

Acts (Part Twenty-Seven)

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Just a little bit of a run up to Acts 28 where we left off the last time. I found out that as I was beginning the Bible study last time, something struck me that I was leaving a piece of Acts the 26th chapter out. And then it was confirmed after Bible study was over that I left out that portion beginning in verse 19. And so we could go back to that. I cannot say that there is a great deal in there that we have not already covered before because Paul is covering for the third time, his conversion and the things that he did after he was converted. And of course, the only difference is this time he is telling us what he said before King Agrippa and Festus rather than Felix or anybody else.

So in verse 19, we find that he is speaking directly to Agrippa. Remember the story there, that Agrippa just happened to drop in on Festus because Festus had recently moved into the area, become procurator in the place of Felix. And so Agrippa was paying a courtesy call on him and Festus invited him to hear Paul's case. Remember Paul had been stewing in sort of a house arrest for two years by this time, held there by Felix, and there was no real good legal reason for Paul to be held there. But Felix held him because he felt that it would buy him a little bit of peace with the Jews.

Well, Festus did virtually the same thing, made virtually the same decision. And we have here now, Paul before Agrippa and Festus.

Now Agrippa was considered to be, by the Romans anyway, an authority on the Jews. Because Agrippa was Jewish, it was thought that he had insight into their ways and that it would be good for Festus to get some sort of counsel from Agrippa. Now, Paul had already appealed to Rome, that is, he appealed to the emperor. And so that was something that was not set in concrete yet. It could have been set aside by Festus because all Festus had to do was acquit Paul.

But we find at the end of the chapter that Festus again made the decision that he was not going to acquit Paul. And again, the reason was the same, it was same as Felix, he wanted to appease the Jews. And so he sent Paul on to Rome. But there is no doubt from the context here in Acts 26 that Agrippa was struck, let us put it that way, by the force and the logic of the things that Paul said.

And so we find in verse 19 that Paul is speaking directly to Agrippa that he was not disobedient to the things that Christ had called him to. And then he goes through a brief rundown of what he did. He went first to Damascus, where he was converted or, that is, just outside of it, but he received his sight in Damascus. And then he went on into Jerusalem and then on to the Gentiles. And he is giving this as a background for why the Jews are upset and why he is actually standing before Agrippa at that time.

In verse 23 he gives the essence of the things that he was preaching: that Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

Acts 26:24 Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning has driven you mad!"

What we have here is the expression of the sophisticated man of the world. He did not grasp the spiritual essence, the spiritual content of the things that Paul was saying because he was just as pagan as you could get, and it just did not ring true. I mean, why should anybody rise from the dead? That was something that was beyond the thinking of, let us say, a normal pagan Roman official because after all, was he not educated in the best schools? Had he not come from Rome? Was that not the seat of wisdom and knowledge? And so his response was that Paul was mad.

But you can just see Paul standing there very calmly turning to his attention to Festus.

Acts 26:25 But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak words of truth and reason."

And then turning to Agrippa. Now you can just see him:

Acts 26:26 "For the king, before whom I also speak freely [meaning Agrippa], knows these things [and he says, that I speak freely, meaning confidently]; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner."

Now, what he is doing here is he is nailing Agrippa to the wall to make an admission of some kind. Because Agrippa had to have been aware of the things that Paul was reporting on, that is, the ministry of Christ, the crucifixion of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the things that occurred on Pentecost. And all that Paul was doing was filling in the things that occurred personally to him from the time of his conversion. And so Agrippa was aware because those things were not done in a corner. They were well advertised.

You know, you can find in I Corinthians 15, how that the apostle Paul wrote that Christ was seen by 500 witnesses at one time, in addition to others that He personally saw during that 40-day period after His resurrection. That is a lot of witnesses that saw Him alive after He was dead. And these things were not done in a corner. God caused them to be very well advertised.

Acts 26:27-28 "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? [You are a Jew, are you not? That is what he was saying. And then Paul adds something.] I know that you do believe." [I mean, that was pretty hard to wiggle out of up to that point.] And then Agrippa said to Paul, "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."

Well, Agrippa had a reputation that needed to be maintained and what he really said there, if we were going to paraphrase it and put it into modern English, was actually a question. He said, "Do you believe that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Now, that is closer to what he actually said than what the New king James says. Paul came right back and said,

Acts 26:29 "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains."

Short time or a long time, but I wish you were like me.

Now, get the picture here. We have got a man on trial, ostensibly for his life. He is standing before them in chains and he is telling them who are free and clear, so to speak, I wish you were like me. We understand what he meant. If anybody was just kind of looking on, that must have been amusing for him that this man in chains would say, I wish you were like me.

