

The Bible Notebook

THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Volume 8

(Chapters 26-28)

A Verse by Verse Study

By

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DEDICATION

To

James A. Sadler

Friend, Roommate, Brother in the Lord
(From our first day (in line) at Mississippi College

“Sadler and Sanders!”

We must have heard it a thousand times from “Pop” Gore.
*Why were we blamed for all of those “innocent” dorm pranks?
(No one blamed Ernie!)*

SPECIAL NOTE ON THE BIBLE NOTEBOOK

The format for all the verse by verse studies I have written in The Bible Notebook Series evolved over a period of years. It began after I graduated from seminary and began to assess my study habits. After leaving the academic setting I was determined, now that I was free to study what I wanted to rather than what was assigned, to maintain a program of Bible study in which I would outline books

of the Bible and add notes for future use in sermons and Bible studies.

I moved from the legal pad to the type writer to the early generation of computers. I could then expand my verse by verse Bible studies and save them to a disk, rather than filing hard copies in my filing cabinet. The very first one to follow the current format was a commentary on the Book of Philippians, *UNDEFEATED: Finding Peace in a World Full of Trouble*, published in 1998. I felt compelled to continue the study of the Word, and in time I realized that someone else might benefit from these studies. I had shared with a few friends for a number of years, but to be perfectly honest, I did not know whether anyone else would find them helpful or not. For some 30 years, I taught from four to six Bible studies a year in addition to seminary extension classes. I expanded my own studies with the bi-vocational pastor and informed layperson in mind, not knowing if a seminary trained pastor would find my studies helpful. Feedback from trusted friends helped me stay on track and continue my work. Dr. Leon Hyatt, Jr. was a great source of encouragement from the beginning.

Dr. Hyatt is a serious Bible scholar and sound theologian. He wrote the following letter to me on January 6, 2000:

Dear Doctor Sanders:

“In the past few days, I have been reading and studying again your excellent study materials on Philippians. I am finding them as helping and exciting as when I studied them earlier. You have done an excellent job of presenting and explaining the universal message of this book, while keeping it in true context. The work is both scholarly and practical. Thank you for taking the time to make such excellent study helps available in such usable form.

“I am looking forward to having an opportunity to see and use the studies you are presently developing on First and Second Thessalonians and First Corinthians. I am confident they will be equally helpful. Thank you for agreeing to share copies with me, even though you do not yet have them in final form.

“Anyone who uses these materials will be blessed. I hope you will work hard to make them widely available. May the Lord give you perseverance and strength to continue until you have completed similar studies on every New Testament book.

Sincerely yours,
Leon Hyatt, Jr.

Dr. Mike Minnix is Editor of PastorLife.Com web site (Georgia Baptist Convention). I had sent him 150 sermon manuscripts (*The Sermon Notebook*) before I sent the first commentary. I asked if he would be interested in the studies I have done in what I called *The Bible Notebook*, and he asked me to send him a sample. After he saw the sample, he wrote the following note on May 24, 2004:

Johnny,

Yes, I saw the commentary work you sent - fantastic!!! We are in process of setting up a commentary segment to the site and placing your works there. Of course, we would like to add others. Over time we could perhaps have multiple commentaries on different books of the Bible. Preferably, we would have some original works that are

basically unpublished.

Thanks, Johnny, for all your help. Keep us in your prayers as we contact states for support. We will do that in the next month. God bless!

Mike

Dr. Minnix wrote to me after receiving a CD with something like 28 volumes from General Dutch Shoffner (Retired three star), who had converted my work from WordPerfect to MicroSoft Word, edited the work, and then sent all the studies on to Dr. Minnix, who mentions both sermons and commentaries in the following note (dated May 29, 2004):

Johnny,

“Yes, I got everything. Fortunately, we have gotten a lot of material lately and we are in the process of getting it ready for upload to the site. Some of the material will be edited for inclusion over a period of time - like the 1 John sermons, etc. The commentar(ies) have presented us with a new opportunity and new challenge. We would like to upload them by Bible books. We are working on the best way to group them and the best way to handle them within our existing available computer technology...**The material you sent is outstanding and we absolutely want to make it available!!!**

God bless, and thanks for being my friend and a friend to PastorLife.”

Mike

ACTS 26

Paul before Agrippa

26:1 - AGRIPPA SAID. *“Agrippa said to Paul, “It is permitted for you to speak for yourself.” Then Paul stretched out his hand and began his defense...”* Paul had already made his defense before Festus, the Roman governor of this province (25:6-12), and now he stands before King Agrippa II to address him, this time without charges against him. The purpose of this hearing was to provide Agrippa an understanding of the situation so he could help Festus with the letter he must write to the emperor. He had let things get out of hand and Paul had appealed to Rome. Festus was faced with the unenviable task of writing to the emperor to explain why he had sent him to Rome. He reveals the dilemma he faced, both to Agrippa and to the distinguished visitors: “I have nothing definite to write to the Emperor about him. Therefore, I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that after this examination is over, I may have something to write” (Acts 25:26). **Remember that the emperor at the time was Nero**, and no one took Nero lightly.

In Vol. 7 in this series on Acts, this writer quoted both A. T. Robertson [WORD PICTURES IN

THE NEW TESTAMENT, *The Bible Navigator* electronic Bible library, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville - after this, ATR] to identify King Agrippa, and the [NEW COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE, New Testament, *QuickVerse* electronic Bible Library, Parsons Technology, 2007 edition - after this, NCWB]:

“Agrippa II son of Agrippa I of Acts 12:20-23. On the death of Herod King of Chalcis A.D. 48, Claudius A.D. 50 gave this Herod Agrippa II the throne of Chalcis so that Luke is correct in calling him king, though he is not king of Judea. But he was also given by Claudius the government of the temple and the right of appointing the high priest. Later he was given also the tetrarchies of Philip and Lysanias. He was the last Jewish king in Palestine, though not king of Judea. He angered the Jews by building his palace so as to overlook the temple and by frequent changes in the high priesthood. He made his capital at Caesarea Philippi which he called Neronias in honour of Nero. Titus visited it after the fall of Jerusalem” [ATR].

BERNICE. This was the sister of King Agrippa. “She married her uncle Herod, the king of Chalcis. When he died, she came to live with her brother, Agrippa II, and probably had an incestuous relationship with him” [NCWB].

IT IS PERMITTED. Either Festus, governor of the province and King Agrippa II had agreed in advance that Agrippa would preside over this meeting, or Agrippa took over presumptuously as soon as everyone was in place. There is no indication that Festus introduced Agrippa and Bernice to the dignitaries assembled in the hall at the time of this hearing. Agrippa simply assumes the right to preside and gives Paul permission to speak.

Interestingly, no charges are made against Paul. There were none! Festus, however, in an effort to please the Jews, had asked Paul if he would return to Jerusalem for a hearing in the presence of the high priest and elders of Israel. Paul had been a prisoner in Caesarea for two years following his rescue from a mob in Jerusalem that was determined to kill him. He was immediately taken into custody, and when the Roman Commander learned of a plot by assassins to ambush him while he was in the custody of Roman soldiers, he sent him to Caesarea under heavy guard.

The high priest and elders showed up in Caesarea with a Roman attorney named Tertullus to present charges against Paul. Paul, in his defense, pointed out that the charges were without merit and the hearing was dismissed. Two things should be remembered here: (1) Paul, though innocent, was kept in prison for two years, and Felix, the governor of the province, called for him often to try to elicit a bribe; and (2) the attitude and conduct of the by Jewish leaders would lead to a revolt within a decade of this hearing, which Titus would meet with the might of the Roman army. They would lay siege to the city, break through the walls, rout the citizens, and destroy the great and beautiful temple of the Jews (A. D. 70).

When we see the high priest and elders of the Jews challenge Roman authority here, and

learn of the plot to ambush Paul while he was under the protection of Roman soldiers, we come to understand why Rome would see how close they were to rebellion. Seeing that, there is little wonder that the emperor would finally become fed up with them and send his army to break the back of the rebellion. Their hatred for Jesus and his followers was about to destroy the nation and leave the Jews without a homeland from A. D. 70 to 1946!

The high priest and elders of the Jews might complain to the emperor when the governor or local commander did not please them. However, we have to assume that the governor was sending reports to Rome about the conduct of these religious leaders. Hatred for Jesus was pushing them to the brink of disaster. Their success in forcing a hearing before Felix so that they might bring charges against him (Ch. 23), their charges against him before Festus in Jerusalem, their success in forcing yet another hearing in Caesarea, and their effort to persuade Festus to bring Paul to Jerusalem (so that they might kill him (Ch 25) was moving them toward a disaster of catastrophic proportions, just as Jesus had prophesied (Matt.24).

PAUL STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND. When he was given an opportunity to speak, he assumed the traditional posture and began to speak. “This was the usual posture of orators or public speakers. The ancient statues are commonly made in this way, with the right hand extended. The dress of the ancients favoured this. The long and loose robe, or outer garment, was fastened usually with a hook or clasp on the right shoulder, and thus left the arm at full liberty” [Barnes' Notes on the New Testament, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources, Nashville - after this, BARNES].

“This speech has a number of parts: (1) complimentary remarks (26:2-3), (2) Paul’s early life in Judaism (vv. 4-8), (3) his zeal in opposing Christianity (vv. 9-11), (4) his conversion and commission (vv. 12-18), (5) his ministry (vv. 19-23), (6) his verbal jousts with Festus and Agrippa (vv. 24-29)” [Bible Knowledge Commentary, QuickVerse, 2007 edition - after this BKC].

Paul shows no bitterness or animosity for the unfair treatment to which he had been subjected. He simply takes advantage of the opportunity to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the upper echelon of the Roman army in the area, as well as the leading Roman citizens in the province. Jesus had promised that he would have an opportunity to proclaim the Gospel before an assembly like this at the time of his conversion and call to be the Apostle to the Gentiles (Acts. 9:15).

