the rulers creeping in their holes again – and for a considerable time. The churches have rest “throughout all Judaea, and Galilee, and Samaria,” and multiply steadily (Acts 9:31).

Ere long the apostles and elders at Jerusalem are freely holding their own council in defiance of the Sanhedrin, with a great multitude from far and near attending (Acts 15). And soon there are “many tens of thousands¹²⁵ of Jews” at Jerusalem “which believe” (Acts 21:20) and the rulers can do nothing about it. Like Simon, the apostate Jew of Samaria, they are “in the gall of bitterness.”

But meantime Paul had been sent “far hence unto the Gentiles,” to offer them salvation and blessing apart from Israel, by the grace of God alone and on the basis of the death of Christ. Through his ministry thousands of Gentiles had come to rejoice in Israel’s God and in the Messiah Israel had rejected.

This was too much for the rulers to bear and, when Paul visited Jerusalem again, they leaped out of the flame, as it were, to strike at him and destroy him.

“Away with such a fellow from the earth!” they cried, “for it is not fit that he should live.” And in their rage “they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air” (Acts 22:22, 23).

It was because of their enmity that Paul was now in chains, that he had suffered this fearful shipwreck and would soon be called upon to stand before Nero. But in this brief symbolic incident the Holy Spirit shows how futile is the rulers’ rage, and how inevitable their doom, for the apostle merely shook off the beast so that it fell *back into the fire*, which he went on unharmed.

Our Lord had warned these rulers that if they blasphemed again the Holy Spirit they could *never* find forgiveness, neither in that age, nor in the age to come (See [Matt. 12:31, 32](#)). They now had persistently blasphemed the Holy Spirit as Christ was preached by the apostles “with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” Hence they were to be given up to the fire of God’s judgment, while Paul went on to dispense to the Church and the world still greater riches of grace.

¹²⁴ Though he was both too young and too sincere to be included in the category of the vipers to which the rulers belonged.

¹²⁵ This is the correct rendering.

PAUL'S MINISTRY AT MELITA

"In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.

"And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.

"So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed:

"Who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary."

-Acts 28:7-10.

So completely had God overruled in the storm which had overtaken the great Alexandrian grain ship that it had even been wrecked at the right spot!

It was more than a mere co-incidence that Publius, the "chief man," or governor, of the island owned "possessions" in the very area of the shipwreck. Of this man Luke writes: "He received us, and lodged us three days courteously."¹²⁶

We have already learned that the Melitans had "*received ... every one*" of the 276 survivors (Ver. 2) but the Greek word rendered "received" in Verse 7 has a different meaning. The former word means to *welcome* or *take to one's self*, but the latter means to *entertain* or *assume responsibility for*. This is why we find it used along with the word "lodged," and in connection with Publius' "*possessions*."

It is perhaps impossible to determine precisely how many are included in the "us" of Verse 7. It is doubtful that it includes all 276 survivors, for if it did, the phrase "every one" would be more appropriate here than at Verse 2. Since Luke is the writer, it doubtless includes Paul, Luke and Aristarchus, and probably also Julius, for surely the chief official of a Roman possession would give special recognition to a Roman military officer of considerable importance. Indeed, it may well be that Publius offered *Julius* this generous hospitality, which Paul and his companions were then allowed to share.

At any rate, God was overruling, for by this hospitality on the part of Publius and the subsequent healing of his father, Paul's acceptance and prestige on the island was immediately assured and he found three months of usefulness and blessing among its inhabitants. And this in turn further enhanced his position with Julius, the centurion.

Publius' father had been ill with recurrent fevers¹²⁷ and an aggravated form of dysentery. Paul's visit at this time, therefore, was opportune, and his procedure in healing the sick man throws light upon a question which has baffled many

¹²⁶ The original expresses kindness of *feeling* rather than mere kindness of manner.

¹²⁷ The word is plural in the original.

commentators.

Strangely, nothing is said in the record about any preaching by Paul at Melita, nor about anyone being converted. We can understand that circumstances doubtless forbade his preaching aboard ship, but now, with three months to spend on the island, surely there was ample opportunity to proclaim Christ and His finished work.

In cases of this kind we must not forget the selective principle in divine inspiration, which is so prominent in the Book of Acts. God's great purpose in Acts is *not* to record "the birth and growth of the Church," as some have supposed, but to record *the fall of Israel* and to vindicate His action in setting them aside while He demonstrates the righteousness and grace of the Messiah they have rejected.¹²⁸

In this closing section of Acts it is not God's main purpose to show Paul's ministry among the Gentiles, but rather to show the apostle as rejected by Israel and sent in chains to Rome *because* of his ministry among the Gentiles (See [22:21-23](#)).

Who can doubt that Paul did preach the gospel to the inhabitants of Melita? True, we read only of his miracles, but had he not written in his letter to the Romans that Christ had used his "mighty signs and wonders" "*to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed*" as he "*preached the gospel of Christ*"? (Rom. 15:18,19).

Further, it will be observed, that in his initial miracle of healing on the island, he "*prayed*" as he laid his hands on Publius' father and healed him. This, to begin with, would show those present that he was *not* the author of the miracle but only the instrument; *not* a god, as they had supposed, but a *messenger* from God. We may be sure, too, that this prayer, and such words as the apostle would say in addition, would include a testimony to the saving grace of Christ.

While mere tradition cannot be *trusted*, in many cases it is accurate, and in this case it is interesting to note that tradition places an ancient church at Melita, with Publius as its first bishop or overseer.