Acts 26:30-32 When he had said these things, the king stood up, as well as the governor and Bernice and those who sat with them; and when they had gone aside, they talked among themselves, saying, "This man is doing nothing worthy of death or chains." Then Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."

Though it does not say it, it is very likely that Agrippa then advised Festus what to say in the letter that went to Rome with Paul. You know, from the perspective of a Jew, that is, Agrippa, and also a Jew who was a very high official in the Roman government. Festus, not understanding, and the reason actually for asking Agrippa to view this and hear this, had been fulfilled. And Agrippa then must have told Festus what to put on the charges, but there was nothing that they could put there that was of a seditious nature.

And then Festus, having to fall back on or feeling as though he had to fall back on pacifying the Jews, allowed it to go through. Now, he could have, he had the authority to acquit Paul. But he felt that if he acquitted him, he would not have bought himself any kind of favor in the eyes of the Jews. Remember, he had only been there a month or two by this time and he wanted to start off his procuratorship there as smoothly as he possibly could. And so, rather than make a legal decision which would have been to set Paul free, he made a political decision, also on the advice of Agrippa, and so they sent Paul on to Rome. Certainly that must have been at least partly within the

will of God because of Paul's commission and a very great deal was accomplished because this was done. But looking at it legally, it was not at all a fair decision.

Then we went through chapter 27 and there we went through the perilous voyage to Rome, the shipwreck that they went through, the landing on the island of Malta, and it was there that they spent the remainder of the winter and then as soon as fairly good sailing weather came on, why, the apostle then was hustled on to another Alexandrian ship. And they went off to, first of all, Syracuse in Sicily and from there to Puteoli. And that brings us over to chapter 28.

Acts 28:11 After three months, we sailed in an Alexandrian ship whose figurehead was the Twin Brothers, which had wintered at the island.

As I mentioned to you before, this was probably somewhere around mid-February. Even then it was considered, according to contemporary writings, that that was not really the best time to sail. It would have been better if they had waited perhaps another month. But from the way the scholars are able to put together the travels of Paul, they feel that they nonetheless left sometime around mid-February and headed north and went to Sicily in Syracuse, which is on the east coast of Sicily about halfway up the island.

Acts 28:12-14 And landing at Syracuse, we stayed three days. From there we circled around and reached Rhegium. [Rhegium is on the toe of the boot of Italy.] And after one day the south wind blew [so that meant that the wind was blowing north]; and the next day we came to Puteoli, where we found brethren, . . .

That is where I mentioned to you, how did he do this? Was he carrying some kind of a computer runout with him so that he knew that there were people there? Well, it seems likely that they must have had some kind of an understanding of the number of people that were in the city. I mean, the number of Christian people and where they could possibly meet them.

Now, how they did this, I do not know. I do not know how good the communication systems were. I do not think that they were all that good.

Certainly not anywhere near the standards that we have today. It is likely though, or let us say, a possibility that the word had gone out from Jerusalem what the apostle Paul's state was and that he is being shipped to Rome. But at any rate, he apparently did not have a great deal of trouble finding brethren in that city and actually allowed to stay there for seven days.

Acts 28:15 And from there, when brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as the Appii Forum and the Three Inns.

The Appii Forum was along the Appian Way and I think I mentioned to you it was somewhere around 40 to 42 miles outside of Rome, south of Rome. And there are a group of people met him, people from Rome, which indicates that the people in Puteoli must have sent runners up to Rome, said that the apostle was there, and that he would be coming north along the Appian Way in a short period of time. And then another 10 or 12 miles further, they came to the Three Inns.

Acts 28:15 When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.

Certainly, that must have given him a great deal of encouragement after the harrowing experience of going through the shipwreck and spending over two years as the ward of the state or at least imprisoned, by first the Jews and then the Romans and then on the ship. And to see the brethren there certainly must have encouraged him a very great deal, enough that Luke could see it very clearly.

Acts 28:16 Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

Now, that last phrase where it says he was able to be by himself, indicates that he was not thrown together with the common criminal, but apparently had earned the respect of this Julius, who was the centurion who was watching over him all the way from Caesarea. But he had earned his respect so greatly that when they got there, Paul was set apart in a separate house.

And there he was, of course, still chained to a soldier, but nonetheless, he was by himself, he had a great deal of privacy, and considering the fact that he was a state prisoner, he had a great deal of liberty.