The defense here is similar to the one he had begun on the steps to the Tower of Antonia in Jerusalem (Acts 21:40). That effort had been cut short by the bitter reaction of the Jews. He will be given an opportunity to present his message here. Sadly, The Chosen People chose to refuse the Messiah for whom they had prayed for centuries. He simply was not the kind of Messiah they wanted. They wanted a Messiah who would drive out the hated Romans who ruled over them. That hatred was about to lead to their destruction as a nation, as well as the destruction of the temple and temple sacrifices. “All the people answered, ‘His blood be on us and on our children!’” (Matt 27:25). That was almost two thousand years ago, and today in Jerusalem they still hate the name of Jesus.

26:2 - I CONSIDER MYSELF FORTUNATE. *“I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that today I am going to make a defense before you about everything I am accused of by the Jews...”* Paul began by stating that he was happy to have this opportunity to speak with him. He had stood before Felix (Ch. 24) when the Jews were appealing to him to have him put to death. He had stood before Festus (Ch. 25) when the governor asked him if he was willing to go back to Jerusalem to be heard before the Jewish leaders there. He had then taken the decisive action that had placed Festus in this precarious situation: he had appealed to Rome and the appeal had been granted. This was not a trial but a hearing, and Paul knew an opportunity when the Lord presented him with one.

We cannot help but notice Paul’s positive attitude. He is courteous and respectful, but there is no hint of the kind of flattery we saw in the case of the Roman lawyer Tertullus (Ch. 24) before Felix. The decision has been made to send him to Rome, so Paul does not fear a decision here. Nor does he look on this as a benign debate. He obviously had a genuine hope that he could persuade Agrippa to believe in the risen Christ and be saved.

KING AGRIPPA. It is not always easy to distinguish one Agrippa from another, or one Herod from another. The Holman Bible Dictionary, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - HBD hereafter - provides a brief biographical sketch:

“**Agrippa I**, the son of Aristobulus and grandson of Herod. He ruled with the title of king from A.D. 41-44. Agrippa I ordered James the son of Zebedee killed with the sword and imprisoned Peter (Acts 12:1-23).

Agrippa II, the son of Agrippa I, heard Paul’s defense (Acts 25:13-27; compare Acts 26:32). With his death the Herodian dynasty came to an end, in title as well as in fact.

Drusilla (Acts 24:24) was the third and youngest daughter of Agrippa I. She had been married briefly at age 14 to Azizus, king of Emessa, probably in the year 52. In 53 or 54 she was married to Felix, the Roman procurator.

Bernice was the sister of Drusilla and Agrippa II, and also his wife. Paul appeared before them in Acts 25” [HBD].

MAKE A DEFENSE. Here, Paul is not offering a criminal defense, but in the sense of apologetics, he is making a defense of his faith in Jesus Christ. It will not take him long to get to the subject. He promises to deal with “everything I am accused of by the Jews.” This was the purpose of this hearing, and regardless of what anyone else brings to the table or takes from this meeting, Paul is not about to miss this opportunity. He was about to speak to King Agrippa, Bernice, to Festus, and to the leading military, commercial, and political figures of the province. How often does one have an opportunity like this. Who better than the Apostle to the Gentiles to address the king in the presence of this audience.

We must remember this: Paul’s success or failure could not be measured in nickels and noses. If

scores of people had been saved, Paul could not take credit for them (unlike some modern preachers). If no one was saved, he was not to blame. He was accountable only for faithfully proclaiming the message, not for what the Jerusalem Daily or the Caesarean News Dispatch might write about him. He was not going to be written up in the Jerusalem Baptist Message or the Caesarean Baptist Record. Numbers are often mentioned in the early part of Acts to show the phenomenal growth of the church during its infancy, not to advertise that Peter was producing more converts than John. Major Ian Thomas joined treat British preachers like Stephen Olford, Stuart Briscoe, and Leonard Ravenhill in preaching to preachers and lay persons for decades. My friend, Randy Knepper, a banker in Jacksonville, Florida, told me about hearing Thomas for a week when he was a youth. One message still stands out in his memory: “Oil in the Lamp, Gas in the Car, God in the Man.” Recently, my wife Becky found my copy of one of his books and handed it to me. It had been lost to me so long I had forgotten about it until she handed it to me. It is THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS (Zondervan Press, Grand Rapids, MI, 1964. 155pages). He introduces this book as follows:

“All the glitters is not gold. And in the light of all that we are about to consider, it may be profitable for us to make a sober re-evaluation of those standards of commitment which are prevalent today, and which pass muster for Christian dedication.

All too often quantity takes precedence over quality, and in this highly competitive age those outward appearances of “success” which are calculated to enhance the reputation of the professional preacher, or the prestige of those who have promoted him, are of greater importance than the abiding consequences of his ministry.

In an unholy ambition to get “results,” the end too often justifies the means, with the result that the *means* are certainly not always beyond suspicion, and the “results,” to say the least, extremely dubious!

In this unhappy situation both the pulpit and the pew carry their share of the blame, though I suspect that it started in the pulpit! There are those who have insisted to be valid, every spiritual transaction between the believer and his Lord must be matched by some outward physical act, and that apart from the accompanying act, no worth can be attached to the inward spiritual transaction.

Inevitably on the basis of this unfounded supposition, the work of the Holy Spirit in any given meeting through the ministry of the preacher, will be directly represented by the physical response of the congregation to some form of public appeal, “invitation” or so-called “altar-call” - a term which is singularly inappropriate in view of the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ has “offered one sacrifice for sins forever” (Heb. 10:12), and there is no place today fore another sacrifice or another altar in the church of the redeemed - the *altar* has given place to a *throne* for the exalted Lamb.

The terrible dangers inherent in such a fallacy, however, are patently obvious!

The ambitious preacher, eager to climb the ladder of evangelical fame, and not altogether unmoved by the plight of the lost and the needs of the saints, will be subject to a temptation so strong, that for more than one it has proved to be irresistible - that of being heavily preoccupied with devising ways and means of insuring that a large enough public “response” on the part of the congregation will adequately demonstrate the effectiveness of his preaching, vindicate his reputation, sufficiently reward the confidence of his sponsors, and suitably impress the crowd.

The preacher, of course, will not allow himself to be aware of the underlying motives which prompt the use of his clever techniques, being careful to persuade himself that they stem only from what he would describe as a genuine “passion for souls,” but the sorry spectacle is exposed for what it is by the apparent indifference on the part of the preacher to the tragic aftermath of his endeavors, once “the show is over”! [Thomas,: 111-12].

I might add that Major Ian Thomas was just warming up, and once we finish with this book we should read his classic, *THE SAVING LIFE OF CHRIST*.

26:3 - EXPERT IN ALL THE JEWISH CUSTOMS. *“(E)specially since you are an expert in all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.”* The HCSB captures the meaning. He is saying, because you are an expert “in all the Jewish customs and controversies”, I am especially happy to make my defense before you. He and Agrippa at least had some common ground for communication, unlike the case when he stood before Felix or Festus. Those governors were pagans who worshiped a whole pantheon of gods that do not even exist. They knew nothing of the true God.

Sadly, such ignorance was not erased in the First Century. A very close relative related a disturbing account of something that happened in an informal gathering of members of a well known church in the area. The pastor and his wife were present, as well as the Director of Missions. They were discussing the candidacy of Governor Mit Romney some time before he dropped out of the race for the White House in February, 2008. Someone made a statement about the Mormon god, and then one of the ministers made the statement that “the god of Islam is not the same as the Christian God.” A lady, who was a leader in that church and whose husband is a Sunday School teacher, dramatically threw out her hand and said, “Don’t tell me that!” She is a professor in a university, and she was apparently appalled by those fundamentalist preachers who, for some reason that escaped her, wanted to distinguish the Christian God from the god Mohammed created, with a pagan god in mind. She may have been shocked if they had distinguished between the God of the Bible and the god of Mormonism.

THEREFORE. The “therefores” in the Bible are especially significant. Paul is saying that,

because of your expert knowledge of Jewish customs and ceremonies, “I beg you to listen to me patiently.” I had gone to a number of doctors with severe pain in my left foot. By the time the first two doctors got through with me, I was almost “totaled out” in the terminology of the work place. I had spend years trying to find help and get relief before friends persuaded me to go to see Dr. Henry McDonald at the Fort Worth Bone and Joint Clinic. When he walked into the examining room, he said, “Tell me about it!” I hesitated before starting and then asked, “May I?” He assured me he would listen to me, so I started from the beginning. I had a short version of my experience and a long version. People would ask, but before I finished my explanation, you could tell they were trying to figure out some way to get away from me. They really didn’t want to know, but I could not answer their questions without some detail. I wanted to know if Dr. McDonald would hear me out. I believe this is what Paul was requesting of King Agrippa. I might add that I spent twenty-five preaching from a bar stool until sometime in the Spring of 1999 or 2000 when I stood to preach one Sunday morning. The next Sunday, I stood for both services and I have been standing ever since. I had prayed for healing many times: He did it His way!

Paul was anxious to give his full testimony, but he could recall too many times when he had been cut off, sometimes violently, so he tactfully asks Agrippa to hear his full defense. He did not want to be cut off in the middle of his defense without an opportunity to make an appeal to him, and no doubt to others present to receive Jesus Christ.

26:4 - MY WAY OF LIFE. *“All the Jews know my way of life from my youth, which was spent from the beginning among my own nation and in Jerusalem.”* When Paul says, “all the Jews know my way of life” he means that his way of life was well known to the chief priests and elders. A thought that I have never seen mentioned anywhere is that some of his fellow students in the school of Gamaliel were now counted among the elders of Israel. He had surpassed them in all points of which a pious Jew and strict Pharisee might boast (Phil. 3:4). He was apparently the most outstanding student of his day, and the most promising young Pharisee. It would be interesting to know how his fellow students had felt about him then. He wrote to the church at Philippi that he had surpassed them all. He was well known to the elders before his conversion because they had authorized him to led the persecution of the followers of Jesus, and because he had carried out this commission with such zeal that they had given him a letter authorizing him to take the persecution of believers to other cities in the region, and then to Damascus (Ch. 9).