The healing of Publius' father naturally caused others, who were ill, to come to Paul for healing. It was a great opportunity for Paul to repay the islanders for their generous hospitality, as well as to make Christ known to them. The Melitans had sought no gain in befriending the wretched survivors of the wreck. How richly they had now been rewarded! Malta was now an island of healthy people!

And now *they* showed their gratitude to him, whose unexpected visit had brought them so much good. Not only did they honor Paul and his companions with "many honors,"¹²⁹ but when the time came to leave, they "loaded" them with provisions. They

¹²⁸ This is why we find no mention of the "one Body," discussed so fully in his epistles written during this time (See Rom. 12:4,5; I Cor. 12:12-27; Gal. 3:26-28).

¹²⁹ Compare here the treatment which our Lord received at the hands of the Jews. Those who should in gratitude have statues and held banquets in His honor in every city, asked Him instead: "*By what authority doest Thou these*

would never forget the apostle and the blessing he had brought them. Little wonder that this of Malta is to this day known as St. Paul's Bay!

APPROACHING ROME

"And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

"And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.

"And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli;

"Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.

"And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum, and the Three Taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

"And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him."

-Acts 28:11-16.

At length the time arrived to leave Melita, since another "ship of Alexandria," which had wintered there, was about to set sail for Italy.

The "sign" under which this ship sailed was "Dioscuri," signifying Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Jupiter and Leda. These legendary twins were identified as the two bright stars in the constellation Gemini, and worshipped as the patron deities and guiding stars of sailors. The Apostle Paul aboard this ship, "protected" by heathen gods, is an example of the believer in the world.

Syracuse, the first port at which they landed, was an important city of Sicily, still bearing the same name. Perhaps they "tarried" there for three days to wait for a change of wind, for it was then necessary to reach Rhegium (at Italy's toe) by an indirect course.¹³⁰ But after one day at Rhegium a favorable south wind arose, taking them north to Puteoli by the next day.

Puteoli was the most sheltered port on the Bay of Naples, situated at its northern extremity. It was then the chief port of Rome; a harbor for the great Alexandrian grain

things? and who gave Thee this authority...?" (Mark 11:28). They asked the Great Physician to show His credentials!

¹³⁰ The phrase "*fetched a compass*" in A.V., is most misleading. They had no compasses in those days (Cf. 27:20). The word rendered compass means simply "*to go around*," as in our word *en-compass*. The word "fetched" is not found in the original.

ships. This was the end of Paul's *voyage* to Rome. The rest must be done on foot.

At Puteoli the apostle, doubtless with the help of Luke and Aristarchus, succeeded in finding a number of Christian brethren. The record states that these brethren urged Paul and his friends to remain with them for seven days,¹³¹ and the implication is that Paul and his associates did this. This is another remarkable indication of Julius' growing interest in Paul, for it meant that the centurion and all his soldiers and prisoners must wait for one week while Paul ministered to these "brethren." Doubtless Paul's miracles and ministry at Melita had further deepened Julius' already profound respect for Paul.

The fact that believers in Christ could be found at Puteoli reminds us of Paul's words in Heb. 13:24: "*They of Italy* [not merely of *Rome*] salute you," and indicates how widely the gospel of the grace of God had been proclaimed and received.¹³²

But a few miles past Puteoli the travelers would now find themselves on the great *Appian Way*, perhaps the most famous highway of antiquity. Slatius called it "*the queen of long-distance roads.*" The part from Capua to Rome (132 miles) was built about 312 B.C., but it was lengthened to reach Brundisium by about 244 B.C. Milestones and inscriptions as to its repair are still in existence and, though constructed more than two millenniums ago, parts of this great highway still remain intact.

As the apostle and the others made their way toward Rome along this ancient road, two other companies were coming from Rome along the same road to meet him. How did they know of his arrival? Evidently the believers at Puteoli had sent word of this to Rome as Paul ministered to them. One of these groups met him at Appii Forum, and the other fifteen miles further on, at The Three Taverns.

The record says, simply, that when Paul saw these brethren, "he thanked God, and took courage." But this brief record still speaks volumes. It indicates that anxiety and fear had attended the apostle's way. Would he have to enter Rome as a criminal, with none but Luke and Aristarchus to stand by? Would the Roman believers remain aloof?

In the last chapter of his Roman Epistle he had sent *personal* greetings to no less than *twenty-seven* members of the church there, and had mentioned others. A considerable number of these he knew intimately. Many of these, no doubt, were included in the two happy welcoming committees: his beloved Aquila and Priscilla, Phebe and Mary, who had helped him much in the work, Andronicus and Junia, his relatives and "fellow-prisoners." Were these among them? What a time of prayer and thanksgiving they must have had; what recollections of their experiences 'in the

¹³¹ As at Troas (20:6) and Tyre (21:4).

¹³² We do not believe the tradition which credits the conversion of these Gentile believers to the ministry of the twelve and their associates (See Gal. 2:2,7,9). It was Paul's gospel that reached to all nations, "all the world" and every creature [all creation]" (See Rom. 16:25,26; Col. 1:6; Col. 1:23). Had the twelve, under *their* "great commission," reached all nations. all the world and all creation, with *their* "gospel of the kingdom," the "end of the age" would have come (See Matt. 24:14) but that program was interrupted by "*the dispensation of the grace of God*" through Paul (Eph. 3:1-4).

proclamation of the gospel; what serious discussions and plans with regard to Paul's stay at Rome and the approaching hearing before Nero! The apostle's affectionate nature was reflected in the love of these believers, who had come all this way to meet and re-assure him. Often they must have read his words: "I long to see you," and now they had demonstrated their longing to see him too.