Now, he was not at liberty to go outside of the prison area. Apparently the prison was right in the area of what is called in literature, Caesar's house, the area of what we would call the palace grounds. I believe it was called the Praetorian, not real positive of that, but I believe that that is the word that was used for that area of of Rome. So he was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.

Acts 28:17 And it came to pass after three days that Paul called the leaders of the Jews together. So when they had come together, he said to them: "Men and brethren, though I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans, . . .

The remainder of the book is going to focus on Paul's relationship with the Jews in Rome. Now, exactly why I do not think anybody knows for sure, because there are so many things that are left out that could have been put in. What about his appearance before Caesar? You know, how did it go? What did he say? What were the charges, who were the witnesses against him? Did he have anybody witnessing *for* him? How long was it before his trial came up? What did he do in the meantime? There is a little bit said there in the remainder here. There is also material in some of the epistles that he wrote.

But why did Luke just suddenly abruptly stop the book after his meeting with the Jews? Well, again, that is one of those things that nobody knows. There are some interesting speculations, one of which is that Luke did not write anymore because Theophilus, to whom the book was written, knew the rest of the story. He just did not know the things that led up to this point right here. It is a possibility. I do not know how strong it is. It is just a guess, but it is certainly something to think about.

Not only that, it does not tell us anything in the book of Acts about his relationship with the Christian church in Rome. Who were some of the outstanding members there? What was the congregation like? Was it a mixture of Jews and Gentiles? Was it predominantly Gentile? Were there

some Jews or was it predominantly Jewish? What was it like? Who had begun it? Who was its pastor? Those are things that the book does not tell us. Did these people come and visit Paul when he was in prison? Did they stand by him whenever he had his trial? What was their life like in the city? Well, again, those are things that just are not there.

So what he is saying here, beginning in verse 17 is, this is how I came to be at Rome. And it is interesting, the pattern continues. That Paul goes into an area that is new to him. He goes first of all to the Jews, to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. So he follows the pattern and he is there to explain how it was that he came to be there.

Acts 28:18 "who, when they had examined me, wanted to let me go, because there was no cause for putting me to to death.

What he is telling them basically is that he is there because of the charge that has been made against him by the Jews of Jerusalem. But whenever Rome tried him, they found no reason that he should be put to death. Now, he is probably doing things at least partly in order to show them so that everybody is on the right basis here, that Christianity is something that has been accepted by the judicial system of Rome. And that if they are intending in any way to stir up trouble against him, it means that they are going to bring themselves against the Roman government. That every decision so far has been in his favor and that the only reason he is there is because of political things.

Acts 28:19-20 "But when the Jews spoke against it, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar, not that I had anything of which to accuse my nation. For this reason therefore I have called for you, to see you and to speak with you, because for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain."

Now, undoubtedly, Paul wanted to have the opportunity to make sure that these people in Rome, that is, the Jews who were there, were accurately informed as to how he came to be there. What the charges were as well as what the decisions were that were made by each one of the Roman judicial representatives. Verse 21 begins their response to him.

Acts 26:21-22 They said to him, "We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere."

So their reply was one of ignorance, that they knew nothing about him or any charges that were made against him. They had no instructions at all from Jewish headquarters in Jerusalem. And they really were essentially saying we do not want to get involved, but they did want to hear from Paul regarding Christianity.

Acts 28:23 So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening.

There was an all day session that consisted of proclaiming the gospel and then undoubtedly discussing, the New King James here says, persuading. In the Greek it is a lot more forceful than that: they were arguing. The word could even mean debating. There was heat that was flowing back and forth as they discussed, argued over finer points of interpretation of the law and the prophets and the writings, probably in regard mostly to Jesus as Messiah and whether or not He fulfilled that role, things regarding the resurrection and the Kingdom of God.

Acts 28:24-27 And some were persuaded by the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved. [So there was a mixed response, which is typical, and I would think not at all unexpected.] So when they did not agree among themselves, they departed after Paul had said one word: "The Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers, saying, 'Go to this people and say: "Hearing you will hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'"

Jesus also quoted this in Matthew 13 and there He was reflecting on exactly the same thing as Paul was. And Paul was essentially, here, shaking the dust from his feet, dusting the clothing that he was wearing, which were symbols of saying that, "I am now free of any responsibility regarding your eternal salvation. I have preached the gospel to you, you have rejected it, and surely the Word of God in the Old Testament from Isaiah is being fulfilled. You're hardheaded, you're stubborn. I have given you my best shot. I can see that it's not good enough. And now you're going to have to face the judgment of God."