FROM MY YOUTH. Paul grew up in Tarsus, so he was a Hellenistic Jew. However, he had gone to Jerusalem in his youth, possibly as early as 12 or 13, to study at the feet of Gamaliel, the highly esteemed teacher of the Pharisees. He had been trained in all the orthodox teachings of the Jews and he was well known among both his peers as well as the religious leaders of the day.

FROM THE BEGINNING. This does not mean from the beginning of his life, but from the beginning of his training in Jerusalem.

MY OWN NATION. Paul was born and reared in Tarsus, capital of Roman province of Cilicia. He would have had the normal synagogue training when he was growing up in Tarsus, as well as

instructions in his home, where great value was placed upon his education in the strict manner of the Pharisees.

IN JERUSALEM. Some of those very elders who were trying every trick they could think of to have Paul condemned to death had been classmates of his in the school of Gamaliel. They knew him well because they saw the elders of the day choose young Saul of Tarsus to lead in the persecution of the Way. They hated him so much they were willing to risk a blood bath in Jerusalem if they had been successful in their efforts to persuade Festus to take Paul to Jerusalem for a hearing. They were planning to ambush him and kill him while he was being escorted by Roman soldiers. If this seem too far fetched to believe, remember that they were now less than one decade away from a rebellion that would bring Titus and the Roman army against Jerusalem. After a long siege in which many Jews starved, they breached the wall, scattered survivors, and destroyed the temple in A. D. 70. Jesus had warned His followers to flee the city when they saw the wrath of Rome coming (Matt. 24).

26:5 - PREVIOUSLY KNOWN. *“They had previously known me for quite some time, if they were willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I lived as a Pharisee.”*

As noted above, many of the elders of the Jews at this point had been fellow students with Paul in the very strict school of the highly esteemed Gamaliel. Had they been willing to testify to the fact, they could have told Agrippa that he had been trained according to the strictest party of Judaism.

Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, in his commentary on the Book of Acts [*An Exegetical and Practical Commentary on Acts*, Book of Life Publishers, Dallas, 1974 - after this, HLE] points out that by using the expression, “the strictest party of our religion”, Paul is using a strong superlative and one of few of its kind in the New Testament [HLE: 360]. This sect was the most precise in its interpretation of the Mosaic Law, but Paul had outstripped them all in his religious zeal. “They accused Paul of being un-Jewish. “He shocked many hearers by showing his Judaism had deeper roots than that of his accusers” [HLE: 360].

I LIVED AS A PHARISEE. In another volume in this series on the Book of Acts, I copied the article on the Pharisees in the Holman Bible Dictionary [The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources, Technology Division, Nashville - after this, HBD]. The same article is copied here so that a busy student of the Word will not have to leave this passage in order to run references, and thereby risk losing his train of thought. This is one of the advantages in The Bible Notebook, in which no apology is offered for repetition if it will help the student of the Word.

“The Pharisees constituted the most important group. They appear in the Gospels as the opponents of Jesus. Paul claimed that he was a Pharisee before becoming a Christian (Phil. 3:5). They were the most numerous of the groups, although Josephus stated that they numbered only about six thousand. They controlled the synagogues and exercised great control over the general population” [HBD].

The Pharisees were the religious leaders, while the Sadducees were the political leaders and they dominated the Sanhedrin at this time. This often led to intense arguments, as in the case in which Paul brought up the Resurrection when he appeared before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:6).

“No surviving writing gives us information about the origin of the Pharisees. The earliest reference to them is dated in the time of Jonathan (160-143 B.C.), where Josephus refers to Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes. Their good relations with the rulers ended in the time of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.). They came to power again when Salome Alexandra became queen (76 B.C.).

“The name “Pharisee” means “the separated ones.” It may mean that they separated themselves from the masses of the people or that they separated themselves to the study and interpretation of the law. It is usually assumed that they were the spiritual descendants of the Hasidim, the loyal fighters for religious freedom in the time of Judas Maccabeus. They appear to be responsible for the transformation of Judaism from a religion of sacrifice to one of law. They were the developers of the oral tradition, the teachers of the two-fold law: written and oral. They saw the way to God as being through obedience to the law. They were the progressives of the day, willing to adopt new ideas and adapt the law to new situations.

“The Pharisees were strongly monotheistic. They accepted all the Old Testament as authoritative. They affirmed the reality of angels and demons. They had a firm belief in life beyond the grave and a resurrection of the body. They were missionary, seeking the conversion of Gentiles (Matt. 23:15). They saw God as concerned with the life of a person without denying that the individual was responsible for how he or she lived. They had little interest in politics. The Pharisees opposed Jesus because He refused to accept the teachings of the oral law” [HBD].

Not only had Paul been a student of the famed Pharisee Gamaliel, he had surpassed his peers in academics and in the persecution of The Way. He was well known among them. King Agrippa may have known something of this. If not, he could easily confirm it by talking with the current leaders of the Jews. They had known him well as a youth and young adult, but now they viewed him as a traitor to both God and Israel.

26:6 - I STAND TRIAL. “*And now I stand on trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers...*” Actually, the official trial had been held before Festus, at which time Paul had appealed to Caesar and the appeal had been granted. But in a practical sense, Paul was on trial, not for a crime but for holding to “the hope of the promise made by God” through the prophets to their forefathers. Here, “Paul asserted that he was being tried for believing that God’s promise of a Messiah was fulfilled in the resurrected Jesus” [NCWB].

HOPE. On February 19, 2008, syndicated talk show host Rush Limbaugh read a statement about hope that touched off some interesting discussions. According to the quote, “hope” is, in essence, for losers, a sign of despair, something to fall back on by those who do not apply themselves to solutions. A caller who was identified as Roy, from Hattiesburg, Mississippi, challenged that definition, and after some debate, Limbaugh said, “Wait a minute. You are adding a new element to

the discussion.” After some thought over the next break, he came back and pointed out that Roy was right, when you view hope from a theological perspective. I am not sure that he really did understand, and for that matter, I am not sure Roy did. Roy said that we he does everything he can and can do no more, he hopes that God will provide the answer.

In reality, hope in the Bible is far more than wishful thinking on one hand, and trusting God to work out situations and circumstances (as in Romans 8:28). **Hope in the Bible is something on which you can absolutely depend. The believer’s hope in the resurrection is not wishful thinking.** The hope of eternity in heaven is not wishful thinking, but **some thing reserved in heaven for us** (John 14:1ff; 1 Peter 1:3-5).

26:7 - PROMISE. “... [the promise] our 12 tribes hope to attain as they earnestly serve Him night and day. Because of this hope I am being accused by the Jews, O king!” Typically, when we read about “the promise”, we think of the Messianic Covenant, or Messianic promise. This is normally justified, but here it seems that Paul has something else in mind. The promise to which he refers her is the promise “that God raises the dead” (Vs. 8). Adam Clarke offers a background study in the promise:

“This does not appear to mean, the hope of the Messiah, as some have imagined, but the hope of the resurrection of the dead, to which the apostle referred in Acts 23:6, where he says to the Jewish council, (from which the Roman governor took him,) of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question: see the notes there. And here he says, I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise, etc., and to which, he says, Acts 26:7, the twelve tribes hope to come. The Messiah had come, and was gone again, as Paul well knew; and what is here meant is something which the Jews hoped to come to, or attain; not what was to come to them; and this singular observation excludes the Messiah from being meant. **It was the resurrection of all men from the dead which Paul's words signified;** and this the Jews had been taught to hope for, by many passages in the Old Testament” (Adam Clarke's Commentary, The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources, Technology Division, Tim Vineyard, Vice President - after this, CLARKE, bold added by this writer).

It was this writer’s privilege as a member of the LifeWay board of trustees to vote to create the Technology Division and to name Tim Vineyard as Vice President. My copy of the Bible Navigator was a gift from Tim Vineyard.

The hope of which Paul spoke had bound the Hebrew people together for centuries. In its verb form it is highly motivating, like a spiritual cohesive, binding them together with common interests and commitments.

OUR 12 TRIBES. The Jewish readers who read Luke’s account would readily identify with this designation for the nation of Israel. All Jews, knew that the twelve tribes had been reduced to two

tribes (Judah and Benjamin) in 722 B. C., when Sargon II of Assyria invaded the nation of Israel, the northern ten tribes, and uprooted much of the population, forcing them to resettle in other lands. Those Israelites who were killed or exiled were replaced by Assyria with conquered people from other nations. Robertson has written: Paul's use of this word for the Jewish people, like Jas 1:1 (tais dôdeka phulais, the twelve tribes), shows that Paul had no knowledge of any "lost ten tribes." There is a certain national pride and sense of unity in spite of the dispersion (Page)" [ATR].

BECAUSE OF THIS HOPE. Hope "is basically expectation, joyfully confident" [HLE]. It was because of the hope "that God raises the dead" (vs. 8) that Paul was "being accused by the Jews." The king would know that the issue was the claim by His followers that Jesus was the long awaited Messiah. However, the thing that often set off the Jews was the claim that Jesus, whom they had crucified had been raised from the dead. Even after two thousand years no one has ever been able to prove the resurrection of Jesus Christ never happened.