"*He thanked God and took courage.*" His entry into Rome was now to take on a new aspect, with these dear ones nearby to comfort and cheer.¹³³

At Rome Julius probably had his last opportunity to show kindness to Paul.

Doubtless the letter sent with Paul (25:26,27) indicated that he was innocent and that *he* had appealed to Caesar. Doubtless, too, Paul's own bearing and the presence of his friends distinguished him as an outstanding personality, but the special consideration given him by the captain of the guard may well have been due in largest part to the intercession and influence of Julius, the centurion, who had by now come to esteem Paul so highly.

Thus, when the prisoners were delivered to the captain of the guard, Paul alone was permitted to live at the home of a friend¹³⁴ - perhaps that of his old friend Aquila who, with Priscilla, had entertained him on previous occasions. He was constantly guarded by a soldier, however, to whom he was probably chained. That he was bound by a chain is clear from Ver. 20 (Cf. [Eph. 6:20](#); [Phil. 1:7, 13,14,16](#); [Col. 4:18](#); [Phile. 10,13](#)).

¹³³ He had entered Jerusalem, too, with many friends, but still with dire forebodings because of the Spirit's warnings (Acts 21).

¹³⁴ The Greek word *Xenia*, in Ver. 23, indicates a place where one is *entertained*, not a cell, nor the "hired house" of Ver. 30.

Chapter XLIX - Acts 28:17-31

PAUL AT ROME

THE PRELIMINARY MEETING WITH THE JEWISH LEADERS

"And it came to pass that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

"Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me.

"But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

"For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you; because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

"And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spoke any harm of thee.

"But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against."

-Acts 28:17-22

Wherever Paul had gone in his ministry thus far, his policy had been: "The Jew first." One would suppose that this would be changed now. His last earnest appeal to his countrymen at Jerusalem had only served to arouse antagonism so bitter that his present bondage in Rome was his only protection from their rage! He had been forced to appeal to Caesar to escape assassination. Besides, who could expect him to go to the Jew first under *these* circumstances? He was bound with a chain and *could* not attend a synagogue or go where Jews were wont to meet.

Yet, even here in Rome his first care was for his kinsmen. Perhaps some of them might yet be saved. At any rate, the chosen people, from Jerusalem to Rome, would then be without excuse.

Thus it was that after but "three days," doubtless spent in getting settled and meeting with Christian friends old and new, he "called the chief of the Jews together" for a preliminary meeting, at which a date might be set and plans made for a full discussion of the matters which so deeply concerned them all.

With typical tactfulness the apostle addressed them in terminology they would appreciate: "Men and brethren," "the people," "our fathers." Yet he was careful not to give false impressions.

It is only the extreme dispensationalist, trying to prove a point, who interprets the apostle's words in Verse 17 to mean that until this time he had strictly observed the laws and customs of Judaism.

Actually he said nothing of the kind, nor *could* he honestly have done so, for even extreme dispensationalists, who interpret his words in I Cor. 9:20,21 to mean that his policy was to go back and forth, *under* the law and *from under* it again, would have to admit that he had *not* observed Jewish laws and customs when among the Gentiles.

Thus this passage by no means proves that Paul had until then lived under the law, proclaiming a kingdom message. He did not commit himself to a positive here. He did not say: "I have faithfully observed the customs of our fathers." He merely said: "I have committed nothing *against* the people, or customs of our fathers." The idea is plainly that he was not guilty of *desecrating* their sacred customs. He had not treated either the people or their traditional customs with disrespect.¹³⁵ Those who so lightly ridicule beliefs and customs which are sacred to others, would do well to observe Paul's conduct on this occasion.

Next it should be observed that the apostle takes the *defensive* position, as he relates how, though innocent of offense against Judaism, he was delivered a prisoner into the hands of the Romans. This would further tend to win their sympathies, for one of the cruelest things a Jew could do to his brother was to deliver him to the uncircumcised Roman oppressors.

He further points out, however, that his Roman judges had found him innocent of the crimes laid against him, indeed that *they* would have let him go, had not the Jews protested against it.

In this Paul's experience was not unlike that of His Lord. Each succeeding Roman magistrate had found him innocent and each individually should, in justice, have acquitted him but, as with our Lord, the wishes of the Jews played an important part in their decisions.

Thus, the apostle points out, he is here in Rome as a *defendant*, not a plaintiff. He had been *forced*¹³⁶ to appeal to Caesar to avoid being handed over to a prejudiced tribunal (25:9,10) and most probably being assassinated before even coming to trial (25:2,3). Yet he is not here to make any charge against his persecutors. He does not tell how they dragged him out of the temple, beating him and going about to kill him upon the mere *conjecture* that he had brought a Gentile into the sanctuary, nor how the aroused multitude had screamed for his death, casting off their clothes and throwing

¹³⁵ As the Jews at Jerusalem had suspected (Acts 21:27-29).

¹³⁶ The word "constrained" in Verse 19 is rendered "compelled" in 26:11.

dust into the air, nor how the high priest had commanded that he be smitten on the mouth at his hearing before the Sanhedrin, nor how more than forty Jews¹³⁷ had made a pact neither to eat nor drink till they had killed him - and all these outrages, and more, he could have proved.

