

Acts of the Apostles
Luke, the beloved physician
Discussion Session 9
Chapters 25-28
Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible (pgs.)

Outline:

I. Home missions (Acts 1-12)

**The witness to the Jews in Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria.
Outstanding leader—Peter. Important city—Jerusalem.**

II. Foreign missions (acts 13-28)

**The witness to the Gentiles, to the “uttermost parts!” Outstanding
leader—Paul.**

Important cities—Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome.

Foreign Missions—

ACTS 13-28 Introduction to Paul’s Life

Birth:

A. Probably born about the same time as Jesus.

B. In Tarsus, capital of the province of Cilicia, in Asia Minor.

Family:

A. Jews from the tribe of Benjamin. (Saul may have been named for King Saul.)

B. Roman citizenship—Paul was free born. This citizenship meant he could never be crucified or scourged and could appeal to Rome for justice.

Education:

- A. In Tarsus he would receive the benefits of Greek culture. Tarsus was a famous university town and commercial center.
- B. At Jerusalem under Gamaliel, he received the finest Jewish training and became an outstanding Pharisee.

Conversion: -

On the road to Damascus about 36 AD.

Trips:

- A. To Cyprus and Asia Minor.....First Journey
- B. To Europe.....Second Journey
- C. To Asia Minor and Europe (especially Ephesus)....Third Journey
- D. To Rome.....Fourth Journey

Writings: -

Thirteen or fourteen important New Testament Epistles

Imprisonments:

- A. Arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem.
- B. Held as prisoner in Caesarea for two years.
- C. Taken to Rome where he remained in jail for two years.
- D. Temporarily released. E. In the Roman inner prison, he died a martyr under Nero

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, what a fascinating section of Scripture in these chapters, where Paul is accused, put on various trials, sent to various High Priests, a King, and finally Caesar himself. During this time, he is left in chains in prison for years, survives a shipwreck and a snake bite. But Lord, You were always in control, and Your plans and purposes were being worked out in the life of this faithful servant, for the furtherance of the gospel and for Your praise and glory. When my life seems to always be going in the wrong direction, help me to faithfully trust in You, as Paul did, and I pray You would use me in the furtherance of the gospel for Your praise and glory. In Jesus' name, AMEN.

“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.”

(Acts 25:12)

Discussion Questions:

1. Before whom did Paul next make a great speech? (25:23- 26:23) King Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, The whole Jewish Community.
2. What did Agrippa say of Paul's message? (26:28) ”Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”
3. What did Agrippa and Festus think of Paul? (26:31-32) They said that he has not done anything that warrants death or imprisonment. That he could have been set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar.

C. Journey to Rome

1. Which centurion guarded Paul? Julius
2. At which stop was Paul allowed to visit friends? When the landed at Sidon

3. To what place was the ship going on which they set sail at Myra? (27:5-6) Cilicia, and Pamphylia, Italy
4. At Fair Havens in Crete what suggestion or warning did Paul make? (27:8-12) "Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.
5. In what place did the crew prefer to spend the winter? (27:12) Phoenix
6. In trying to sail to this port what happened? (27:13-20) A wind of hurricane force, called a Northeaster, swept down the island. The ship was caught, thrown about, and destroyed, including the cargo that was on it.
7. What cheerful message did Paul have for those on ship? (27:22-26) "But I urge you keep your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed."
8. What did Paul say to the crew who tried to escape privately in the lifeboat? (27:30-32) "Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved."
9. How long were they driven by the storm? (27:27, 33) Fourteen days
10. How many were on the ship? (27:37) 276
11. How did the centurion guarding Paul save his life? (27:42-44) He ordered those who could swim to jump over board, and get to land first.
12. Where did they land? (28:1) (This is the same island as Malta today) Malta
13. What did the people of Melita think about Paul when he was bitten by the serpent? (28:1-4) They thought he was a murderer, who had escaped, and the goddess Justice had not let him live.
14. What did they think when he did not die? (27:5-6) He shook the snake off into the first, suffered no ill effects. They thought he would swell up, and suddenly die, but he nothing happened. That he was a God.
15. What miracle of healing did Paul perform on the island? Placed his hands, and healed a man of fever and dysentery.
16. How long did they stay at Melita? (28:11) three months

17. At which places did they stop before reaching Rome? **Syracuse_, Rhegium___, Puteoli_____**
18. How did the Christian brethren honor Paul? (28:14-15) **___They traveled far and wide to come and meet them. Allowed to live alone with a centurion guard._____**
19. To whom did Paul first present the gospel in Rome? (28:17) **___The Local Jewish Leaders_____**
20. When some did not believe to whom did Paul then present salvation? (28:28) **___The Gentiles_____**
21. How long did Paul teach and preach in Rome as a prisoner in his own hired house? **___Two years_____**

Letters written from Roman prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Letters written during temporary release from prison: 1 Timothy, Titus. Letters written during final imprisonment: 2 Timothy

THE UNFINISHED BOOK: Acts closes abruptly. The history of the church continues on. The heroes of the church and missions have each contributed their chapter and will continue to do so till God's mission plan for the world has been completed and Christ appears as ruler of all. (Matthew 24:14).

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for Paul who had such confidence and boldness to share those things concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that my life would be lived in such dedicated abandon to my Lord and Savior, and with Paul, may my life's cry be: "To live is Christ and to die is gain." In Jesus' name, AMEN.

"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."
(Acts 28:31)

Prayers of the People:

for Sherry Corner, Lonnie, Ariana, Veronica, Rudy, and Martha's Family, Dana Collins who is undergoing chemo, Deb, Alexis, Emelia, Josh, Dennis, Patrick and family, Candy and Al for safe travels.