Acts 28:28-29 "Therefore let it be known to you that the salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles, and they will hear it!" And when he had said these words, the Jews departed and had a great dispute among themselves.

Hey, what did he say? He said this. No, he said that. He said something else. How do you think that this applies? Well, that is interesting too. They could not even agree among themselves about what they heard.

Acts 28:30-31 Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus with all confidence, no one forbidding him.

Now there it ends. There is no amen. And of course, we wonder about that too. Why? The most common belief is that there will be more added.

I probably could have made an entire Bible study out of Paul's further adventures after this incident right here. But I am going to give you at least an overview of it. I am not going to turn to too many scriptures but there is a great deal of information that is available to what happened to the apostle Paul after verse 31.

Now putting together the things that are available from secular history as well as writings of those men who are called the early church fathers, men like Chrysostom and Eusebius, Clemens and a couple of other men who were writing within the first 50 to 100 to 150 years after the apostle Paul went

through this experience in Rome, and there is no reason to assume that the things that they wrote were not essentially correct because they can pretty much be corroborated by the epistles that he wrote.

This much we know: that Paul's trial was delayed for quite a period of time. The indication for that is in verse 30 that "Paul dwelt there for two whole years." Now, if he had been acquitted before that time, they would have let him free. If he had been convicted, he would have died because what he was going to be charged with was sedition, which was a capital crime, and he would have been put to death. So we know that Paul remained under house arrest for another two years.

Now, there is a reason why the trial was delayed for that long. One of the major reasons is because of the Roman judicial system and because of the very slow systems of communication and transportation. Now, we know that the apostle Paul left Caesarea sometime around the middle of October because we find in chapter 27, verse 9 that the Fast was already passed. And I told you that that year (probably) Atonement was on October the fifth. So they must have left Caesarea then sometime around October of 61 AD. We know that he was three months after the shipwreck in Malta and then it took another little while for him to get into Rome. So by the time he got to Rome, it was somewhere in the spring of 61 AD.

We find that he was in prison then at least another two years. Now, why? Well, it is very unlikely that the Jews were going to be able to arrive at Rome with their witnesses in order to pursue the trial for some period of time after Paul was there, because it is highly unlikely that they risked taking a journey at the same time that Paul and Julius and Luke and those people went on to Rome. So they must have waited until good sailing weather in the springtime before they would have left Jerusalem. Now, it had to be this way because if the trial was going to be pursued, the prosecutor in the trial had to be there at the trial. And if it was all possible, the prosecutor had to prosecute it himself, that is, the accuser. It is very likely that the Jews would have done what they did before Felix. You see, where they hired an attorney to speak for them. But nonetheless, the people who are making the accusations would have had to have been there for the trial. Now, figuring that it would have taken them several months to get there in order to substantiate the charges before the court could actually process the trial.

Once they laid their case before the court, then they would have had to get witnesses. Now, it is very likely that because this case was so important to them that they would have wanted to have witnesses from all over the Roman Empire wherever Paul had preached in order to show that this man was a seditious fellow, not only in Jerusalem, not only in Caesarea, but also in Damascus, in Pisidia, in Greece, in Macedonia. Everywhere he went, this man stirred up trouble. So they would have followed Paul's route and gotten witnesses from everywhere that they possibly could and brought them to Rome in order to testify in their behalf. Now, how long do you think that would have taken?

In addition to that, there was nothing that stopped the emperor from delaying the trial on his whim. If he did not feel like hearing it, he did not have to hear it. I mean, who is going to say, "Emperor, you've got to hear it." Nobody would say that, especially to a madman like Nero. And so he could delay the trial any period of time that he wanted to until he felt good and ready to hear it, until he was in the mood to do it. So that very likely could have delayed things for quite a while.

Now, Paul was busy during his two years there. What do you think the apostle Paul did during those two years? Well, what he did was, he preached the gospel. It is sort of like, well, if Mohammed could not bring the mountain to him, Mohammed would go to the mountain. So, what Paul did is he turned his cell into an evangelistic hall and he must have had people go out into the city and advertise and they brought the people right into his place and he preached the Kingdom of God to them in chains. Would that not be quite a witness? "I want you to be like me." *clank, clank. You know, this is as he was gesturing all over the place. What a witness that would have made!