He had made not a single counter-charge against his accusers before any Roman judge, nor will he now do so before Caesar, nor, indeed does he even tell *this* audience about all these outrages. His lips are sealed as to all this. He has gone far indeed to conciliate the favored nation and here again he will do so, adding to his explanation of his presence here, the words: "*not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.*"¹³⁸

While there was much Paul could have accused his nation of, remember too that there was much they could have accused *him* of. He had at first led them in rebellion against Christ. A message of grace from his pen was therefore most appropriate. It had been fully demonstrated that the children of Abraham were sinners along with all the other children of fallen Adam.

But his main purpose in calling them together was to show them how the truth which his accusers had so bitterly opposed, and which had now cost him his liberty, was the very "hope of Israel."

This truth was not merely that which the prophets had predicted concerning Messiah's reign, for the believers at Jerusalem had been preaching this for some time without serious opposition. It was rather the truth of the resurrection in general and the resurrection of Christ in particular. This truth, which Paul proclaimed with greater light and greater power than any of the twelve could have done' and which so aroused the enmity of the Jews, was actually Israel's only hope. Certainly if it were *not* true that the crucified Messiah had been raised again there could be no hope of a kingdom to come, for there is no other Messiah. And, what is more important, there could then be no hope of the forgiveness of Israel's sins, for a *dead* Messiah could not save.

In the passage before us the apostle says: "*For the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain*" (Ver. 20). Now, by examining the Scriptures concerned, any sincere student will learn that Paul was "bound with this chain, *not* for proclaiming that which Israel hoped for, the kingdom, but for proclaiming that which was the *basis* of her hopes, the resurrection."¹³⁹ Let us then examine the record:

Before the Sanhedrin the apostle stated clearly why he had been "called in question" by the Jews:

"Men and brethren ... OF THE HOPE AND RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD I AM CALLED IN QUESTION (23:6).

¹³⁷ The term "Jews" in this passage is evidently used in its proper, rather than general, sense, of the *Judeans*.

¹³⁸ This is consistent with his "dispensation of the grace of God." Compare Peter's accusations in Acts 2:23; 3:14,15; 4:10,11; 5:30.

¹³⁹ As *he* preached it, of course.

Before Felix again, the apostle declared:

"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers ... AND HAVE HOPE TOWARD GOD ... THAT THERE SHALL BE A RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD..." (24:14,15).

Again, when Festus "declared Paul's cause" to Agrippa, he said:

" ... the accusers ... brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: But had certain questions ... of ONE JESUS, WHICH WAS DEAD, WHOM PAUL AFFIRMED TO BE ALIVE" (25:18,19).

At his hearing before Agrippa, the apostle said:

"AND NOW I STAND AND AM JUDGED FOR THE HOPE OF THE PROMISE MADE OF GOD UNTO OUR FATHERS ... FOR WHICH HOPE'S SAKE, KING AGRIPPA, I AM ACCUSED OF THE JEWS" (26:6,7).

The *promise*, of course, was the restoration of the kingdom to Israel in glory, but "the *hope of the promise*" was the *resurrection* for the apostle goes on to say:

"WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT A THING INCREDIBLE WITH YOU THAT GOD SHOULD RAISE THE DEAD?" (Ver. 8).

All this evidence permits but one interpretation of the last of these passages:

"FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL I AM BOUND WITH THIS CHAIN" (28:20).

Let the sincere and diligent student note carefully that four out of these five passages state that Paul was accused, or in bondage, for a *specific reason*; that four out of the five *state* this reason to be his preaching of the *resurrection*, and finally, that in four out of the five this truth is called a "*hope*." In this connection it should be remembered that Peter, at Pentecost, had warned Israel that Christ was alive (Acts 2:36; 3:14,15; 4:10) while Paul had later proclaimed that resurrection as the proof that the sin question had been fully dealt with (Rom. 4:25; etc.). It was the resurrection, then, and particularly the resurrection of the crucified Christ, that was "*the hope of Israel*."

Bound, as he was, with "this chain,"¹⁴⁰ the apostle doubtless also hoped that by showing them all this he might gain their sympathy and support in his appeal before Caesar. This seems to be implied in the conclusion, "*For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you ...*" (Ver. 20).

Their response seems more diplomatic than forthright. They say they have received neither letters nor personal complaints against him. Yet they tell him that they know of

¹⁴⁰ The singular agrees with Verse 16. He was evidently now chained to a single soldier.

"this sect"¹⁴¹ ... that everywhere it is spoken against" (Vers. 21,22). Diplomatically they tell him that they would like to hear *his* opinion about it, and with that a date is set for a conference.

THE MAIN CONFERENCE

"And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

"And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

"And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esalas the prophet unto our fathers,

"Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive:

"For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.

"And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

"And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."

-Acts 28:23-31.

The day agreed upon having arrived, "many"¹⁴² of the Jews came to Paul's "lodging."

Here again we should carefully observe just how Paul dealt with them and what this implies.

¹⁴¹ How did they know he belonged to "this sect" If they had heard no evil reports about him?

¹⁴² Most translations use the rendering "many" here, though, in fact, the Greek *pleion* is the comparative of *polus*, and means either "more," or "the more part." Thus (as far as we can now ascertain) this second gathering may have been attended by either more or less Jews than the first. If "more" is meant, then the company was greater; if "the more part," then it was smaller! It is inconceivable that Luke's readers could not have understood *exactly* what he meant, but we are still learning the Greek of that day.

We read that he "testified" to them of the kingdom of God and sought to "persuade" them concerning Jesus, "both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets" (Ver. 23).