For anyone who is suffering from addiction, illness, COVID-19, RSV, those who are grieving the loss of a loved one during this Christmas Season, those who are struggling with rejection, depression, oppression, or imprisonment, the poor, those who are persecuted for any unjust reason, those who hunger, those who have died of natural or unnatural causes.

We pray that you guide our countries leaders to be moral, upright, and forth standing in their office, and that you guide them and any leaders in the path that is pleasing and just to all parties, minority, or majority.

We also offer thanks for the gifts that you have given, and those you have promised in the coming days.

We thank you for the gift of the birth of Jesus, for the salvation of all humankind, that our works be pleasing and right in your eyes.

We also pray for the gift of the Virgin Mary, and sacrifices she made to raise Jesus for the salvation of the world.

Hail Mary- Prayer

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.

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Discussion Notes:

Festus availed himself of the opportunity to discuss Paul's case with King Agrippa who had come on a state visit to pay his respects to the governor on the occasion of his inauguration. Agrippa was accompanied by Bernice, his sister. The Pulpit Commentary explains about Agrippa that he was: “Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I. (Acts 12.), and consequently brother of Drusilla [Felix' wife] ... He was only seventeen at his father's death, and so not considered by Claudius a safe person to entrust his father's large dominions to. But he gave him Chalets, and afterwards, in exchange for it, other dominions. It was he who made Ismael the son of Phabi high priest, and who built the palace at Jerusalem which overlooked the temple, and gave great offence to the Jews. He was the last of the Herods, and reigned above fifty years. Bernice was his sister, but was thought to be living in an incestuous intercourse with him. She had been the wife of her uncle Herod, Prince of Chalets; and on his death lived with her brother. She then for a while became the wife of Polemo, King of Cicilia, but soon returned to Herod Agrippa. She afterwards became the mistress of Vespasian and of Titus in succession.”

The Herodian family was Edomite and had embraced Judaism. Agrippa, therefore, must have been thoroughly familiar with all things Jewish. The Jews, however, never accepted the Herods as genuine Jews and called them “half-Jews.” Bernice, being the daughter of Herod I, and therefore of the same family, was in the same category.

It is interesting to observe that Festus formulates the conflict between Paul and the Sanhedrin as being “about a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive.” We may be sure that the governor was aware of the fact that the controversy was not as to whether this “man named Jesus” had, according to Paul, never died but that it involved a resurrection from the dead. Evidently, in Festus’ philosophy there was no place for a resurrection, as there had been no place for it in the mind of philosophers at the Areopagus.⁴⁷⁴ This must also have been the reason for Festus’ interruption of Paul’s defense, in the next chapter, when he shouted: “You are out of your mind, Paul! Your great learning is driving you insane.” As noted earlier, some people observe death as a logical conclusion to life, where as Christians, we observe this as the start to a new journey into eternity. we observed earlier, we must conclude that some people do in fact consider death to be a logical conclusion to life, although everything in a human being shouts against this.

Agrippa knew of Christianity and its teaching. He may have also been very familiar with Paul and his role in the vast spread of Christianity, and his controversial ministry. Agrippa was prompted through his curiosity, to view Paul in a more understandable way. This same curiosity was demonstrated by his grandfather towards Jesus. We may assume that Agrippa was thoroughly familiar with the existence of Christianity and its doctrine. He probably also knew of Paul and his controversial ministry. His curiosity, which prompted him to want to see Paul, is, therefore, understandable. His grandfather, Herod Antipas, had shown the same curiosity about Jesus.⁴⁷⁵

The problem that persisted was that Paul was still going to be sent to Rome, with a letter which stated the reasons or accusations that were being put against him, however, as far as the Roman government was concerned he had not committed any crimes. Later, Christians refused to believe an aura of divinity towards the emperor, which would constitute a

charge great enough, to prescribe the death penalty. However, Rome had not yet arrived at that point, or conclusion.

The problem remained that Paul needed to be sent to Rome with an accompanying letter, stating the accusations against him, and as far as the Roman government was concerned, there were none. A few years later, the Christians refusal to ascribe an aura of divinity to the emperor would constitute enough of a charge to warrant the death penalty. But Rome had not arrived at that point yet. The NIV renders the Greek word kurios: “His majesty.” Older versions use the word “Lord.” It implies divine authority. Previous emperors had refused the title, but Nero, evidently, enjoyed the honor given to him.

As we reach chapter twenty-six, Luke continues to describe Paul’s defense in detail before the governor, the king, and Bernice. Paul’s motioning with his shackled hands accentuates the paradox of his outward fetters (shackles for the feet) and inward liberty. Paul speaks freely, as if he isn’t bound in chains. Paul later writes to Timothy saying: “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained. The passage reads like this:

2nd Timothy 2:8-13

⁸Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel,⁹ for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God’s word is not chained.¹⁰ Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.

¹¹Here is a trustworthy saying:

*If we died with him,
we will also live with him;*

*¹²if we endure,
we will also reign with him.*

*If we disown him,
he will also disown us;*

¹³if we are faithless,

*he remains faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.*

The Greek word, translated “defense” is *apologeomai* of which our word “apology” is derived. In modern use, the word has acquired the meaning of confessing a wrong and asking for forgiveness. But in the realm of theology it means an exposition of religious truth. The word is, therefore, very appropriate in describing Paul’s action at this point. The apostle was not merely defending himself or proving his innocence, he presented the truth of the Gospel.