It is interesting that Christians often assume a defensive position when it comes to defending the faith. When someone demands that we prove there is a God, why not ask them to prove there is a God. The preponderance of the evidence is on our side. If someone insists that we prove that Jesus arose from the dead, why not ask them to prove that He did not. The evidence, again, is on our side. Brilliant and highly motivated Jewish leaders tried everything they knew refute the claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. Those who plotted his death, and in essence killed him, had to sit and listen to Peter and John declare to them that the very Jesus they had crucified had risen from the dead. If they could have refuted the claim that Jesus had risen from the dead they could have destroyed the Christian movement. They could not! Over five hundred people had seen Him at one time. Now, Paul and other believers were preaching that those who believe in the risen Jesus, have everlasting life. The Sadducees did not believe in any resurrection, but the Pharisees did. They did not believe, however, that faith in Jesus is the only way to have eternal life.

26:8 - GOD RAISES THE DEAD. "*Why is it considered incredible by any of you that God raises the dead?*" Robertson notes that "This rhetorical question needs no answer, though the narrative resumed in verse Acts 26:9 does it in a way" [ATR]. The way Paul expresses it, it would seem incredible if one did not believe that God raises the dead. "He had done that and would continue to do so. Paul obviously viewed the resurrection as an accomplished fact. It is interesting that no one challenged the evidence of Christ's resurrection but rather found the whole thing to be 'incredible' [NCWB]. Adam Clarke comments:

"As Agrippa believed in the true God, and knew that one of his attributes was omnipotence, he could not believe that the resurrection of the dead was an impossible thing; and to this belief of his the apostle appeals; and the more especially, because the Sadducees denied the doctrine of the resurrection, though they professed to believe in the same God. **Two attributes of God stood pledged to produce this resurrection: his truth, on which his promise was founded; and his power, by which the thing could be easily affected,** as that power is unlimited.

“Some of the best critics think this verse should be read thus: What! should it be thought a thing incredible with you, if God should raise the dead?” [CLARKE, bold added by this writer].

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is a vital part of the New Testament record and an essential part of the message of redemption. Paul wrote to the church at Corinth:

“Now brothers, I want to clarify for you the gospel I proclaimed to you; you received it and have taken your stand on it. You are also saved by it, if you hold to the message I proclaimed to you—unless you believed to no purpose. For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve. Then He appeared to over 500 brothers at one time, most of whom remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one abnormally born, He also appeared to me” (1 Cor. 15:1-8).

“Now if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, “There is no resurrection of the dead”? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without foundation, and so is your faith” (1 Cor 15:12-14).

26:9 - I MYSELF. *“In fact, I myself supposed it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus the Nazarene.”* Of “the first seven words in English (five in Greek) three are pronouns (I myself I). “These pronouns give sharp contrast of Paul now slaving for Christ to the Saul who once worked against him viciously” [HLE: 361]. Robertson translates this, “I verily thought with myself” (egô men oun edoxa emautôi). He explains that this is a “Personal construction instead of the impersonal, a touch of the literary style. Paul's "egoism" is deceived as so often happens. I ought (dein). Infinitive the usual construction with dokeô. Necessity and a sense of duty drove Paul on even in this great sin (see on Acts 23:1), a common failing with persecutors” [ATR]. Robertson is not joining the Paul's big ego chorus some persist in chanting, but noting his attitude at the time he was persecuting Christians. He was convincing himself this was the right thing to do.

Paul now begins a personal testimony concerning this role in the early persecution of the followers of “Jesus the Nazarene”. Most commentaries become rather sketchy here for the simple reason that we have already covered Luke's account of Paul's role in the persecution of the followers of Christ, his conversion on the road to Damascus, and his call to proclaim the Good News to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 9). Luke records Paul's testimony about his earlier life in Jerusalem in Chapter 22. It is in this that **The Bible Notebook** differs from many other studies. **Paul's testimony will be treated here as though this is the only record of it.** This would not be practical in hard copy, but it is very practical in the electronic media. If one is studying this chapter, this writer does not want him or her to have to break the line of thought by continually leaving this passage and going to another to compare them. That does not mean that I cut and paste the repetition. The student of the Word

wants his or her study in any passage to be fresh.

Few things are harder to explain than the fanatical zeal which drives one who persecutes others in the belief that they are serving God when they are doing so. Over the past millennium, countless numbers in Europe and other places have been slaughtered by people who were obsessed with their perceived defense of God. Religious zeal can be a very dangerous thing when not governed by the Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures. The struggle between Henry VIII and the Catholic church over control of England will bear out that fact. Certain bishops convinced themselves that they were serving God when they murdered people who simply wanted to read the Bible in their own language.

Dr. William R. Cooper chronicles a case in his amazing work, *OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH*. A man named Richard Hunne was shamefully and brutally murdered by order of the bishop of London. It is very disturbing when church leaders are identified as murderous or bloody. Paul's personal testimony concerning his role in the persecution of the early church shows that he had the absolute approval of the Jews when he was viciously persecuting Christians. He only became their enemy when he became one of them.

JESUS THE NAZARENE. Paul stresses that he “supposed it was necessary to do many things in opposition to the name of Jesus the Nazarene.” The Prince of Peace was unjustly condemned and crucified, and many of His followers were martyred by those who were “in opposition” to His name.

Paul was a vicious leader of this persecution until the moment of his conversion. He will now tell King Agrippa how he had led in the persecution of the followers of Jesus the Nazarene. There may have been many men with the same name, but there was no question as to His identity when he is identified as the Nazarene.

26:10 - I ACTUALLY DID. *“This I actually did in Jerusalem, and I locked up many of the saints in prison, since I had received authority for that from the chief priests. When they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.”* Paul had no doubt often reviewed in his mind his fanatical nature of the persecution, the intensity and scope of it, and certainly the focus of it. How could he ever forget it? This actually happened, and it happened in Jerusalem where he became well known both by the elders and his peers when he was a young man. We must remember that many of his fellow students were among those elders who plotted his death with the assassins in Jerusalem (Ch. 23); and when that failed, hired a Roman lawyer to bring charges against him before Governor Felix in Caesarea (Ch. 24). Two years later they tried to get the new governor, Festus, to take him to Jerusalem so they could have him ambushed on the way, and that while he was being escorted by Roman soldiers. They had no idea how close they were to pushing Rome too far, but within a decade Titus would be destroying the temple and scattering the people.

I LOCKED UP MANY. The force of this seems to be, **I actually did this! I actually locked up many of the saints!** He was guilty of persecuting the saints, and that fact was well known. Many might have criticized or condemned, but Saul of Tarsus stepped forward and led in the persecution of the followers of Jesus. One also infers that those Paul arrested were thrown into a recognized prison, approved by both Rome and the Sanhedrin.

SAINTS. The believers were called saints. The concept of someone having to be canonized to be a saint is totally alien to the New Testament, but the Holman Bible Dictionary (B & H Publishing Group and The Bible Navigator, LifeWay Christian Resources - after this, HBD) explains the New Testament use of the word:

“One word, *hagios*, is used for saints in the New Testament. This word, like *qadosh*, means holy. Consequently, saints are the holy ones. There is only one reference to saints in the Gospels (Matt. 27:52). In this verse, dead saints are resurrected at the Lord’s crucifixion. The death of the Holy One provides life for those who believe in God. In Acts, three of the four references occur in chapter 9 (vv. 13,32,41). First Ananias and then Peter talks of the saints as simply believers in Christ. Paul continues this use in his Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, and Philemon. In each case, saints seem simply to be people who name Jesus as Lord. In the Book of Revelation, however, where the word saints, occurs more times than in any other single book (13 times), the meaning is further defined. Saints not only name Jesus as Lord, but they are faithful and true witnesses for Jesus” [HBD].

I HAD RECEIVED AUTHORITY. The persecution Paul led was under the full authority of the Sanhedrin, though **there is no basis for the claim that he was a member of that body.** For one thing, he would have had to have been married and it seems clear from his epistles that he was not. Furthermore, it is inconceivable that he would never have mentioned his membership in that body with all the references to the elders, chief priests, and the authority the Sanhedrin had granted him to carry out the persecution against Christians. In fact, this would have been a good place to mention it. He did not. It would have reinforced all he was saying.

Paul is stressing the vicious nature of his persecution of believers. Religious persecution often knows no bounds. On February 21, 2008, some fifteen hundred young men broke away from what had probably begun as a peaceful demonstration in Serbia, following the move by Kosovo to declare its independence. America had approved, so these young men attacked the American Embassy. Their government was trying to control riots they did not sponsor, even though they had bussed them in so they might participate in a “peaceful” demonstration. Many turned violent. Various religious faction have been fighting each other for centuries in the region: Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Muslims, and Russian Orthodox. One man who is knowledgeable observed that the Nazis and the Communists held them in check for decades, but not those restraints have been removed and violence has resurfaced.

Paul had received authority from the chief priests to carry out a exhaustive campaign against the saints in an effort to destroy this movement. He was authorized, motivated, and encouraged in the persecution of the saints. He arrested them and imprisoned them.

PUT TO DEATH. “When they were put to death, I cast my vote against them.” Barnes rightly notes that “In the history of those transactions there is no account of any Christian being put to death,

except Stephen, Acts 7. But there is no improbability in supposing that the same thing which had happened to Stephen, had occurred in other cases. Stephen was the first martyr; and as he was a prominent man, his case is particularly recorded” [BARNES]. His reasoning seems sound. Paul stood by and approved the death of Stephen, and watched the clothes of those who stoned him. Here, he may have simply voiced his approval, since we are not told of any court in which he could vote officially for it. To those who may not be aware of the fact that he was never married, this may imply membership in the Sanhedrin. There any indication that he actually killed anyone himself. We are not given that information. Again, his casting his vote does not mean that he was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was doing their dirty work for them.

26:11 - IN ALL THE SYNAGOGUES. *“In all the synagogues I often tried to make them blaspheme by punishing them. Being greatly enraged at them, I even pursued them to foreign cities.”* Many of those early followers of Jesus were still going to the local synagogues to worship and this must have enraged Paul and to the chief priests who authorized him to arrest them, imprison them and even kill some of them.