Does this imply, as some conclude, that until this time Paul had preached only what was contained in the law and the prophets? Those who insist that this is so generally use Acts 26:22 to prove their contention, but we have yet to see one of them add the qualifying clause of Verse 23.

The plain fact is that we find Paul, in his earlier epistles, and even in the Acts record, preaching much that was not contained in the law and the prophets. Indeed, as early as Acts 13:38,39 we find him preaching in a synagogue, proclaiming justification by faith in Christ *without the law*.

But in dealing with Jews under the law, he *must* prove to them *from their Scriptures* that Jesus is the Christ. It is only a pity that in so many cases they refused to be persuaded, so that he could not go on to preach to them the glorious truths he had been specially commissioned to proclaim.

If it be remembered that the *theme* of Acts is *the fall of Israel* and God's vindication of Himself for going to the Gentiles, it will not seem strange that again and again we find the apostle proving to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ, but getting no farther, since they will not accept the proof.

In this particular case he continued "testifying" and "persuading" from morning until evening with results that were indecisive to say the least. Some were persuaded, but others "disbelieved," refusing to be convinced, and, disagreeing among themselves, they "began to depart."¹⁴³ Before they left, however, the apostle pronounced upon them that stern indictment which implies, not merely a patience almost exhausted by the long contest with prejudice and unbelief, but the end of God's present dealings with Israel as a nation.

It is to be noted that in each of the crises at which Paul turned from the Jew to the Gentile it was made clear that the Jew himself was to blame, since he had refused to accept Messiah and the fulfillment of the promises.

At Jerusalem the Lord Himself had appeared to Paul, saying: "*Get thee quickly out of Jerusalem, for THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE THY TESTIMONY CONCERNING ME*" (Acts 22:18).

At Pisidian Antioch the apostle had said to the Jews, with regard to God's Word to them: "*YE PUT IT FROM YOU, AND JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE*" (Acts 13:46).

At Corinth, after they had set themselves in opposition and had blasphemed: "*YOUR*

¹⁴³ The imperfect tense is used.

BLOOD BE UPON YOUR OWN HEADS; I AM CLEAN" (Acts 18:6).

And now at Rome: "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto your¹⁴⁴ fathers ... THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE IS WAXED GROSS [DULL], AND THEIR EARS ARE DULL OF HEARING, AND THEIR EYES HAVE THEY CLOSED; LEST THEY SHOULD SEE ... AND HEAR ... AND UNDERSTAND ..." (Vers. 25-27).

Seven times the Spirit refers to this judgment upon Israel and shows the peril of hardening the heart against God and His truth.

This indictment of the Jews at Rome by Paul should be compared with that of the leaders at Jerusalem by Stephen. He likewise referred to the unbelieving Jews of former times as "*your fathers*," calling his hearers "*uncircumcised in heart and ears*" and charging them with "*always resisting the Holy Ghost*" (Acts 7:51).

The Jews (except a remnant) from Jerusalem to Rome had now rejected their Messiah. Stephen's initial pronouncement had now been brought to a conclusion, as Paul said:

"BE IT KNOWN THEREFORE UNTO YOU, THAT THE SALVATION OF GOD HAS BEEN¹⁴⁵ SENT UNTO THE GENTILES, AND THAT THEY WILL HEAR IT" (Ver. 28).

What folly to assume that this marks the historical beginning of the Body of Christ! Clearly, this is not the *beginning* of something, but the *end* of something - the withdrawal of God's favor from Israel for some time to come.

A great change in God's dealings with men had now been consummated. When on earth our Lord had said to a Samaritan woman: "*Salvation is of the Jews*" (John 4:22). But now the apostle of the *glorified* Lord declares: "*The salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles*" (Acts 28:28).

God's present work is not, of course, the fulfillment of *prophecy* among the Gentiles. This awaits a future day, when Israel is saved and the Gentiles find salvation through her (Zech. 8:13,22,23; etc.) His *present* work is called "this *mystery* among the Gentiles" and we are told that He would have us know what is "the riches of the glory" of it (Col. 1:27).

Our hearts should indeed overflow with wonder and gratitude that in this dispensation of grace we Gentiles, to whom God had promised nothing (Eph. 2:11,12) can be saved and assemble to worship Israel's God and Israel's Messiah while she staggers in the blindness of unbelief; indeed, that we may belong to that blessed Body of which He is the living Head, seated with Him in the heavenlies and there blessed with "all spiritual blessings" (Eph. 1:3; 2:4-10,13).

¹⁴⁴ The A.V. is evidently wrong here.

¹⁴⁵ See *New Tr.*, et al.

It had been predicted that Jehovah would divorce Israel (Isa. 50:1); that they would be *Lo-Ammi*: not His people (Hos. 1:9) but never had He made known the purpose in His heart of love to bring salvation to the Gentiles through Israel's "fall" and "casting away" (Rom. 11:11-15).

It is true that under this dispensation of grace there is, before God, "*no difference between the Jew and the Greek*" and that "*the same Lord over all is rich unto ALL that call upon Him*" (Rom. 10:12). It is true that "*God hath concluded them all in unbelief that He might have mercy upon ALL*" (Rom. 11:32) and that believing *Jews and Gentiles* are now "*reconciled ... unto God in one body by the cross*" (Eph. 2:16). Thus the offer of salvation by grace is extended to all men everywhere, whether Jews or Gentiles.

But all this does not alter the fact that *practically* speaking this is a Gentile age, simply because so few Jews will accept Christ as their Savior. So small is the proportion of Jews in the Body of Christ that nearly all Christian congregations are made up exclusively or overwhelmingly of Gentiles in the flesh.