His introduction demonstrates sound psychological insight. His words flattered the king, but not in a smooth talking manner as Tertullus when he tried to curry (to seek or gain favor by flattery or attention) Felix’ favor. Agrippa was, in fact, well informed about Judaism and Christianity. Paul established, first of all, the fact that he was a Pharisee and considered himself still to be one. He demonstrated that the belief of the Pharisees was rooted in the foundations of Judaism as it took seriously the historical promises of God to the Patriarchs. Because of Jesus’ controversy with the Pharisees and our Lord’s sharp condemnation of their practices, we sometimes get the mistaken impression that their doctrine was amiss. But Jesus never condemned their doctrine. He said to His disciples: “You must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.”⁴⁷⁷

In spite of Paul’s assertion that the resurrection of the dead, as exemplified in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is the essence of God’s promise to the fathers, we must admit that the resurrection was a hidden treasure in the Old Testament prophecies. It was not until Jesus came and broke the code in which the truth was written and “He opened [the disciples’] minds so they could understand the Scriptures,”⁴⁷⁸ that the Holy Spirit could place this truth in broad daylight.

In emphasizing that the resurrection is the core of God’s promises, Paul distances himself from the doctrine of the Sadducees but he also condemns the practice of the Pharisees, who confessed the doctrine but

did not live up to it. Admitting the reality of Jesus' resurrection would, of course, be a confession of their guilt for His crucifixion. In a sense, the Sadducees were more straightforward in that they adhered to their confession (or the lack of it) than the Pharisees, who were said to believe in the resurrection but would not admit to the possibility of it. The conflicts and complications of the Jewish mind can, ultimately, be traced back to the deviousness of the human heart. In the words of Jeremiah's prophecy: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"⁴⁷⁹

Apparently, Paul does not make here a direct reference to the Jewish expectation of the coming of the Messiah, but he refers to the Jewish hope of a physical resurrection for all men. The reason for this approach is logical if we consider that Paul wanted to appeal to the pagan part of his audience. Everybody accepts the fact that man must die. The question is whether death is the end of man's existence. If it is, there is no judgment and, consequently, no need for moral restraint. For the same reason, Paul had spoken to Festus about "righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come." *At this point in the message, Festus replied that is enough! Because of his own insecurities with the actual truth of the message about personal and moral restraint.*⁴⁸⁰ To most pagans the hope of the resurrection must have been, at best, a gray area, but for the Jews it was, with the exception of the Sadducees, a vital part of their religion and their nationhood. The hope of the resurrection when taken to its logical conclusion leads eventually to the recognition of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. When Paul writes to the Philippians: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead,"⁴⁸¹ he expresses, basically, a deeply held Jewish conviction. Jesus appealed to this belief when He stated: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."⁴⁸² And that the resurrection of the dead was vitally connected to the character of God, is clear from Jesus' rebuttal of the Sadducees' error: "But about the resurrection of the dead-have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."⁴⁸³

Another interesting part in Paul's speech is the expression "our twelve tribes." We know that the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom, which were taken into Assyrian captivity, never returned to their homeland. Some members of the ten tribes, however, moved to Judea in order to worship the Lord in Jerusalem. When Jeroboam initiated his idol worship in the Northern Kingdom, we read: "Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam son of Solomon three years, walking in the ways of David and Solomon during this time."⁴⁸⁴ At a later point in history, some Israelites also responded to Hezekiah's invitation to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. We read: "Some men of Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem."⁴⁸⁵ At the birth of Christ, we find in the temple "Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher."⁴⁸⁶ Paul's wording, "our twelve tribes," therefore, was more than a Jewish ideal expression of a reality that was no more. It may also have been, however, a statement of faith to express the conviction that God's plan with Israel had not been cancelled. Jesus expresses this in the words: "You who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."⁴⁸⁷ And James sends his epistle "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations."⁴⁸⁸

At this point, Paul must have looked around at the rest of the audience and not only addressed King Agrippa. His rhetorical question: "Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?" touches upon the essence of all faith and unbelief. Barnes' Notes suggests the reading of these words: "What! Is it to be thought a thing incredible...?" We return again to the question whether death is a logical conclusion of life. It is an established fact that all living beings die, but is it logical? Death is a logical consequence of sin, but not of life itself. That God would have created life in order to destroy it makes no sense. We can understand why a person who separates himself from the source of life by an act of the will must die, but we cannot say that this makes death a logical conclusion of life as God created it. The very fact that every living being fears death proves the point. Immortality definitely makes more sense than mortality.

The above does not prove that there is a resurrection of the dead, but it lays a foundation for the possibility of a reversal of the process of death. The question, therefore, is not whether resurrection occurs but if it is a possibility. In view of the existence of a God who is the omnipotent Creator of life, the answer must be: "Yes!" The fact that we may not have seen a resurrection is no proof of its impossibility.

Paul, cleverly, moves from the question about the resurrection of the dead in general to the resurrection of Jesus. **He did not persecute Christians because of his conviction about the resurrection but because he believed that Jesus was a fraud and that He was not resurrected. Meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus changed all this.

**NOTE: In today's society, many people find it hard to believe that there was a man who performed all of the miracles, healed these people with just a simple laying of the hands, and even just by speaking phrases. It is hard for them to fathom this conflict, because there is not physical proof, that this happened, "just a book, that could have been written by any person when they were drunk, or things that are completely, made up. "

It is important to remember that some of the instances that are in the Bible are mere stories, and testaments through a strong belief and trust system, which is shown through the devotion of those who are in the stories and passages that we read.

We read Paul's encounter with Christ, in the book of Acts three times. Two of these encounters do not include details that the third does. The words that are missing from the third instance are "It is hard for you to kick the goads." This seems to have been inserted by the apostle to clarify to the Gentiles the reason for his work and to appeal to the conscience of the hearers. In his defense in front of the masses at the temple square, Paul retells what he heard when he fell into a trance when he was praying at the temple. The crowd was not happy with his account, and interrupted him, when he made stating that he was told to go to the Gentiles. These people were viewed as second class citizens, below the Jews. Paul was not able to even finish the sentence: "to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of since and a place

among those who were sanctified by faith in me.” These words were spoken by the apostle frequently. Just as the words “I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds” are also frequently spoken. These words in the latter sentence are spoken with intent to reach the conscience of those who are present.