MAKE THEM BLASPHEME. A religious inquisition can be a shocking experience, as countless thousands have discovered, both in the early church and throughout the centuries. Paul persecuted saints in an effort to get them to blaspheme, and thus to commit an offense serious enough to punish them or even kill them. He sought to make the saints blaspheme, or speak evil against the temple, the Law, the prophets, of the elders to justify further punishment.

“From what is said in this verse, it seems that Paul, before his conversion, was invested with much power: he imprisoned the Christians; punished many in various synagogues; compelled them to blaspheme-to renounce, and, perhaps, to execrate Christ, in order to save their lives; and gave his voice, exerted all his influence and authority, against them, in order that they might be put to death; and from this it would seem that there were other persons put to death besides St. Stephen, though their names are not mentioned.” [Clarke].

BEING GREATLY ENRAGED AT THEM. Success often breeds a greater intensity, and for Paul, the more he persecuted the saints the more he wanted to extend the persecution to other cities. Too much success too young may lead some to complacency, but with Paul it seems that his success only fueled the fires for greater persecution.

I EVEN PURSUED THEM TO FOREIGN CITIES. The word translated “pursued” meant to run after or chase, as in hunted animals first and later, people [HLE: 363]. All we know about this is that he had received a letter authorizing him to go to Damascus to arrest believers and take them back to Jerusalem (Ch. 9). Paul used “cities” (plural), so he must have gone to some foreign cities, possibly cities closer to Jerusalem before going to Damascus.

Paul Recounts His Conversion and Commission

26:12 - TO DAMASCUS. *“Under these circumstances I was traveling to Damascus with authority and a commission from the chief priests.”* Under the “circumstances” mentioned already (pursuing believers to foreign cities), Paul was traveling to Damascus to hunt down any and all followers of Jesus Christ. In Vol. III, (on Chapter 9) in this series I commented on why Damascus was chosen, and how it was that the high priest could send Paul and his companions on such business to Damascus, the capitol of a nation that has been an enemy of Israel longer than most nations have existed. To answer the first question one must only remember that both nations had been conquered and subjugated by Rome and were now a part of the mighty Roman Empire.

As to the first question, this writer noted that “While modern scholars look to archaeologist for information about many ancient biblical sites, there is little we learn from archaeologists about Damascus, for the simple reason that it is still inhabited. However,

“Explorations do indicate settlement from before 3000 B.C. Tablets from the Syrian center of Ebla mention Damascus about 2300 B.C. Thutmose III of Egypt claimed to have conquered Damascus about 1475 B.C. The Hittites battled Egypt for control of Damascus until the Hittites were defeated by the Sea Peoples about 1200 B.C. At this time Arameans from the nearby desert came in and took control of an independent Damascus, gradually establishing a political power base” [HBD].

This writer continued:

“Israel had a long history of conflicts with Damascus. It seems to have been a known city when Abraham chased foreign kings north of Damascus to recover Lot, whom they had taken captive after invading Sodom (Gen. 14:15). That was 2000 years before Christ. Abraham’s servant Eliezer apparently came from Damascus (Gen. 15:2). It may have been founded not too long after Nimrod founded Nineveh and Babylon, and if so, it may well be the world’s oldest city” [Sanders, Johnny L., The Bible Notebook Series, Acts, Vol. III].

WITH AUTHORITY AND A COMMISSION. (met' exousias kai epitropês). Robertson says this was “Not merely "authority" (exousia), but express appointment (epitropê, old word, but here only in N.T., derived from epitropos, steward, and that from epitrepô, to turn over to, to commit)” [ATR]. Luke records the circumstances in Ch. 9:

“Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, **went to the high priest and requested letters from him to the synagogues in Damascus**, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, either men or women, he might bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2, bold added by this writer).

Here was a young Pharisee who was persecuting the followers of Jesus of Nazareth with such

tenacity and purpose that the high priest, a Sadducee, was more than happy to give him a letter which he could take to the various synagogues showing that he was authorized by the high priest to arrest and take to Jerusalem those Jews who professed faith in Jesus. He could in no way arrest any Gentile, however. Rome permitted the Sanhedrin to deal with religious issues in other cities, to arrest them, try them, and punish those who violated Jewish law. Supposedly, they could pass any sentence except the death sentence, in which case they appealed to the Roman governor, as in the case of Jesus (who stood before Pilate) and Paul (who stood before Felix).

26:13 - AT MIDDAY. *“At midday, while on the road, O king, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me.”* “At midday!” I love this! This is space-time history. It reminds me of John’s account of the feeding of the five thousand men plus women and children, where the Beloved Apostle adds that there was a lot of green grass there. When someone challenges us about the Bible, they like to put us at a disadvantage by demanding that we prove what some of the most brilliant scholars in history have sought to do for a long time: prove the Bible is true. Invariably, they demand to know if we believe the entire Bible is literally, and as soon as you affirm it, they immediately point to parables and metaphors to disprove you. The Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible Word of God, the Perfect Word of the perfect God, so how could it not be true. Maybe we should begin asking the growing number of enemies of Christ in America to **prove that the Bible is not true.** Perhaps a good place to begin would be to ask them to analyze the thousands of surviving manuscripts of the Scripture and put them to the same test to which they put the surviving manuscripts or partial manuscripts of Plato or Socrates. The Bible is filled with allusions to everyday things that ring of authenticity.

I SAW A LIGHT. It was at midday, but this was not the sun. Rather, it was a blinding light, as far as young Saul was concerned. Paul continues his testimony, “At midday, while on the road, O king, I saw a light from heaven brighter than the sun, shining around me and those traveling with me.” He is standing before King Agrippa II, and he addresses him personally, though he must have been keenly aware of the presence of the leading military leaders, political leaders, and merchants of the province who were in attendance. Paul is speaking to Agrippa, even though he was technically a prisoner of Festus. Even though Festus was governor, Agrippa had assumed control of this meeting.

Paul says that the light was brighter than the sun, meaning that even with the sun shining brilliantly, this light was overpowering. That it was a light from heaven was never in question as far as Paul was concerned. There must have been a lot of discussion among his companions about this light, both then and later, but we are not told that any of them were converted.

26:14 - WHEN WE HAD FALLEN TO THE GROUND. *“When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’* When he had spoken to the hostile Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, Paul has said, “As I was traveling and near Damascus, about noon an intense light from heaven suddenly flashed around me. **I fell to the ground and heard a voice** saying to me, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’” (Acts 22:6-7, bold added for emphasis). Those who are always looking for evidence that the Bible contradicts itself should be more

concerned that the Bible convicts them, but some may point to the difference in the two accounts (here and Ch. 9). Robertson explains the **in Jerusalem Paul had been speaking in Hebrew, whereas he was speaking Greek** before these Gentiles in Caesarea, and he make a natural addition [ATR]. In chapter 9, Luke wrote:

“As he traveled and was nearing Damascus, a light from heaven suddenly flashed around him. **Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying** to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” (Acts 9:3-4, bold added by this writer).

I HEARD A VOICE. In all the accounts, Paul is the only one who heard the voice. Such was the phenomenal experience that the light God sent caused all of them to fall to the ground, but only Saul of Tarsus heard the voice. Critics who might challenge that surely, if there was a voice his companions would have heard it should consider the fact that infer Saul was stricken with blindness. Not that it matters, but Paul’s addition here that the voice he heard was in the Hebrew language carries the implication of personal knowledge. He is speaking before King Agrippa, who would have known Hebrew, so the addition is natural. From this addition the modern reader may infer that this was a natural personal recollection.

SAUL, SAUL. The Lord is speaking and He is addressing one Saul of Tarsus. Repetition of the name was either to get his attention or for special emphasis. The sovereign Lord is dealing with Saul of Tarsus in a special way, as He often does in the Bible, and in history. He called Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, and Jeremiah in much the same way. He is acting according to His sovereignty. Who might have imagined that Paul’s name would someday be added to that list, or to the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11?

WHY ARE YOU PERSECUTING ME? In the comments on this voice in chapter 9, this writer wrote: First, Saul was addressed by name, a fact that left no room for denial or debate. Second, the voice asked, “Why do you persecute Me?”, a question (according to the Bible Knowledge Commentary) that is

“**filled with significance for it shows the union of Christ with His church.** The Lord did not ask, ‘Why do you persecute My church?’ The reference to ‘Me’ gave Saul his first glimpse into the great doctrine of Christians being in Christ. This same truth was implied earlier by Luke when he wrote that the Lord continues His work on earth in the church (1:1). Also Ananias’ lie to Peter was a lie to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Luke, with Paul, saw Christ and the church as the Head and its body” [BKC, bold added here by this writer].

Clearly, when one persecutes the church he is persecuting Christ, since He is the Head of the church and the church is the body of Christ. If that applied to those who persecuted the church in the First Century it applies today. Using the same logic, to pervert the message of the church, minimize the doctrines of the church, or to simply ignore the church is to commit a sin against Christ, the Head of the church

(bold added here for emphasis) [Acts. Vol. III, JLS].

IT IS HARD FOR YOU TO KICK AGAINST THE GOADS. The KJV has, “it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks”, which means that the modern preacher or teacher had to explain the word “pricks”. This was a vivid picture for Saul, as it would have been to people over the centuries before the machine age. The owner of the oxen trained them to obey his command. I had the privilege of going into the woods to see a man log with oxen when I was a very young man. This man used large oxen to “snake” the logs out of the woods, along a muddy trail. Land owners preferred to have this man do the logging because they did minimum damage to other trees. When these oxen pulled the log along side the waiting truck, the owner unhitched them and he threw a large chain over the logs and then spoke a quiet command to two oxen lined up side by side on the opposite side of the truck. Those oxen then began their slow, methodical walk forward. The chain tightened until the log began to crawl up the doubled chain, suspended parallel to the trailer of the truck. The log finally fell over onto the trailer, at which time the chain became slack. The owner then spoke to the two loading oxen, and while he was busy with other things, that pair of giant oxen slowly make a circle and lined up beside the truck to wait for another log to be loaded.