Thus the pronouncement was true: "*The salvation of God has been sent unto the Gentiles, and ... they will hear it.*" And thus the Jews departed from Paul's lodging "and had great reasoning among themselves," as they have had ever since.

After some days of entertainment in the home of friends Paul evidently moved to "his own hired house" where he remained for two whole years, receiving all who wished to visit him (Ver. 30). He evidently engaged in a very fruitful ministry here, being used of God, among other things, to establish a church in the very palace of the Emperor (Phil. 1:12,13; 4:22). Nor could his enemies now oppress him, for he was always attended by his Roman guard.

It will be remembered that in the opening verses of Acts, our Lord is said to have taught His apostles for forty days "*the things pertaining to the kingdom of God*" (1:3). This would, of course, involve its establishment on earth, for this was what was to follow His sufferings (Acts 1:6; 2:30; 3:19-21; etc.). Since that time Israel had rejected Messiah and His reign, hence when Paul, in Rome, preached "the kingdom of God and ... those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ," he would naturally explain how Christ had been rejected, so that the *earthly establishment* of the kingdom of God was now held in abeyance, while God sent to a sin-cursed world a wondrous message of grace; an offer of reconciliation through the blood of His Son.

Whether or not the apostle was released after two years and engaged further in a traveling ministry before his trial and execution by Nero, is a question which we will discuss at some length in an appendix.

WHY THE BOOK OF ACTS CLOSES SO ABRUPTLY

It is evident from the close of Acts, if nowhere else, that the book is not primarily a

history of "the birth and growth of the Church," nor even a complete record of "the acts of the apostles." How we should like to know what happened to the Judaeen apostles after the raising up of Paul! How we should like to know how Paul fared during these two years in his own hired house *and after!* What reading an inspired record of his last days and his trial and execution would have made!

But God did not cause Luke to write the Book of Acts in order to satisfy our curiosity. The book is rather intended to be the story of Israel's fall and of how salvation was sent to the Gentiles. This having been accomplished, and Israel having rejected Christ at Rome as she had done at Jerusalem and all the way between, the narrative ends. Now, at least, we are in a position to understand why, in the next book of Scripture we find Paul saying:

"I SPEAK TO YOU GENTILES, INASMUCH AS I AM THE APOSTLE OF THE GENTILES; I MAGNIFY MINE OFFICE" (Rom. 11:13).

PAUL'S TRIAL DELAYED

The fact that Paul, after reaching Rome, "dwelt two whole years in his own hired house," receiving callers and freely discussing those things which concerned the Lord Jesus Christ, indicates that his trial was delayed for a considerable length of time.

In the first place, it appears evident that Paul's accusers had not left for Rome when he did ([Acts 28:21](#)) and hence *could not* have left until the next spring. Further delay, however, may have been due to one or a combination of several causes. It may have been caused partly by Caesar's lack of interest in either party. Even apart from this, trials at Rome were often delayed for long periods of time, to allow the parties concerned to produce witnesses coming from great distances. In this case, witnesses whom the Jews would probably ask to testify against Paul, would have to come from *many* distant places (See [Acts 24:5](#)).

It may be, too, that Paul's accusers were discouraged from appearing against him. *They* had not wished the case to come before Caesar; it was he who had appealed to Caesar, and the prospects of their winning the case against him were not bright in the light of the opinions of Julius, Festus and Agrippa ([Acts 23:26-29; 25:25,26; 26:31,32](#)) and of the formal report which Festus had by now sent to Caesar.

DURING THE DELAY

We have already seen that during this delay, or at least two years of it, the apostle carried on an active and vigorous ministry, receiving visitors and preaching and teaching without restraint. This ministry was bearing abundant fruit.

Imagine the feelings of the soldiers of the Praetorian Guard¹⁴⁶ as, one after another, they found themselves in the midst of gatherings of believers, with Paul presiding!

¹⁴⁶ Nero's body-guard.

Conybeare and Howson's *Life and Epistles of Saint Paul* contains the following paragraphs regarding Paul's ministry at this time:

"... But nothing in it [his Epistle to the Philippians] is more suggestive than St. Paul's allusion to the Praetorian guards, and to the converts he had gained in the household of Nero. He tells us (as we have just read) that throughout the Praetorian quarters he was well known as a prisoner for the cause of Christ, and he sends special salutations to the Philippian Church from the Christians in the Imperial household. These notices bring before us very vividly the moral contrasts by which the Apostle was surrounded. The soldier to whom he was chained today might have been in Nero's body-guard yesterday; his comrade who next relieved guard upon the prisoner might have been one of the executioners of Octavia, and might have carried her head to Poppaea a few weeks before. Such were the ordinary employments of the fierce and blood-stained veterans who were daily present, like wolves in the midst of sheep, at the meetings of the Christian brotherhood. If there were any of these soldiers not utterly hardened by a life of cruelty, their hearts must surely have been touched by the character of their prisoner, brought as they were into so close a contact with him. They must have been at least astonished to see a man, under such circumstances so utterly careless of selfish interests and devoting himself with an energy so unaccountable to the teaching of others. Strange indeed to their ears, fresh from the brutality of a Roman barrack, must have been the sound of Christian exhortation, of prayers, and of hymns; stranger still, perhaps, the tender love which bound the converts to their teacher and to one another, and showed itself in every look and tone.