It's important to keep in mind that this account is much shorter than the original address or speech. But Paul possibly elaborated on Christ's suffering by referring to His crucifixion by the Roman authorities. Peter and the other apostles did not refrain from telling the people who had gathered in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost that they were guilty of the Messiah's death, THEIR MESSIAH. Even though the minds of the unconverted deny the crucifixion, even the Koran denies it.

Paul's passionate speech evokes a violent reaction from the governor. He interrupts Paul with a shout: “You are crazy!” giving as his personal opinion a medical diagnosis that an excess of study must have overloaded the apostle's brain. Since Paul had not made any particular display of learning in his defense, Festus' reaction must have been based on his own emotional response to Paul's message. Festus is a typical example of a man who uses his own understanding as the absolute and ultimate measure of judgment for things that are beyond his grasp. Human logic, when used as a defense mechanism against the truth of God, leads to complete moral failure. Festus understood more than he wanted to admit to himself. Paul's mention of darkness and light, of Satan and God, of repentance of sin, was too close for Festus' comfort. If he admitted that Paul was right in his statements, he would have to draw the consequences for his personal life. The easiest defense for the governor was to dismiss Paul's words as insanity, making Festus the man with the sound mind. The fact, however, that the governor shouted his words indicates that he felt the soundness of his own mind threatened.

Paul's retort is a marvel of politeness and restraint. He addresses the governor as “Your Excellency,” and says that his words give rather proof of the sanity of his mind than of the contrary. Addressing again King Agrippa, Paul appeals to the king's knowledge of the historical facts of salvation. “It was not done in a corner.” Agrippa must have been familiar with the report of Jesus' ministry and death sentence, as well as with the

role his father and grandfather had played in the persecution of Christ and His followers. Paul's words contain a hidden reminder of the king's painful heritage. Since Agrippa believed in the Old Testament Scriptures, it would have been a logical step for him to accept the Gospel message.

The NIV renders vs. 28: "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" This is probably more correct than the rendering of the older versions: "You almost persuade me to become a Christian."⁴⁹² The paraphrase of TLB: "With trivial proofs like these, you expect me to become a Christian?" strays farther from the Greek text but it probably conveys the meaning quite correctly. Scholars have argued for centuries whether Agrippa was serious or ironic and whether Paul understood the king's words correctly or reacted to them incorrectly.

Paul's reply to the king's ironic or serious statement, places the situation in the courtroom in a heavenly perspective. Agrippa and Bernice had come to the room, in Luke's words, "with great pomp." Agrippa would have expected Paul to wish he could trade places with the king. After all, who would not wish to be a king? The desire to trade places with Paul had, obviously, never entered the king's mind. Paul's exchange offer, therefore, must have evoked a strong emotional reaction. On the one hand, the king must have immediately brushed aside the thought of giving up his crown and becoming a follower of Jesus of Nazareth. On the other hand, he may have realized that the great pomp merely served to cover the emptiness of his soul. The question begs itself as to who the real king in this scene was. Spurgeon's statement still stands: "If God calls you to be a missionary, don't stoop to be a king!"

Paul's defense began and ended with the rattling of his chains. He had lifted up his shackled hands as he started to speak and, not without a humorous sparkle in his eye, he must have shown his handcuffs as he announced to his audience that he was praying for their conversion. **But Paul did not wish his listeners to bear his chains. They had their own chains that would be taken from them if they chose to enter into the wonderful freedom of Jesus Christ.** There is no mention that any of them did.

The conclusion of the court was that Paul was innocent. I don't know if the governor would have the authority to cancel Paul's appeal to the

emperor. The question, evidently, never came up. As far as the Roman government was concerned, sending Paul to Rome was an expedient way to solve a controversy. The actual reason Paul went to Rome was because the King of kings had told him: "Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome."⁴⁹³

B. Reception of the Gospel in Rome 27:1-28:31

For the third time in this book, Luke introduces himself into the narrative.⁴⁹⁴ Luke and Aristarchus had, obviously, been with Paul throughout the whole period of his imprisonment in Caesarea. It does not appear that Aristarchus, who had been in Paul's company since the riot in Ephesus, traveled with the apostle as a prisoner. But, in writing from Rome to the church in Colosse, Paul calls him, "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus."⁴⁹⁵ It may be that Aristarchus' imprisonment did not start until he was in Rome.

Luke's nautical expertise is very obvious from his description of the sea voyage and the details of the shipwreck. For us who live in the age of jetliners, it would be interesting to put ourselves in the sandals of a first century person who must travel from Caesarea to Rome. The trip by plane would, nowadays, take less than two hours; Luke is speaking in terms of months. Even a present day boat trip would not take longer than a few days.

The first leg of the journey was made in a coastal vessel that took the prisoners, the other passengers, and the soldiers from Caesarea to Myra. The trip was continued in another boat that passed Fair Havens and was driven by a storm in a westerly direction until it shipwrecked at the island of Malta, where the company was forced to spend the winter months. From there a ship took the group to Puteoli from where the rest of the journey to Rome was made overland.

Paul, with some other prisoners, were handed over to a Roman officer by the name of Julius. The NIV informs us that he was a centurion who belonged to the Imperial Regiment. It appears that Paul immediately established a friendly relationship with the commanding officer, because as soon as the ship moors at Sidon, Paul gets permission to go on land

and visit friends who provide for his needs. Luke uses the medical terms *epimeleia tugchano*, which can be rendered “obtain care.”

Although it was still summer, the westerly winds made it already impossible to make a beeline to Myra, by passing south of Cyprus. The ship therefore followed the coastline of Asia Minor rather closely, passing Cyprus on the north. In Myra the company changed ships. Myra seems to have been an important harbor at that time where larger cargos from Egypt and Cyprus came to load and unload. The place acquired fame, several centuries later, as the seat of St. Nicolas who served as bishop and was martyred there and who later found a place in our present day Christmas celebrations.