In Paul’s day, if an ox disobeyed, he might tap him on the back with the ox goad. If he did not obey then he would take the sharpened point and touch the back of his leg. If the ox obeyed that was the end of it, but if he kicked against the ox goad he would feel a sharp prick (thus the KJV, “prick”). If he kicked even harder he only hurt himself more.

That Jesus’ use of the metaphor of the ox goad denotes the intensity of Paul’s persecution of the church. One might conclude from those words that Paul knew he was doing wrong, but continued to do it to please the Sanhedrin, to advance himself before that body, or to impress his peers. People often continue in some sin, knowing that they are sinning against the Lord. They stubbornly resist the Holy Spirit, their family, and Christian friend who seek to persuade them to repent. The emphasis here seems to have been on the intensity of the persecution Paul was leading, but even as he was persecuting the church the Holy Spirit must have been dealing with him.

26:15 - WHO ARE YOU, LORD. *“But I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ “And the Lord replied: ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.’”* I checked a number of commentaries for comments on this verse and found that they had nothing to say on Paul’s question, or the Lord’s answer here. I find that interesting. For one thing, There seems to be no question in young Saul’s mind that the voice is from the true God of Israel. He apparently never considered any other possibility, which is a testimony to his training in the Old Testament Scriptures. There is another point that I find interesting here, and that is the title by which he addresses the speaker. Lord! Throughout the Pauline Epistles, this is a favorite title for Jesus. In all his inspired epistles, he speaks of God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Though he does not use the term, there is no doubt in my mind that he was constantly cognizant of and attentive to the Trinity.

I AM JESUS, WHOM YOU ARE PERSECUTING. This must have been the most traumatic announcement Saul could have imagined. The very One whose followers he is persecuting is now

addressing him by name! Whether one fanatical young Pharisee, the might of the Soviet Union, Communist China, or an ungodly network of Islamic clerics, no one is a threat to the One who is speaking to Paul here. There are six billion people in the world today and the population is increasing at an amazing, if not alarming rate. Nevertheless, when Jesus returns at some point in the future to wage war against His enemies, He will destroy them with the sword of His mouth (Rev. 19:15-21), which is His word. The intensity of Paul's persecution may have terrified many, but on the road to Damascus he was standing in the presence of the One he was persecuting.

Jesus! This is the name Saul had hated, the One whose followers he was persecuting with such fanatical zeal. He had been at war with this very Jesus. The Lord identifies Himself as Jesus, and once again reminds Saul that he was the One he was persecuting when he persecuted the church.

26:16 - STAND ON YOU FEET. *“But get up and stand on your feet. For I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of things you have seen, and of things in which I will appear to you.”* This is a simple enough command, but a little stronger in the Greek than in our translation, as Robertson explains: “(anastêthi kai stêthi). ‘Emphatic assonance’ (Page). Second aorist active imperative of compound verb (anistêmi) and simplex (histêmi). ‘**Stand up and take a stand**’ [ATR, bold added by this writer].

FOR I HAVE APPEARED. Our risen Lord, in His Sovereignty, chose to appear to young Saul of Tarsus in this way, just as God the Father had appeared to Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Samuel and others. In the days of Samuel, the Scripture says, the Word of God was precious, meaning that it was very rare for the Lord to speak verbally to an individual. The high priest and elders had high hopes for young Saul of Tarsus, but the supreme High Priest had a higher purpose. There are people today who announce that God has told them something. I believe it was Surgeon who listened to a woman say, God told me to tell you something, and offered a bit of advice. When she finished Spurgeon said, “God spoke to me after he spoke to you and told me not to pay any attention to you!”

Whether that happened or not, we must be very careful when we go around announcing, “God told me” to say thus and so. The Holy Spirit offers guidance, and sometimes He makes His message very clear to us, but we must remember that the listener may, and often does question that. It may be more honest (even if less “spiritual”) to say, “I have a distinct impression that the Lord would like for me to say (or do) something.” One test we must always remember is the Word of God. The Holy Spirit inspired every word of Scripture, and He will not tell you to say or do anything that contradicts or amends His inspired Word.

FOR THIS PURPOSE. This is a unique appearance - Paul's “Damascus Road Experience”. He recounts how the risen Christ had appeared to him and announced a special purpose for his life: “for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and a witness of things you have seen, and of things in which I will appear to you.” It is not surprising that any student of the Word would ask if Paul had no choice to make. In Romans 8, 29-30, we are given some insight into God's foreknowledge. Only God can foreknow something without preordaining it. He called Jeremiah before he was born; He singled out Samuel when he was a small child. Did they have no choice in the matter? We can be sure that, even though God called them they would not begin their service without a personal faith in Him. It may be that Paul believed the instant Jesus said, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting”, or

that may have come during the three days of blindness, but it had surely happened before he was visited by Ananias, his sight restored, and he was baptized.

The New Commentary on the Whole Bible, NT, summarizes this encounter in this way:

“Beginning with this verse and to the end of 26:18, Paul summarizes the message he had received from God regarding the work he was to do (cf. Ezek. 2:1ff. for a similar description of Ezekiel’s commission). **for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee**—Some ancient manuscripts have the word “me” (referring to Jesus) after the word “seen.” The translation would then be as follows: “. . . witness both of the things wherein you have seen me and of the things wherein I will appear to you.” According to this reading, the emphasis is on Jesus’ revelation of himself to Paul. It is not just that Jesus revealed many things (or, many items) to Paul. Jesus revealed himself, the unsearchably rich Christ, to Paul so that Paul may preach him among the nations (see Eph. 3:8). The first appearance Jesus made to Paul was on the road to Damascus. It was at this time that Paul saw the resurrected Christ (see 1 Cor. 15:8). Subsequent to this appearance, Paul received more appearances, in which Jesus revealed more and more to him about his commission” [NCWB, italics added by this writer].

26:17 - I WILL RESCUE. *“I will rescue you from the people and from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you...”* Is it not amazing that Jesus would begin by announcing that Paul would often be in need of rescue? This was certainly something Jesus foreknew. It is also interesting that Jesus did not use a modern day promotional approach, which might include the promise of travel to faraway places, appearances before kings and governors, or the privilege of associating with the movers and shakers of this new Way. He began by announcing that he would be in need of rescue, both from “the people” (Jews spoke of themselves in this way) and “from the Gentiles to whom I now send you.” Adam Clarke has an interesting comment on this promise: “From the Jews-and from the Gentiles, put here in opposition to the Jews; and both meaning mankind at large, wheresoever the providence of God might send him. **But he was to be delivered from the malice of the Jews, that he might be sent with salvation to the Gentiles**” [CLARKE].

“Paul understood Christ’s commissioning to mean that the Gentiles’ salvation depended on his presenting the gospel to them. No wonder he felt as though he was charged with a debt to the Gentiles (Rom 1:14). These people were not saved prior to the hearing of the gospel; they needed to hear the message of salvation from one like Paul (Rom 10:14, 15) [The Believer’s Study Bible notes, QuickVerse electronic Bible Library, 2007 - after this, BSB].

26:18 - TO OPEN THEIR EYES. *“...(T)to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to*

light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” The lost are referred to metaphorically as blind (they are in the dark). Barnes adds: “To enlighten or instruct them. Ignorance is represented by the eyes being closed, and the instruction of the gospel by the opening of the eyes” [BARNES]. Paul would write to the church at Ephesus, “ **[I pray] that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened** so you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the glorious riches of His inheritance among the saints...” (Eph 1:18, bold added by this writer). The purpose in opening their eyes is that they might see the light, meaning the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Only Jesus can open blind eyes that one may see the Light of the World. **No one can open his own eyes** through fasting, prayer, meditation, or even New Age silence (or Eastern Mysticism).

FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO GOD. Every one who has not already been delivered from “darkness to light “ (seen the light) is a slave to Satan. I sat in disbelief in the office of a fellow pastor in Greenville, MS, many years ago now, and listened as he told me about a lady in his church who came up to him one Sunday and said, “I have begun to wonder if there really is a devil.” This pastor gave me a knowing look, and continued: “I said, ‘Sshh, a lot of people haven’t discovered that yet.’” He was a veteran, a number of years older than I, and I had known him both in college and seminary. Sadly, in those days a number of professors were teaching that there was no Satan, he was only the “personification of evil”.

The professor who taught our intensive in Revelation when I was in seminary was pressed by a student who asked point blank, “Do you believe Satan really exists?” The professor offered the explanation that “There can only be one finite Person”, which meant that he did not believe in the existence of a personal devil. He was only the personification of evil. If a person does not believe in Satan, what do you think he believes about hell? In one episode of a once popular television sit-com, which is rerun all the time today, the children of a pastor go to a Buddhist monk and a Jewish rabbi to ask about hell. The Jew gives them a knowing smile, and says, “We are Jews, we don’t believe in hell.”

Jesus had personal experience with Satan in the wilderness immediately following His baptism (Matthew 4), and he encountered people who were demon possessed on many occasions. In the New Testament, we are warned frequently about the wiles of a very personal devil. Someone told Dr. R. G. Lee once, “I don’t believe in hell”; to which he said, “You won’t be there five minutes before you change your mind.”

When I was in seminary, a friend and I wrote to a number of pastors to ask them to share their position on the subject of Satan. One of my professors has just explained why there can be no personal devil. I was particularly pleased to receive the following letter from R. G. Lee, whom I loved and respected. I heard him on television every Sunday for several years. We got home from our services in time to see Dr. Lee drop down on his knee (in his white Palm Beach suit) to his right side of the pulpit and pray before preaching. I also heard him preach “Pay Day Some Day” in person at FBC, Senatobia, MS, and later in Jackson (he preached that sermon over 1200 times!). I used to hear him at conventions and evangelism conferences and in revivals. His letter to me was dated

March 1; 1962:

Dear Johnny,

I believe the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God – without any taint of error, personal in application, regenerative in power, inspired in totality – the miracle Book of diversity in unity. of harmony in infinite complexity.