"But if the agents of Nero's tyranny seem out of place in such a scene, still more repugnant to the assembled worshippers must have been the instruments of his pleasures, the ministers of his lust. Yet some even among these, the depraved servants of the palace, were redeemed from their degradation by the Spirit of Christ, which spoke to them in the words of Paul. How deep their degradation was we know from authentic records. We are not left to conjecture the services required from the attendants of Nero. The ancient historians have polluted their pages with details of infamy which no writer in the languages of Christendom may dare to repeat. Thus the very immensity of moral amelioration wrought operates to disguise its own extent, and hides from inexperienced eyes the gulf which separates Heathenism from Christianity. Suffice it to say that the courtiers of Nero were the spectators, and the members of his household the instruments, of vices so monstrous and so unnatural, that they shocked even the men of that generation, steeped as it was in every species of obscenity. But we must remember that many of those who took part in such abominations were involuntary agents, forced by the compulsion of slavery to do their master's bidding. And the very depth of vileness in which they were plunged must have excited in some of them an indignant disgust and revulsion against vice. Under such feelings, if curiosity led them to visit the Apostle's prison, they were well qualified to appreciate the purity of its moral atmosphere. And there it was that some of these unhappy bondsmen first tasted of spiritual freedom, and were prepared to brave with patient heroism the tortures under which they soon were destined to expire in the gardens of the Vatican." (Pp. 795,796).

And so Paul became widely known, among Caesar's guards, his "household" and elsewhere, as a prisoner for the cause of Christ ([Phil. 1:13; 4:22](#)).

But in addition to all this active ministry at Rome, the apostle still bore "the care of all the churches" ([II Cor. 11:28](#)) keeping contact, through representatives, not only with those churches which he had founded, but also with some that had sprung up indirectly through his ministry-groups of believers whom he had never seen.

It was during this imprisonment that he sent Tychicus and Onesimus from Rome with the letters to Colosse and Philemon, and the Ephesian letter (See [Col. 4:7-9; Phile. 10-15](#)). After Tychicus and Onesimus had left, it seems, Paul was cheered by the arrival of Epaphroditus with a contribution from his beloved friends at Philippi. The Epistle to the Philippians was, in part, an acknowledgment of this gift.

Appendix

DID PAUL SUFFER ONE ROMAN IMPRISONMENT OR TWO?

That Paul closed his ministry as a prisoner in Rome no one, probably, will deny, but did he suffer one imprisonment or two, with a period of release between?

The great majority of those who have looked into this question agree that there were *two* imprisonments, yet the question is often raised, and since the answer to it does not lie on the surface, we devote this appendix to a discussion of it.

Before discussing the Scriptures involved, we would call the reader's attention to Dean Howson's arguments from the testimony of the ancient fathers. Concerning the view that there were two imprisonments, he says: "... no doubt was entertained about it by the ancient Church The evidence ... is all one way" (*The Life and Epistles of Paul*, by Conybeare and Howson, P. 800). "Most important," he says, is the information "supplied by Clement, the disciple of St. Paul, mentioned in Phil. 4:3, who was afterwards Bishop of Rome. This author, writing *from Rome* to Corinth, expressly asserts that Paul had preached the Gospel 'IN THE EAST AND IN THE WEST;' that 'he had instructed *the whole world*' ... and, 'had gone to THE EXTREMITY OF THE WEST' before his martyrdom" (P. 801). Howson also cites "Muratoris Canon" (A.D. 170) regarding "THE JOURNEY OF PAUL FROM ROME TO SPAIN" (P. 801). Such a journey had been his desire, as we learn from Rom. 15:28.

While there are apparently no early writings to contradict this there are passages all the way from Jerome to Chrysostom to show that this belief was widespread.

While extra-scriptural testimony can never be conclusive, the written testimonies of those historically nearest to the apostle do, necessarily, bear some weight. But stronger still, of course, is the testimony of the Word of God, and to this we now turn.

EVIDENCES FROM THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

First we must consider the historical facts of the Pastoral Epistles. The great majority of these could not possibly fit into any part of the apostle's life before or during his first imprisonment in Rome.

In Tit. 1:5 he explains why he had "left" Titus at Crete. This *could not* have taken place on his first journey to Rome, for then he only *viewed* Crete from the ship at Fair Havens ([Acts 27:7-13](#)) and he had with him only Luke and Aristarchus ([Acts 27:2](#)). But from Tit. 1:5 we assuredly gather that by then Paul had visited Crete *with Titus* and had left him there to complete the organization of the churches established.

We learn further, from Tit. 3:12,13, that "Zenas the lawyer and Apollos" were with Titus at this time, evidently in the course of a "journey," and that Paul was to send Artemas or Tychicus to him. This all seems to indicate that a work of considerable extent had been launched at Crete. *Certainly* Zenas, Apollos and Titus had not all been "left" at Crete before Paul's original arrival at Rome.

From Tit. 3:12 we also learn that at the time of his writing he had "determined" to winter at **Nicopolis**. This would indicate that he was either free at the time, or reasonably assured of his freedom.

There is evidence too that by the time the apostle had written this letter to Titus he had spent enough time at Crete to learn their traits by personal experience. Citing "a prophet of their own" to the effect that "the Cretians are always liars," he adds: "*This witness is true*" (Tit. 1:12,13) and indicates that he had left Titus there to correct such abuses (Tit. 1:5,10,11,13). Such personal knowledge of the Cretians could not have been gained while the ship to Rome lay at anchor in Fair Havens.