Luke’s very detailed description of the voyage and its problems is interesting from a historical viewpoint but it does not give us much food for spiritual reflection. Some commentators, legitimately, see Paul’s passage to Rome as a picture of the Christian life in which “God has not promised us smooth sailing but a safe arrival.” One striking feature of the trip with its difficulties is that God intended Paul to go to Rome to give his testimony before the emperor. Yet, the Lord did not clear the way for the apostle to have a safe journey. It seems that the opposition of all the elements of nature was demonically inspired. God allowed Satan to lash out against His servant and bring him, as well as his fellow travelers, within an inch of their lives. We can often determine the importance of our acts by the amount of spiritual opposition we encounter. Satan frequently understands more of God’s strategy in and through our lives than we do ourselves. He shoots at those who are on important missions.

Another fact worth noticing is the importance of the role Paul plays on the ship. As we have seen, he immediately made a favorable impression upon Julius, the commanding officer of the guard. This pagan soldier must have seen the difference between the apostle’s attitude and that of the other prisoners. Paul did not fight his captivity. He wore his chains as a free man, knowing that he was not a prisoner of the Roman government but of Jesus Christ. Accepting our adverse circumstances as ordained by God is the best and only way for us to bear them. Paul practiced what he had preached to the Corinthians, that: “he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord’s freedman; similarly, he who was a free

man when he was called is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." 496

A gentle south wind lured the ship out of the haven. Had this wind continued the ship would have reached Phoenix within a few hours. But as soon as the vessel is at sea a hurricane picked up the boat and forced it away from the island. Since this was a wind of hurricane force and it pushed the ship away from the southern shore of the island of Crete, it is likely that it came over the 7000 feet high mountains and beat upon the Mediterranean. For about two weeks the ship was in the power of this storm till it was smashed to pieces at the island of Malta. Luke's graphic description of the ship's helpless drift to its doom is very impressive. A twenty-four hour cloud coverage made any attempt to navigation impossible. The darkness at night and the gloom by day created an atmosphere of panic and hopelessness that affected everybody, except the apostle Paul. He was the only person who knew where they were going. His Lord had told him that he would go to Rome, and he knew that he must be going in that direction and that he would arrive there. As far as the purpose of the voyage for the ship owners was concerned, everything was lost. They lost their cargo, the ship's tackle and, ultimately the ship itself. Paul, who was not making the journey to sell anything upon arrival, had not lost anything. Gains and losses are always closely connection to the goals we have set for our lives.

This was not all; Paul knew he would arrive safely in Rome, because the Lord had told him so. But God did more for him than spare his own life. Obviously as an answer to prayer, God gave him graciously the lives of all those who were sailing with him. If you want to travel safely, take someone with you who prays! Matthew Henry's Commentary makes the beautiful observation: "Harm and loss in the world, if sanctified to us, may be truly said to be gain; for if they wean us from present things, and awaken us to think of a future state, we are truly gainers by them."

The comparison with the storm that caught the ship on which Jonah tried to flee from the presence of the Lord forces itself upon us. It happened on the same Mediterranean Sea and it may have been the same kind of storm. The differences, however, are obvious. Jonah's storm raged because of his disobedience; Paul's storm because of his obedience. Jonah's ship sustained no significant damage, Paul's vessel shipwrecked.

Jonah slept through the storm, Paul was awake. But in both storms, God was, ultimately, glorified. We are reminded of Psalm 107, in which the poet states: "Others went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the LORD, his wonderful deeds in the deep. For he spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunken men; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and he guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders."⁴⁹⁷ Paul, undoubtedly, knew this psalm and it may have come to his mind.

The terrible experience began on the day of the Jewish fast, the Day of Atonement. God asked the people of Israel to abstain from food for one day in order to humble themselves before Him on account of their sins. During this storm, Satan saw to it that the people on board of this doomed ship did not eat for two full weeks. Fasting, however, is a proven means for the defeat of the devil.⁴⁹⁸ Paul's breaking of Satan's fast served as an object lesson to the worn out crew and passengers of the ship. His simple act of publicly taking a piece of bread and asking God's blessing upon the food broke the ban of fear and greatly encouraged everybody. They all knew he had been right about the storm, so they believed he must be right about their salvation also.

This happened as the ship approached the coast of the island of Malta. The NIV speaks of the Adriatic Sea, but technically, Malta is situated in the Mediterranean. The sailors may have thought they were in the Adriatic, not having been able to determine their true position by the stars. Barnes' Notes explains: "This sea is situated between Italy and Dalmatia, now called the Adriatic Gulf. But among the ancients the name was given not only to that gulf, but to the whole sea lying between Greece, Italy, and Africa, including the Sicilian and Ionian Sea. It is evident from the narrative that they were not in the Adriatic Gulf, but in the vicinity of Malta."

Luke's description of the shipwreck is full of technical terms that have confused interpreters throughout the ages. Whether the rudders were cut off, or the anchors, and whether the main sail was hoisted or the smaller one, is of little purpose to our study. Some of the sailors decided to run for their lives instead of staying with the ship as long as they could, which is proper procedure for sailors. Paul reported their deceptive maneuvers to the Roman officer who directed his men to prevent the deserters from fleeing by cutting the ropes of the lifeboats. Whatever was done to the ship did not achieve the goal of having her run on the beach, which seems to have been the captain's plan. The vessel ran aground on a sandbar and began to break apart under the pressure of the waves that were swept up by the gale.