Therefore, I believe what it teaches about the devil, Satan, in Job 2. I believe he was, and is, a Person – just as much as you are a person. I believe he has his wiles, his wisdom, his desires, his power, his angels, his ministers – as the Bible teaches.

I believe he is presumptuous (Job 1:6) and (Matt. 4:5-6) and proud (I Timothy 3:6) and powerful (Ephesians 2:2 and Ephesians 6:12) and wicked (I John 2:13). And malignant (Job 1:9 and Job 2:4), and subtle (Genesis 3:1 with 2 Cor. 3:11), and deceitful (II Cor. 11:4 and Ephesians 6:11), and fierce and cruel (Luke 8:29 and Luke 9:39-42 and I Peter 5:8).

I think the Devil is the one who started and keeps going the Modernist teaching and preaching and writing of our day – where some preachers and some teachers summon the Bible to appear at the bar of human reason and reduce the supernatural to ignorance and look upon the Bible miracles as legends and myths. Read II Thess. 2:9 and II Timothy 4:1)

I believe just what the Bible says in Jude – that the devil, Satan, will be condemned at the judgment along with the fallen angels. I believe that the doom of Satan is set forth just as Revelation 20:10 states.

I believe the temptations of Jesus were just as the Bible says – Jesus being assaulted by this fearful being who fell through pride (Isa. 14:12-14) – as even now the devil makes earth and air the scene of his tireless activity (Ephesians 2:2 and I Peter 5:8).

Just as Jesus was really the Son of God so Satan was really Satan – the Devil.

You can say this about the three temptations of Jesus:

1. The first temptation meant "SERVE yourself."
2. The second temptation meant "Let GOD serve you."
3. The third temptation means, "Let Me serve you."

How glad we are that temptation never loosened a moral fiber in the being of Jesus.

I hope this will be of help to you.

Yours earnestly,

Robert G. Lee

FORGIVENESS OF SIN. Jesus announced that people see the light and are delivered from the power of darkness that “they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” The Bible teaches that “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and that “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 6:23). All people have sinned and need forgiveness. When one believes in Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9-13) he receives eternal life and “a share among those who are sanctified in Me”. The doctrine of Sanctification is one of the most abused, and at the same time one of the most ignored doctrines in the New Testament. To some, sanctification is an ecstatic experience; to others the very subject is taboo. Perhaps the best capsule definition is found in Romans 8:29, where the Scripture says that God has predestined all believers to be “conformed to the image of His Son.”

26:19 - THEREFORE. *“Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.”* I have often stressed the importance of the word “therefore” in the Bible. Paul uses it to tie together what has been said, and what he is about to say. Here he is saying to King Agrippa that, because of his personal experience with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, he had declared the Good News both to Jews and to Gentiles: “I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.” This coming from the man who epitomizes obedience to Jesus Christ!

THE HEAVENLY VISION. Paul had met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, at which time he was appointed to preach the Gospel. He knew this was a vision from heaven, not a dream or an invention of his mind. Jesus had spoken to him, identified Himself, and commissioned him as an Apostle. Paul was blessed more than once by a visit by the risen Lord: “It is necessary to boast; it is not helpful, but I will move on to visions and revelations of the Lord” (2 Cor 12:1).

26:20 - I PREACHED. *“Instead, I preached to those in Damascus first, and to those in Jerusalem and in all the region of Judea, and to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works worthy of repentance.”* Instead of disobeying the heavenly vision (vs. 19), Paul says he preached to those in Damascus first. He wrote to the churches of Galatia, “I did not go up to Jerusalem to those who had become apostles before me; instead I went to Arabia and came back to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas, and I stayed with him 15 days” (Gal 1:17-18). The believers in Jerusalem did not trust Paul until Barnabas accepted him and persuaded others that the man who had devastated the church three years earlier was now a genuine believer. Since he was in Jerusalem only fifteen days, he could not have wasted any time as he visited synagogues in Jerusalem in the surrounding villages.

The three year period between his conversion and return to Jerusalem were not wasted. He may have

gone to the desert of Arabia for a period of time in order to pray and study the Old Testament prophecies relating to the Messiah. He would have needed time to realign his theology with reference to the One who had called him. He began his ministry by preaching to “those in Damascus first”, which probably means that he began preaching in the synagogues first, and then to Gentiles in the area. Barnes noted that “The 20th verse contains a summary of his labours in obedience to the command of the Lord Jesus. His argument is, that the Lord Jesus had from heaven commanded him to do this, and that he had done no more than to obey his injunction” [BARNES].

THEY SHOULD REPENT. Paul was the greatest theologian in the history of the church, but his message was basically the same as that of John the Baptist, whose preparation for his ministry was to a large part the school of the wilderness. All who preach the Gospel must preach repentance from sin, trust in Jesus Christ, and “do works worthy of repentance.” This was the message of the unsophisticated fore-runner to the Messiah and it was the message Paul preached, both to Jews and Gentiles. Anything less is not the Gospel, no matter how dramatic, entertaining, traumatic, or philosophical it may be. In this day Joel Osteen is one of the most popular preachers in America, yet when asked about his preaching he says that he does not preach repentance - he just wants everyone to feel good. Paul, however, preached that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23), and that “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:23).

DO WORKS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE. Repentance is a total about-face. It is a change of heart that is reflected in a change in one’s direction and behavior. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, “**For by grace you are saved through faith**, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift— **not from works**, so that no one can boast. For we are His creation—created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:8-10, bold added by this writer). James in no way contradicts Paul when he declares, “But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith from my works” (James 2:18). One of my favorite Bible teachers was the late Dr. E. R. Pinson, who taught me a number of classes at Mississippi College. One day in class Dr. Pinson made a statement that stamped itself in my mind and I have never forgotten it: “**Wind is not wind unless it is blowing, and faith is not faith unless it is working.**” It is an absolute heresy to imply that one can be saved by good works, but it is an absolute shame when one does not remind people that we are saved “unto good works” (Eph. 2:10, KJV).

26:21 - FOR THIS REASON. “*For this reason the Jews seized me in the temple complex and were trying to kill me.*” Clarke writes that “These causes may be reduced to four heads:-

1. He had maintained the resurrection of the dead.
2. The resurrection of Christ, whom they had crucified and slain.
3. That this Jesus was the promised Messiah.

4. He had offered salvation to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. He does not mention the accusation of having defiled the temple, nor of disloyalty to the Roman government; probably, because his adversaries had abandoned these charges at his preceding trial before Festus: see Acts 25:8” [CLARKE].

THE JEWS SEIZED ME. The Jews who had “seized” him were not the ones who opposed him during the fifteen day stay in Jerusalem, after his return from Damascus many years earlier, but those who had seized him after he returned with the offering for the suffering saints at the close of The Third Missionary Journey. It would not be lost on all those Gentiles before whom he was speaking as he addressed King Agrippa, that the Jews had seized him and tried to kill him because he was accused of taking Gentiles into the temple complex. This attack by the Jewish mob is what precipitated all the trials and hearing to which he had been subjected during the two years of his imprisonment in Caesarea.

26:22 - HELP THAT COMES FROM GOD. *“Since I have obtained help that comes from God, to this day I stand and testify to both small and great, saying nothing else than what the prophets and Moses said would take place...”* The attempt to kill Paul after they seized him and dragged him from the temple complex, the exposed plot by assassins to ambush him while he was in the custody of Roman soldiers, the charges before Felix, and again before Festus had all failed because of he had “obtained help that comes from God.” Had not Jesus promised to “rescue” him from both Jews and Gentiles when he called him on the road to Damascus (26:17)?

I STAND AND TESTIFY TO BOTH SMALL AND GREAT. Paul was standing before King Agrippa II and Governor Festus, as well as all the ranking military officers, government officials, and prominent citizens of the province, but he had preached for many years to small and great, wherever he found them. He had made no distinction between the small and the great, between rich and poor, between Jew and Gentile.

THE PROPHETS AND MOSES. *“(S)aying nothing else than what the prophets and Moses said would take place...”* The Jews had tried to kill him for preaching what they claimed to believe, namely the Law and the prophets. This was no new message, and the Jews of all people should have believed him. Instead, they sought to kill him, just as the Jews of Jeremiah’s day tried to kill him for declaring the Word of God to them. Those ancient Jews had refused to believe Jeremiah, so the Lord gave him a new message for the religious leaders of the day:

“[This is] the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: **“Stand in the gate of the house of the Lord** and there call out this word: Hear the word of the Lord, all [you people] of Judah who enter through these gates to worship the Lord.

“This is what the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Correct your ways and your deeds, and I will allow you to live in this place. **Do not trust deceitful words, chanting: This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord”** (Jer 7:1-4, bold added by this writer).

The Lord had told Jeremiah to proclaim that the physical temple would not save those who rebelled against him. Solomon's Temple was destroyed by Babylon in 586 B. C. Now some 650 years later, Paul had been seized, beaten, and subjected to two years of trials and hearings by Jewish religious leaders who were defending Herod's Temple, which Jesus had prophesied would soon be destroyed. Little could those Jewish religious leaders (who sought to kill Paul to defend the temple) have realized that within a decade Titus would be leading his troops against Jerusalem, or that the second magnificent temple would be destroyed in A. D. 70. Sadly, they still resist God and oppose those who preach that Jesus is the Messiah. They are too busy planning the construction of a third temple to listen to the clear message that the Messiah has already come, or that He is coming again.