Next let us turn to the first Epistle to Timothy where, in the first few verses we find that Paul had besought Timothy to remain at Ephesus because of false teaching which was gaining ground there. Now Paul had besought him to remain there *while he himself went to Macedonia* (I Tim. 1:3). When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders on his last journey to Jerusalem, and subsequently Rome, as recorded in Acts, such unsound doctrine was as yet undeveloped among them (Acts 20:27-32). Nor was he then bound for Macedonia. He must, therefore have been released and have visited Ephesus - and Macedonia - again. Indeed, it would appear from both Epistles to Timothy that Timothy had by now been subjected to no little pressure from the heretics at Ephesus and needed considerable exhortation to remain in the battle and stand his ground.

In II Tim. 4:6-9, writing on the very eve of his martyrdom, Paul summons Timothy, then at Ephesus, to hurry to Rome. But near the close of the two years of Acts 28:30 Timothy was at Rome and wrote, with Paul, to the Colossians (1:1) the Philippians (1:1) and to Philemon (Ver. 1).

Again in II Tim. 4:13-20 there is evidence of two imprisonments. There the apostle refers to incidents which were clearly *recent*, while, if he was executed after his first imprisonment at Rome he would have been a prisoner for four years: two at Caesarea and two at Rome, and these incidents would have transpired four years previous.

Finally, there are such differences in "style, language and ideas" when we come to the Pastoral Epistles, that some have denied their Pauline authorship. In these pastoral letters, says David Smith, there are some 295 cases of language and terminology peculiar to these epistles (*Life and Letters of Paul*, P. 582). These, we believe, can be best accounted for by the years of hardship which had intervened and by the altered mood and circumstances. Says Smith:

"Accepting as genuine the Pastoral Epistles, we are led, partly by their style, partly

by the difficulty of fitting them into any earlier period of Paul's life, partly by traces of a later stage of development, both of truth and error, to assign them to a date subsequent to the two years' imprisonment of Acts 28:30."

ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE

But we also find indications of two imprisonments in the Acts and Paul's other epistles.

Consider [Acts 28:30,31](#). Luke obviously wrote the Acts *after* the two years' imprisonment. If Paul had been executed at this time would it not have been normal to record it, even considering the dispensational aspect of the book? Instead, there is no further narrative. Does not this reservation suggest that much still remained to be told? The post-Acts epistles confirm this view.

[Phil. 1:24-26](#) and [2:24](#) show that Paul at that time, was confident he would soon be released. In [Phile. 22](#) he shows this same confidence, even requesting Philemon to prepare lodging for him.

If the Hebrews Epistle was written by Paul, as we assuredly believe it was, there can be no question that he was liberated from his first Roman imprisonment, for there we distinctly find him at liberty ([Heb. 13:23,24](#)).

THE PERIOD OF RELEASE

We do not presume to theorize on the reasons for the apostle's release, nor is it possible to outline the course of his travels, or even to tell much about his ministry during the time in which he was at liberty. We only know that he carried on an extensive ministry which included Macedonia, Ephesus, Crete, Miletum and probably Nicopolis and Spain (See [I Tim. 1:3](#); [Tit. 1:5](#); [II Tim. 4:20](#); [Tit. 3:12](#); [Rom. 15:24,28](#)). Also, he appeared at Troas, evidently recently, for he had left his mantle and parchments with Carpus there.

Further, we do not know the length of his period of liberty, nor when or where he was again apprehended. We only know that he was again taken into custody and finally slain as a martyr for Christ.

THE SECOND IMPRISONMENT

There can be no doubt that when Paul wrote his second Epistle to Timothy he was again at Rome, not now "in his own hired house," under military custody as one who had appealed to Caesar, but suffering bonds "as an evil-doer" ([II Tim. 2:9](#)).

His request for his cloak ([II Tim. 4:13](#)) might well indicate that he was in a dungeon, a dank excavation in the ground, like that at Philippi ([Acts 16:24,29](#); note the words "inner prison" and "sprang in").

The persecution then evidently raging under Nero, or the general change in circumstances seems to have tried the loyalty and thinned out the ranks of his friends. Aquila and Priscilla, perhaps again forced to leave Rome (See [Acts 18:2](#)) were now at Ephesus (II Tim. 4:19) and Paul had sent Tychicus there too, to be with Timothy (II Tim. 4:12) Demas had forsaken him (II Tim. 4:10); Crescens had gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia (II Tim. 4:10). Only Luke, his "beloved physician" was still there to minister to him (II Tim. 4:11).

It must have been a keen disappointment to the apostle, at the first part of his second trial, that not one of the Roman believers had the courage to appear in his behalf (II Tim. 4:16). Doubtless the persecution had driven them all into hiding. Less excusable were men like Demas, who had accompanied him to Rome and had left when needed most.

His defense (unsupported by witnesses) must however have been powerful from the very fact that he was remanded to prison to await further trial (II Tim. 4:16,17).

Evidently he was "oft refreshed" by Onesiphorus of Ephesus, and his family (II Tim. 1:16; 4:19) but this probably after his "first answer."

Was it perhaps *while* writing his second Epistle to Timothy that the apostle's case took an adverse turn and he realized that his doom, physically, was sealed? Is this the reason for his urgent appeals to Timothy to hurry to Rome to be with him at the end? (See II Tim. 1:4 and cf. [4:6-8, 9,21](#)).

At any rate he could include in the closing words of his last letter, the following note of victory:

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

"I HAVE FOUGHT A GOOD FIGHT, I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE; I HAVE KEPT THE FAITH:

"HENCEFORTH THERE IS LAID UP FOR ME A CROWN ..." (II Tim. 4:6-8).