The last chapter of this book begins on the island of Malta and ends in Rome. The survivors of the shipwreck spent three months on the island, during which the Lord confirmed Paul's ministry of the Gospel by allowing him to have a ministry of healing. We find no record of the establishment of a church, or even of Paul's preaching, although it would be hard to imagine that he would not have given his testimony about Christ. Luke mainly highlights the miraculous aspects of Paul's work. There may have been a language barrier which complicated communications. The Pulpit Commentary explains: "The population, however, was Phoenician or Punic, and probably knew little Greek or Latin." The NIV designates the inhabitants as "the islanders." The Greek uses the word barbaroi, from which our word "barbarians" is derived. To the Greek, anybody who did not speak Greek was called barbaros. It is believed that these natives were descendants of Phoenicians.

The first miracle described is Paul's own healing. Immediately upon arrival on the beach, an incident occurs that establishes Paul's reputation as more than a mere mortal. The survivors were, of course, drenched and shivering and the natives of the island had made a bonfire for them. We do not know if Paul was the only one of the newly arrived who made himself useful in gathering firewood. Luke may have singled him out because of the incident with the viper. It may be, however, that Paul set the example as he had done on the ship when he ate bread in front of everybody and encouraged the others to follow his example.

We must not read too much in the incident with the snake. It is true that a serpent in Scripture represents Satan and that he did not want Paul to arrive in Rome. But to see a parallel between this incident and the temptation of Eve pushes Bible interpretation beyond the limits of what is reasonable. The almost nonchalant way in which Paul treats the snakebite is an indication of his faith in the Lord's promise that he would go to Rome and stand before the emperor. The reaction of the bystanders to the incident is interesting; they first label Paul as a murderer to whom justice is meted out and then the pendulum of their opinion swings to the other extreme and they believe that he is a god. The fact that there is truth in both extremes of these beliefs must have been beyond their comprehension. Paul's faith may have been boosted by Jesus' promise to His disciples: "They will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."⁴⁹⁹

Publius, who was probably the tribal representative of the Roman government, invited the survivors of the shipwreck to his estate and gave them hospitality for three days, after which, possibly other accommodations for the rest of the winter were found. Whether only a small group was invited, which included Paul, Luke and, probably, the Roman officer, Julius, or all 276 survivors, is not clear.

The miracle of Paul's healing of Publius' father is the only divine healing in the New Testament that is authenticated by a medical person. Luke diagnosed the man's sickness as fever and dysentery. Paul first prays and then places his hands upon the patient. This indicates that God had given Paul the spiritual gift of healing. The hand in which the viper had fastened its fangs was the hand that became the hand of healing. It has been observed that both parts of Jesus' promise about signs that would accompany the preaching of the Gospel are vindicated here: "They will pick up snakes with their hands; ... they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."⁵⁰⁰ This second miracle opened the way for the healing of all the sick on the island. That winter on Malta became a spiritual springtime. It seems impossible that this would not have been backed up by a life changing work by the Holy Spirit in the souls of the Maltese. After all: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"⁵⁰¹ At the same time, God used Paul's ministry to the sick to provide for the physical needs of the group, who had lost

everything in the wreck, so that at the time of their departure they were well provided for.

The ship sailed from Malta to Syracuse, a port on the island of Sicily, touched the toe of the Italian mainland at Rhegium, and ended its journey at Puteoli. There, the party spent a whole week. It may be that Julius had personal reasons to spend to linger there, or that he consented to Paul's request to spend time with a group of Christians at that place. Since the remainder of the trip had to be done overland, there was no particular hurry to continue. The Christians in Puteoli may have been people who heard the Gospel from those who had attended the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem on the day the church of Jesus Christ was born. Or they may have been the fruit of the testimony of some of the Jerusalem Christian who moved there when the persecution broke out.

Word of Paul's arrival in Italy reached the Christian in Rome before the apostle got there. They sent out a welcoming committee, which met him and his party at the Forum of Appius, some forty-three miles south of Rome. This was one of the stopping places on the Appian Way, as was the Three Taverns, ten miles further up the road. These rest stops are also referred to in ancient classic literature.

Approaching Rome, Paul is overwhelmed by the realization that a dream is becoming reality. No one knows exactly how the Gospel had reached Rome at such an early date. There is no record of any apostolic activity in the city before Paul's arrival, apart from the "visitors from Rome," Luke mentions as being present on the day of Pentecost.⁵⁰² Several years earlier, Paul had written his famous Epistle to the Romans, in which he expressed the desire to meet them. We read: "God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be opened for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong."⁵⁰³ And elsewhere in the same epistle: "But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to see you ... so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and together with you be refreshed."⁵⁰⁴

Upon Paul's meeting with these people he had longed to see, Luke records: "At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged." These few words give us insight into the depth of Paul's paradoxical emotions and into both the strength and weakness of his faith. The fact that the apostle was encouraged indicates that he needed encouragement. The long journey must have been emotionally and physically wearing on him. Being a prisoner of the Roman government was not a sinecure, even if one is a prisoner of Jesus Christ at the same time. Paul's encounter with the Christians of Rome must have choked him up. He would need this encouragement to face the opposition that would face him in the city later on.

In Rome, Paul was allowed and able to rent private quarters, which gave him a certain amount of liberty under the guard of a Roman soldier, although, according to vs. 20, he remained cuffed to his guard day and night. Since the guard was changed ever so often, the apostle must have had ample opportunity to present the message of salvation in Jesus Christ to a large number of his majesty's warriors. The words: "It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain" could be construed to merely refer to his being a prisoner, without being physically shackled to a soldier, but the context seems to rule this out. This must be the reason that he called the Jewish leaders to his house instead of going to the synagogue. Some scholars believe that the Jews in Rome were not allowed to build a synagogue. The fact that there was again a Jewish congregation in Rome indicates that the previous eviction of all Jews by the Emperor Claudius had been rescinded. Bringing a Roman soldier into the Sabbath service would have been considered improper.