See, here is the outstanding example. Can you imagine the humor of God? Here is the outstanding preacher on all of Christendom preaching that people ought to be free, preaching that people ought to worship this God—how great and how good and how merciful and how kind and how generous He is—and there he is in prison with chains on. There must have been some of those people, if they bothered to think about it at all, they thought this guy is out of his cotton picking tree if he wants me to give up my life and go to jail and to have chains on just like he has. And yet it worked. People were

converted. Then you are not the only ones who have done these things to the disgrace maybe of your families, who shake their heads at what you are doing.

In addition to that, you might recall, I believe it is in II Corinthians 11, that Paul wrote that daily he was burdened with the care of the churches. Well, it seems as though Paul operated the equivalent of church administration from his cell as well. I mean, the ancient equivalent, the first century equivalent of what is today church administration from his cell because Paul maintained the churches.

Now we find from reading the epistles who his companions were there because whenever he wrote a letter, he let us know. We know that Luke was with him, we know that Timothy was there from time to time, we know that Tychicus was there. In fact, Tychicus left Caesarea with Paul and was Paul's companion on the shipwreck and went all the way to Rome with him. Tychicus, remember, was the man from Thessalonica. We find that Demas was with him. We find that Mark was with him, Aristarchus, Epaphras, Epaphroditus, and Onesimus.

Turn with me to Philemon. (Philemon is just before Hebrews.) The apostle Paul wrote Philemon while he was in prison in Rome.

Philemon 8-10 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting [Paul was writing to Philemon], yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ [He was a prisoner in two ways: he was Christ's slave and he was also in prison in Rome.] —I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains.

Do you know the story of Onesimus? Onesimus was a slave. He was a slave of Philemon. Philemon was converted to Christianity but at some time during their life, apparently after Philemon was converted, Onesimus stole some money or stole some goods from Philemon and ran away. Now capturing a slave who had run away was virtually impossible. But somehow or another Onesimus landed in Rome of all places, and out of that teeming mass of people who do you think was led to Paul's prison cell and became

converted? Why, Onesimus was. And then Onesimus, when Paul found out the story and realized that this man was the slave of another man, who was probably also a convert of Paul's (I believe it was in Colossae. I am not real sure of that, but I believe that that is where Philemon was), he told an Onesimus that it was his duty, his responsibility to go back to Philemon and live out his life as a slave under Philemon. Now, what Paul did to sweeten the pot is he gave Onesimus enough money to pay for the damages that were done by what Onesimus had stolen. And then he wrote this very beautiful letter to Philemon to cover the way, to pave the way for Onesimus.

This story gets a little bit more interesting when we begin to find out that Paul not only wrote this letter to Philemon, but that at the same time, he wrote a letter to the Colossians, that is, the letter that is now called Colossians. And he also wrote another letter which has an interesting history. Now, we find that the letter to the Colossians was carried by Tychicus. And we find that Tychicus also carried this other letter. And that all three of these letters, Philemon, Colossians, and this other letter all went back in the same package. Now, when they arrived in Colossae, Tychicus, if he was literally carrying the letter, maybe Onesimus did, but at least that letter that is now called Philemon was in Onesimus' hands and then Onesimus went back to face Philemon with this letter from Paul. The letter to the Colossians church was very likely held on to by Tychicus. Maybe it was given to some of the elders in the church and then the following Sabbath, it was undoubtedly read and discussed, expounded upon before the church, before the congregation in Colossae because what it did was, of course, discuss difficulties and problems that were going on there in the Colossian area.

Now, this third letter is the one that we now know as the letter to the Ephesian church. The reason I did not name it before is because if you read Ephesians, it is a little bit different than the other letters and the way it is different is that it really has no greeting at the beginning. Now, why is that? And to whom was it really written? Well, Conybeare and Howson in this book, *The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul*, say that it was very likely that that letter that is now called the letter to Ephesus was a circular letter and that there may have been quite a number of them, all duplicates like we would run them off on a Xerox machine. But they were sent to that general area of what is today western Turkey. And that in the book of Colossians, there is a brief mention of another letter.

What they feel is that the other letter was the letter that we know today as the letter to Ephesus. However, it contains no greeting because it was a circular letter in the area. The letter to the Ephesians has to do primarily with a unity within the church and the subject less applies to any one congregation, but many congregations would very likely have the same kind of problem.

Let us go back to Colossians 4.

Colossians 4:16 Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.

You see, one letter went to each church and that second letter apparently, from every indication that is in the Bible, is the letter that is now called Ephesians.