Barely three days after moving into his apartment, Paul asked for the representatives of the Jews living in Rome to meet with him. If these "three days" are calculated according to the Jewish time reckoning, the time may even have been less than 48 hours. The first thing Paul wanted to ascertain was whether the Jews in Rome were in any way prejudiced against him, as the Jews in Asia Minor had been. When it appears that they knew about Christianity but had no information about Paul and his ministry, the air is cleared for his presentation of the Gospel.

Paul explains in a delicate way that his appeal to Caesar does not imply an accusation against the Jews in Jerusalem or anywhere else. In view of

the difficult status of the Jews in Rome, it was important to explain that the apostle's arrival would not compromise their position. Paul explains that his appeal to Caesar was only made for the salvation of his own life. One important truth, that had been the overriding motivation for all Paul's recent actions, is left out, namely the vision of Jesus in which he was told that he should go to testify in Rome.⁵⁰⁵

Paul must have known, better than we do nowadays, whether his audience was unprejudiced or reluctant to hear. But this did not change his commitment to preach the Gospel. He had earlier written in his Epistle to the Romans: "I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome."⁵⁰⁶

Paul seems to have had only one day to expound the Gospel to his fellow Jews in Rome and he, obviously, made the most of it by preaching a one-day-long sermon to them.

Some scholars believe that this meeting did not take place in the house Paul rented, where he would spend the next two years. The Greek uses the word *xenia*, which is derived from a word meaning "hospitality." The same word is found in the apostle's letter to Philemon, where we read: "And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers."⁵⁰⁷ Others, however, believe this to be the same place as Paul's own rented house, mentioned in vs. 20.

We would have wished that Luke had elaborated on the contents of Paul's discourse of that day. The core of his message is, however, not difficult to reconstruct if we read the epistles and the few sermons the apostle preached in synagogues, recorded in this book.

The Jewish concept of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the coming of the Messiah was mainly derived from Daniel's prophecy. In one of his visions Daniel recorded: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an

everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”⁵⁰⁸ Jesus Himself clearly established this link with Daniel’s prophecy by calling Himself “the Son of Man.” In Matthew’s Gospel alone, the expression is used thirty times. Daniel’s prediction about the time of appearance of the Messiah and of His rejection is among the clearest of his prophecies. The angel Gabriel had stated clearly: “Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven ‘sevens,’ and sixty-two ‘sevens.’ It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two ‘sevens,’ the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed.”⁵⁰⁹ In spite of this, the Jewish expectation of the Kingdom of God was one of a political and nationalistic restoration of the kingdom of David. There was little or no conviction of sin that must be atoned for in order for the reign of God to become a reality on earth.

This truth regarding the need for atonement for the sin of the world and its connection with the coming of the Messiah had been completely hidden from the Jewish worldview. Yet the Law of Moses abounds with stipulations regarding atonement for sin by substitution. The thought that the blood of animals could not effectively solve the problem of human sin had never entered their mind. The words of John, the Baptist, in presenting Jesus: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”⁵¹⁰ had been completely lost on them.

It appears that Paul was not able to convince many. Luke does not give us any numbers or statistics, but Paul’s closing remarks suggest that the unbelievers outnumbered those that were convinced.

The translation “They disagreed among themselves” is a double negative in the Greek: *asymphonos ontes*, for being “inharmonious among themselves.” This is probably one of Luke’s major understatements about the Jewish way of debating. Paul’s final quotation of Isaiah’s prophecy does not seem to be a diplomatic effort to “win friends and influence people.” But in holding before them the mirror of God’s Word, the Word they professed to believe and honor, he did indeed do them the greatest service he could do. Jesus had done the same to a hostile crowd of

Pharisees and Jewish leaders when He told them the Parable of the Sower.⁵¹¹ The seed of God's Word is sown in the human heart, but it depends on the condition of the heart whether the Holy Spirit can make it grow and produce fruit.

However hard and condemnatory Paul's words may sound in this context, we must not forget what he had written before to the believers in Rome: "I speak the truth in Christ-I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit- I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."⁵¹² Some of that compassion must have shown in his quotation of the Isaiah's prophecy.

More than Paul's condemnation regarding the callousness of their heart, the announcement that the Gospel would henceforth be presented to the gentiles must have stung those people deeply. Jesus had a similar reaction when He told the Parable of the Tenants and the Vineyard.⁵¹³ Paul's statement is built on Jesus' words: "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit,"⁵¹⁴ as well as on Jesus' instructions to Paul during the vision he received in the temple.⁵¹⁵

Paul's quotation of Isaiah's prophecy is the sixth reference to it in the New Testament.⁵¹⁶ At first sight, Isaiah's words seem to make God the source of man's callousness. The Adam Clarke's Commentary, however, correctly observes: "The prophecy of Isaiah was neither the cause nor the motive of their unbelief: it was a simple prediction, which imposed no necessity on them to resist the offers of mercy. They might have believed, notwithstanding the prediction, for such kinds of prophecies always include a tacit condition; they may believe, if they properly use the light and power which God has given them." The same commentary quotes Augustin, who wrote: "If I be asked why they could not believe? I immediately answer, because they would not. And God, having foreseen their bad will, foretold it by the prophet."

In Isaiah's prophecy God uses sarcasm to express His deep sorrow over the fact of the hardness of Israel's heart. We understand Isaiah's words: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never

perceiving.' Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed"⁵¹⁷ to mean: "Go ahead! Keep on hearing without understanding..." We base this interpretation on the last line that reads: "Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." With Adam Clarke, we come to the conclusion that on the basis of what we know of the character of God, God cannot be held responsible for the hardness of the human heart. If in Scripture there is mention of God's intervention by which a human heart is hardened, it is never in the sense of making hard something that was originally soft. God can continue and make irreversible what man started. It is true that God said to Moses: "I will harden Pharaoh's heart," and "I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials,"⁵¹⁸ but Pharaoh's heart had never been anything but hard to begin with.

Paul's quotation of Isaiah is even mild in comparison with Stephen's condemnation of the leaders of the Jewish nation. When he stood before the Sanhedrin, he shouted at them with a passion that cost him his life: "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him- you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."⁵¹⁹

The tragedy of the Jewish people throughout the ages has been that they never understood their heritage. Paul defined this legacy in his Epistle to the Romans as: "Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."⁵²⁰ The Jews acted as if they owned God and that God's glory was derived from theirs. They did not see themselves as tenants of God's vineyard but as owners. Unless we use our ears to hear God's Word, our eyes to see His glory, and our hearts to believe His promises we will find ourselves in the enemy's camp. There is no in-between position; we are either light or darkness, goodness or evil. The reason the Jews had Jesus killed was because they did not recognize Him as God who had become man.

As Isaiah's prophecy included a prediction of Israel's captivity, so was Paul's quotation a prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation. Paul does not specifically say this, but those who heard him knew that Isaiah's text continues with the words: "Then I said, 'For how long, O Lord?' And he answered: 'Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.'" ⁵²¹ In Isaiah's day the captivity was still more than a century away; when Paul spoke those words there was only one decade of grace remaining.

Paul had clearly expressed the agony of his soul regarding the wayward condition of his own people, when he wrote in his Epistle to the Romans: "Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them."⁵²² It was this compassion, the hope that their jealousy regarding their heritage would make them turn back, that prompted him to quote Isaiah's words.

On three previous occasions, Paul (and once Barnabas) had announced to their Jewish audience that they would henceforth preach the Gospel to the gentiles. We read: "Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: 'We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles.'" And: "But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, 'Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.'" And: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go; I will send you far away to the Gentiles.'" The crowd listened to Paul until he said this. Then they raised their voices and shouted, 'Rid the earth of him! He's not fit to live!'" ⁵²³ At every one of those occasions, this statement had put Paul's life in jeopardy. Being under the protection of the Roman government, this was the first time that Paul could speak without risk.

We cannot overstate the tragedy of the moment. The rejection of the Gospel by those for whom it was primarily meant seems to have been a complete victory for Satan. Yet, God also turned this defeat around in the most triumphant manner. This reminds us of Joseph's words to his

brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”⁵²⁴

Paul, himself, puts this in the right perspective in his Epistle to the Romans: “Because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. But if their transgression means riches for the world, and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring! For if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?”⁵²⁵

Luke records that Paul lived for two years in a rented house and that this place soon became a center of Christian activity in the city of Rome. This piece of information suggests that the Roman government did not assume any financial responsibility for Paul’s imprisonment and that his case was pending in the judicial system of the empire. It is generally assumed that the apostle’s liberty was curtailed by the presence of a Roman soldier to whom he may have been chained. Paul’s house arrest would naturally not create a favorable condition for the spread of the Gospel in the capital, but in spite of this the Holy Spirit made Paul’s abode into a place to which many hungry souls were drawn. A similar situation existed at the time of John the Baptist, who preached in the desert, where people flocked to him. Ralph Waldo Emerson is credited with saying: “If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap, than his neighbor, though he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door.” The Holy Spirit does not need strategic locations for the proclamation of the truth. Wherever the light of the Gospel shines, souls who are bound in darkness will be attracted to it.

The conclusion of the Book of Acts has, throughout the ages, been a matter of discussion among scholars. One would wish that this second book, which Luke dedicated to Theophilus, did not fizzle out the way it does. We must conclude that the book, actually, has no ending. It seems reasonable to assume that Luke either intended to continue the narrative or to write a third volume. There are other examples in world history of masterpieces that have remained unfinished. In classical music Franz Schubert’s “Eighth Symphony,” and Anton Bruckner’s “Ninth” come to mind. Yet, art critics usually consider those compositions to be complete

in themselves. The same can be said about Luke's masterpiece. Luke may have intended to write more. He may not have lived long enough to do so. He may not have survived the apostle who is the main character in the greater part of his book. We do not know. Believing the Book of Acts to be part of the divinely inspired Scriptures, we must conclude, however, that the Holy Spirit considered this book to be complete. Luke had stated in the opening of Acts, that this book was a sequence to "all that Jesus began to do and to teach," and that the Book of Acts was, obviously, a continuation of Jesus' acts and teaching. In the way Acts ends, the Holy Spirit seems to tell us that Jesus' acts and teaching did not end with Paul or Luke but that they are being continued. His Word marches on and we are part of it.

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank You for Paul who had such confidence and boldness to share those things concerning our Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that my life would be lived in such dedicated abandon to my Lord and Savior, and with Paul, may my life's cry be: "To live is Christ and to die is gain." In Jesus' name, AMEN.

"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."
(Acts 28:31)

Prayers of the People:

For anyone who is suffering from addiction, illness, COVID-19, RSV, those who are grieving the loss of a loved one during this Christmas Season, those who are struggling with rejection, depression, oppression, or imprisonment, the poor, those who are persecuted for any unjust reason, those who hunger, those who have died of natural or unnatural causes.

We pray that you guide our countries leaders to be moral, upright, and forth standing in their office, and that you guide them and any leaders in the path that is pleasing and just to all parties, minority, or majority.

We also offer thanks for the gifts that you have given, and those you have promised in the coming days.

We thank you for the gift of the birth of Jesus, for the salvation of all humankind, that our works be pleasing and right in your eyes.

We also pray for the gift of the Virgin Mary, and sacrifices she made to raise Jesus for the salvation of the world.

Hail Mary- Prayer

Hail Mary, full of grace. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death, Amen.