One more letter that Paul wrote during this period of time while he was waiting, but apparently it was written somewhere around 9 to 12 months after the first three, and that is the letter to the Philippians. Now, the story behind it, briefly, is this: Epaphroditus, who is mentioned, arrived in Rome sick. Remember what it says there in Philippians 4 about Epaphroditus was sick, you know, almost unto to death. Well, that Epaphroditus, who was apparently the pastor of the church up there in Philippi, traveled down to Rome to meet with the apostle Paul regarding, again, some things having to do with the Macedonian area up there and problems that the people were going through. But he went down there to Rome, but he arrived there sick. It took him some time to recover of whatever the sickness was. And when he arrived, he also brought with him a gift, probably money from the Philippian church because that gift is also mentioned in the Philippian epistle as well.

By the time that Epaphroditus recovered from his illness, it was probably at least nine months, it is figured later, which would bring us somewhere around 63 AD, somewhere in that neighborhood. Now these dates are always approximate. We do not know exactly what we are dealing with. But Paul wrote then Philippians, and Epaphroditus then delivered it back to the Philippian church.

Now something was happening in the court areas of Rome about this time that seemingly was not too good for the apostle Paul. Number one was that when Julius (remember he was the centurion who brought Paul into Rome) arrived there, he turned him over to a man by the name of Burrus. This man is mentioned in some of the secular writings and we find from people like Tacitus. He was the head of the Praetorian Guard and he was very highly esteemed because of his character, that he was a fair, just, evenhanded individual with, I guess for those times, of a wonderful disposition. And apparently he had such a reputation and quite a great deal of influence that when he died in 63 AD, apparently just about the time that Paul was sending off the letter to the Philippians, and when Burrus died, that it was marked as being a black day in the history of Rome and the judicial system under Nero really began to unravel.

Nero had not yet reached the stage of insanity that he did a little bit later on. But he was beginning to unravel. I did not read it in these books here, but I have read somewhere along the line that it is thought that he had syphilis and that it was beginning to attack his brain and that it was largely responsible for the insanity that he showed later on, that his mind was falling apart.

It was also at this period of time that Nero was somehow seduced, convinced, however you might want to say it, into marrying Poppaea. Now, this Poppaea was a real whiz bang. I mean she was number one on the court intrigue list. And she somehow or another managed to convince Nero to divorce his bride. Her name was Octavia, a young woman, apparently a beautiful woman but Poppaea was not bad looking herself. And Poppaea, I think Nero must have felt that this gal is going to get me further so I am going to hitch my wagon to her star, as if he needed any more than he did. Well, Poppaea managed, again by intrigue, to have Octavia put to death. And then after she was put to death, as if that was not bad enough, she ordered her head cut off and brought to Rome where she gloated over her triumph over Octavia because now Poppaea had tremendous influence in Rome because of her position.

Now this is what made it bad for Paul. She converted to Judaism. Can you imagine that? She converted to Judaism, which meant that if the Jews played their cards right they had an ally as close to Nero as you could possibly get. And I am sure that, understanding what I read about the court systems, that

those people were not above bribery and they would play every angle that they possibly could to get the verdict to fall in their direction. And if they could just get to Poppaea, they could get the Nero. And whether or not they had a case as far as the courts were concerned, they would have a case through the intrigues of the court and the thing would be cut and dried.

Well, we find that she was unsuccessful if she did try. And it is very likely that God just made it impossible for her to do anything to influence because He had things yet for Paul to do. Because though Paul was confined, Paul was running the ship from his cell. Now, can you imagine? It is very unlikely that Paul had the same guard all the time. It is very likely that they had a shift just like they do today which lasted 8, 10 hours or whatever, and then they were replaced by another guard. He would spend 8 or 10 hours and then another guard, you see, and those men had to have time off from time to time, they had other responsibilities to do. And so it is very likely that Paul had a constant stream of centurions coming in there, whatever they were, centurions or speculatories coming in there and being chained to him.

Now, what was the influence that Paul had over them? What was it like? One day they might have been out there cutting Octavia's head off and the next day they were in there with him. One day they were out there cleaning up a riot inside of Rome and the next day they were in there listening to Paul preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God to a group of people that had been brought in for that purpose. And there he was gesturing around, arms going up and down, and that would have been interesting. It must not have intimidated Paul in any way, shape, or form.

There are four writings from that period of time and shortly after. There was Clement, there was a thing called Muratori's Canon. There is a writing by Eusebius and then Chrysostom. All of these men write that Paul was liberated sometime around 64 AD. That Paul was liberated, that he did preach in Spain, that he was returned to Rome, imprisoned, and then put to death by Nero sometime around 68 AD. Now that is just roughly what he did.

Let me give you a few more specifics. If Paul was the author of Hebrews, whoever the author was, was free. Now, nobody knows for sure whether Paul was the author. I would say that the church would say that he was the author though he may not have written it. I mean, he was not the actual

person who wrote it down, but rather that it was dictated and written by someone else or that the letter was written from Paul's notes.

Now, is there any other indication that he was free? Well, the answer to that is yes, and it is picked up again from a little bit of secular history, a little bit of church history, and again from the Bible. Now, let me give you roughly what his itinerary was from the time that he was set free sometime in 64 AD. He did not go straight to Spain but rather it went like this: that he went from Rome to Macedonia, up to the churches around Philippi, from Philippi to Asia Minor to the western end of Turkey. That he visited the churches there in that area—Ephesus, Colossae, Laodicea, Smyrna, Pergamos, those churches in that area. And then he went back to Rome and from Rome on to Spain. Now all that was done before 64 AD was over.

Now he went back. He might have stayed in Spain for quite a while. But according to the sources, that he was there before 64 AD was over. He left Spain, went back to Ephesus. Now, by this time, it was around 66 AD. And incidentally by this time, Paul may have been somewhere near 65 to 70 years old. He was no spring chicken and he was undoubtedly worn down from the rigors of all of the things that he had gone through. Very difficult thing for him to do because traveling was so difficult and he was getting so old. So back to Ephesus. From there, his steps are able to be traced to Macedonia again. Now, it was from here that he wrote I Timothy. He wrote I Timothy, it was written to Timothy, but where was Timothy? Timothy was pastoring the Ephesus church.

From Macedonia, he went to Crete and there he made connections with Titus. Then he left Crete and went back to Ephesus and it was from Ephesus that he wrote Titus. From Ephesus his steps are then traced into Greece. He is heading west again and on to a city called Nicopolis. If you will, turn to Titus 3, verse 12,

Titus 3:12-13 When I send Artemas to you, or Tychicus, be diligent to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. [This was the winter of 67 AD and he adds to] Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing.

It was in Nicopolis that he wrote II Timothy. Now turn to II Timothy. It is here that things begin to really unravel for the apostle Paul because it is very likely that it was here that Paul was taken prisoner. There were, I am sure, enemies virtually everywhere he went. But the track runs out on him here. This mention of Nicopolis is the last biblical reference to him, that is, chronologically.

Nobody knows for sure whether he wrote II Timothy from Nicopolis or Rome. There are arguments either way. My own personal feeling is that it was probably written from Rome just from some of the internal evidence here. But it is very likely that he was taken to Rome either immediately upon capture or very shortly thereafter. Now, normally, one would not traverse the Mediterranean in the winter time. However, from Nicopolis, which is in western Greece, over to Italy would have been a relatively safe journey and it is very likely that he was taken across the Adriatic Sea there, just distance of about 100 miles or so in the winter time and taken into Rome and arrived there by late winter 68 AD.

It is interesting in that light to read in chapter 4 of II Timothy. You can see what is on Paul's mind by this time.

II Timothy 4:6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

He knew the end was near and that the likelihood that he was going to be acquitted the second time was extremely small because things had changed radically in Rome, even from the four or five years since he was acquitted. He says,

II Timothy 4:7-11 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. [So he tells Timothy, who is over in Ephesus] Be diligent to come to me quickly [he knew the time was short]; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

Remember, he wrote Titus to come to him in Nicopolis because he was going to winter there. So apparently Titus made it, but Titus was no longer with him now that he was in Rome.

II Timothy 4:11-13 Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments.

Now, what were those parchments? Were they some of his letters? Possibly. Maybe they were things that Peter had written. Maybe he wanted to go over them. I do not know.

II Timothy 4:14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm.

Is this the same Alexander that is mentioned back in the book of Acts, in Ephesus? You know, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Is this the same man? Nobody knows. It was a common name and it is not likely. But it is interesting that the man had virtually the same trade as Alexander did in Ephesus. But maybe it was the same person and maybe this was the man who put the finger on Paul in Nicopolis.

II Timothy 4:14-18 Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he greatly resisted our words. [It is interesting verse 16 shows us that the situation had progressed where Paul had his first hearing.] At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it may it not be charged against them. [Now, why nobody was there? Nobody knows. He said they forsook him.] But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. [You can see what he expected. He expected to go into the Circus there to be torn asunder by lions.] And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His heavenly kingdom. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!

Now, what had happened in Rome? Why was the situation so different? Well, it was largely because of Nero's continued erosion of his sanity. Things were becoming undone from the top all the way down and when the leadership goes to pot, the people do not have the right kind of example. And when they do not have the right kind of example, laws are not enforced, the judicial system is falling apart, everything is totally corrupt. There was no hope that he was going to be able to get any kind of a fair trial.

At some time during that period of time came the well known burning of Rome. Apparently there is meager evidence, but some evidence that seems to indicate that Nero himself was responsible for the burning of Rome. But regardless of whether he was or not, he certainly took advantage of the situation. He had to blame someone and so the Christians apparently were the scapegoats upon whom it was blamed. Now that gave rise to all kinds of punishments, retribution, against the Christians. Now, what I am going to read to you here is from Tacitus, from his annals and what he had to write—this is a Roman writing about Roman history. He says this,

We give the well known passage from a popular translation, "But neither these religious ceremonies nor the liberal donations of the prince could efface from the minds of men the prevailing opinion that Rome was set on fire by his own order. [Nero's] The infamy of that horrible transaction still adhered to him. In order if possible to remove the imputation, he determined to transfer the guilt to others. For this purpose he punished with exquisite torture a race of men detested for their evil practices [Christians] by vulgar appellation, commonly called Christians. The name was derived from Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius suffered under Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea. By that event, the sect of which he was the founder, received a blow which for a time checked the growth of a dangerous superstition. But it revived soon after and spread with recruited vigor, not only in Judea, the soil that gave it birth, but even in the city of Rome, the common sink into which everything infamous and abominable flows like a torrent from all quarters of the world.

Tacitus had a good opinion of Rome, did he not?

Nero proceeded with his usual artifice. He found a set of profligate and abandoned wretches who were induced to confess themselves guilty, and on the evidence of such men, a number of Christians were convicted, not indeed upon clear evidence of their having set the city on fire, but rather on account of their sullen hatred of the whole Roman race. They were put to death with exquisite cruelty and through their sufferings, Nero added mockery and derision. Some were covered with the skins of wild beasts and left to be devoured by dogs. Others were nailed to the cross. Numbers were burnt alive and many covered over with inflammable matter were lighted up when the day declined to serve as torches during the night. For the convenience of seeing this tragic spectacle, the emperor lent his own gardens. He added the sport of the Circus and assisted in person, sometimes driving a curicle and occasionally mixing with the rabble in his coachman's dress.

At length, the cruelty of these proceedings filled every breast with compassion. Humanity relented in favor of the Christians. The manners of that people were no doubt of a pernicious tendency and their crimes called for the hand of justice. But it was evident that they fell a sacrifice, not for the public good, but to glut the rage and cruelty of one man only.

It is an interesting indictment. But you see, that occurred just prior to the time that Paul arrived in Rome. And apparently the charge that was made against him was that he was the one who conspired to have the city burnt. Not that he was there while it burned, but as the ringleader of the group, he was the one who conspired and it was on his orders that this deed was done.

So late winter of 68 AD, by our calendar, he was already in Rome. By the time that he wrote II Timothy 4:16, he had already had his first hearing. And according to the tradition, Nero died sometime about the middle of 68 AD. The apostle Paul, according to the tradition, again, was martyred while Nero was still alive.

Now, Paul was a Roman citizen and because he was a Roman citizen, even though he was a Christian, he was not given the same kind of death as the Christians would have. The other Christians, the great bulk of them were

undoubtedly slaves or at the very least did not have citizenship and as such, they could be given the cruelest kind of death possible. But a Roman citizen was normally executed by decapitation.

There were two ways that it was done. The one way was that the person would be tied to a stake and then they would be beaten with rods. And then when the beating was finished, then it was finished off with the ax. The other way was that the beating with rods was eliminated altogether and the person simply was decapitated.

Nobody knows for sure which way it was done, the first or the second way. But the tradition has it that he was taken outside of the city and executed. And then one tradition says that he was buried at the same spot that he was executed. That is, the same general area. And the other has it that he was taken back into the city and buried in the catacombs. Nobody knows for sure which one was correct.

But I will bet you did not know that he did so much from the time that he got to Rome until the time that he was finally executed. It is fairly well documented from the Bible that Paul was very busy in that period between the end of his first imprisonment and his death. He wrote I and II Timothy and Titus. And in addition to that, it is felt that he at least dictated Hebrews and that it was written by Timothy and then very possibly put into its final form, with beautiful Greek, by Luke.

Now those things are all suppositions because nobody knows for sure. But there was hardly anybody that seems was better qualified to write Hebrews, or be the author of Hebrews, if not the actual writer than the apostle Paul.