26:23 - THE MESSIAH MUST SUFFER. *"...(T)hat the Messiah must suffer, and that as the first to rise from the dead, He would proclaim light to our people and to the Gentiles."* When John the Baptist had called Jesus "The Lamb of God", the rabbis had not understood him because they had not understood Isaiah 53. Nothing has changed with the modern Jew. Moses (The Law) had foretold His suffering, that he was destined to suffering. To the Jew the idea of a suffering Messiah was repugnant, but it fulfilled Scripture. It also gave the Gnostics a subject for much debate later on, as this writer points out in verse by verse studies on Galatians and Colossians (available on the PastorLife.Com web site).

Paul had just told Agrippa that he had preached "nothing else than what the prophets and Moses said would take place" (vs. 22). That message was clear enough for any student of the Scripture to have understood it, but when Paul declared this simple message, the experts in the Law and the prophets had tried to kill him. The Jewish leaders had forced Pilate's hand and had Jesus crucified. The high priest, chief priests, and all the Sanhedrin persecuted Peter and John when they accused them of killing the Messiah. Now, some 30 years later, the current leaders were trying to kill Paul for declaring that the very Jesus they had killed had risen from the dead. It is highly likely that there would have been some members of current Sanhedrin who were leaders even back when Jesus was crucified. The last thing they were willing to accept was that this Jesus had risen from the dead.

HE WOULD PROCLAIM LIGHT. Jesus did "rise from the dead" to "proclaim light" to the Jews (our people) and to the Gentiles. Paul clearly identifies himself as a Jew here. He had been called as an apostle to both Jews and Gentiles and he never wavered in that calling, even when Peter compromised in Antioch of Syria (Galatians 2).

The resurrection of Jesus provoked the Jews to violence and the Gentiles to mock and ridicule the message and those who preached it. Yet, Paul placed great emphasis on the resurrection in the epistles he was inspired to write. The message of the cross is not complete apart from the message of the resurrection both facts declared whenever he had an opportunity. Years ago, I prepared a study of Acts and typed my notes, with some space to write in other notes (there are 335 pages in the notebook). Then, I made handwritten notes on a legal pad, but over the years I never got around to combining them all. Recently, however, while reading through them I found in my handwritten notes the following comment by Dr. Leo Eddleman on this verse: the resurrection "was both

inevitable and indispensable. It proved the efficacy of Christ's death over sin, It conquered death, the chief fruit of sin. The power God uses in saving or converting believers is the same used in raising Christ from the dead (Eph. 2:19,20). (The) dramatic nature of the resurrection did more to call attention to Christianity than any other event" [HLE: 367].

Far from Persuaded

26:24 - FESTUS EXCLAIMED. *"As he was making his defense this way, Festus exclaimed in a loud voice, 'You're out of your mind, Paul! Too much study is driving you mad!'"* The late, H. Leo Eddleman noted that the those on the verge of breaking often accuse others of being mentally deranged [HLE: 367]. I often talked with the man who had been president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary when I was a student. His father had been pastor of my home church many years before, but he and my pastor were good friend and that opened the door for a special relationship with possibly the most brilliant and the most disciplined man I have ever known. I often sat and questioned him, even while he was writing his commentary on Acts. In fact, I took him to my study and questioned him for one hour and taped his answers. However, when it comes to the mental state of Governor, I doubt that he was nearing the breaking point, either psychologically or spiritually (as under the conviction of sin). I believe he simply found it incredulous that anyone could believe that a man had died and then risen from death. At the mention of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, Festus cried out with a loud voice, clearly intending that everyone in the hall would hear him.

YOU'RE OUT OF YOUR MIND, PAUL! If this prisoner had said this of any other person in history, the governor might well have been justified in calling him deranged. However, it is interesting that one who must have been familiar with Greek and Roman mythology would think this claim about Jesus was so unusual. But we may be safe in concluding that Roman mythology was the last thing on his mind at the moment.

TOO MUCH STUDY IS DRIVING YOU MAD! He would have been aware of the fact that Paul was very intelligent and that he spent a lot of time studying while in prison in Caesarea. He concluded that the material he was studying had caused him to lose his mind. Paul had already been inspired to write, "But the natural man does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because **it is foolishness to him**; he is not able to know it since it is evaluated spiritually" (1 Cor 2:14, bold added).

26:25 - SPEAKING THE WORDS OF TRUTH. *"But Paul replied, 'I'm not out of my mind, most excellent Festus. On the contrary, I'm speaking words of truth and good judgment.'" Paul offers a brief, simple, respectful rebuttal to the charge that he was mad, and then adds that he is speaking the truth "and good judgment". He has had his turn before Festus, and he had appealed to Caesar and the appeal had been granted, so he transitions from Festus back to Agrippa (Vs. 26).*

26:26 - THE KING KNOWS. *“For the king knows about these matters. It is to him I am actually speaking boldly. For I’m not convinced that any of these things escapes his notice, since this was not done in a corner!”* King Agrippa II reigned from A. D. 52 to A. D. 92, according to some records, so he would have known about Jesus of Nazareth and the activities of His followers, and he would have been aware of the riot in Jerusalem and the subsequent trials to which Paul had been subjected. “These matters” probably included the crucifixion of Christ, claims of His resurrection, and the growth the church throughout the province. Agrippa was a Jew and he had certainly heard enough about Christianity to know that Paul was speaking as a sober and serious man.

IT IS TO HIM. Paul was addressing Agrippa, not Festus! A statement like this in a Roman court, to a Roman governor, might have led to serious problems, but Paul had appealed to Rome and Festus had already made the decision to send him to Rome. That was settled, but Festus must write a letter stating the charges and he needed Agrippa’s with those charges.

Paul goes on to explain why he is speaking to Agrippa: “I’m not convinced that any of these things escapes his notice, since this was not done in a corner.” “This is a farther judicious apology for himself and his discourse. As if he had said: Conscious that the king understands all these subjects well, being fully versed in the law and the prophets, I have used the utmost freedom of speech, and have mentioned the tenets of my religion in their own appropriate terms” [CLARKE].

NOT DONE IN A CORNER. Palestine was but a small corner of the Roman Empire, but Paul’s emphasis is this province. Jesus died publically, was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Aramathea, and the word of His resurrection on the third day spread quickly in spite of the efforts of the Jewish leaders to squelch it. They did everything they could to stop the word from getting out, but the more they tried the more the message spread; and the more the Good News spread, the more Christianity spread. This was going on in public. There had been no way to squash it.

26:27 - DO YOU BELIEVE. *“King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you believe.”* Wow! Do you see what has just happened? Paul has just courteously silenced the Roman governor, and now he presses the point with Agrippa by asking if he believed in the prophets. **The king was the officer in charge of the temple and had to affirm belief in the prophets!** His answer would be in the affirmative if he answered at all. It had to be!

Paul turns a negative response into a positive witness. When the Christian witnesses for the Lord, he must often do just that. We do not often have someone who has not been attending services, “a cold prospect”, call us and ask us how to be saved. I can recall a man doing just that many years ago in Bastrop, Louisiana, and when this man was saved, his wife was saved, and in time I baptized several members of this family. Little did I see it coming, but within one year we baptized one person for every 11 members! We had one addition for every 6.7 members (and one baptism for every 12 members the next year). We must witness, but we must trust the results to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I had worked for five or six years before seeing such “overnight success”! It was all of the Lord.

The prisoner has been brought into the great government hall in Caesarea by the Festus, the Roman governor. He had been in this hall (or court) many times during the two year tenure of the previous governor, Felix. Before Festus, the prisoner had appealed to Rome and the appeal was granted. There was a problem, however. This prisoner had done nothing wrong, and when Nero is the Caesar a governor simply did not send a prisoner to stand before him without well written charges. There were no charges! Could the new governor say, “My predecessor kept him in prison and sent for him often in order to solicit a bribe? More to the point here, could Festus write that he might have dismissed this case, but in order to please the Jews he had tried to persuade him to go to Jerusalem for another trial there? Not unless he wanted to end up standing before Nero himself. Agrippa, who know much more about Jewish affairs might be able to help him compose that critical letter to the emperor.

Paul had graciously gone over the same testimony he must have given before Felix and Festus on many occasions. When he got to the message about the resurrection of Jesus, Festus interrupted to question his sanity, but Paul responded by telling him that King Agrippa had a good knowledge of Jewish affairs.

Suddenly, Paul, the prisoner, changes tactics and asked the king, “King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets?” It was little more than a rhetorical question, so Paul answers it himself: “I know you believe.” Clearly, he has in mind Messianic prophecies and the promise of a resurrection from the dead, the hope of which was expressed as early as the Patriarch Job, perhaps the first book of the Bible to be written, written near the time of Abraham, some five hundred years before Moses was inspired to write the Pentateuch.

Paul was witnessing to the King, and the king knew it. He wanted to see King Agrippa believe in Jesus of Nazareth and receive everlasting life. And the king knew it! Can you imagine the reaction of the king when he realized that Paul, the prisoner, had suddenly questioned the king? His response validates this claim (vs. 28).

26:28 - THEN THE KING SAID. *“Then Agrippa said to Paul, ‘Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?’* I have a confession. I have labored over the first twenty seven verses in this chapter, often taking an hour or more on a verse, with this verse in mind. To appreciate the reason for my desire to reach this verse, let us first look at the king’s response in the Authorized Version: “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28, KJV). The NASB reads, “Agrippa replied to Paul, ‘In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.”

I love the King James Version and everything I have ever memorized is from the KJV, but throughout my entire ministry, though I preached from the KJV, I studied from either the 1901 American Standard Version or the New American Standard Version. Both the NASB and the HCSB are word for word translations, not phrase for phrase translations (as the NIV). I was on the Broadman and Holman Committee, as a member of the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources, when the HCSB was published. As a matter of fact, my first vote of substance as a

member of that committee was to ask General Editor Dr. Ed Blum to continue the project and in an executive session, we voted to publish this new translation. For the first time in history, a Bible was being published with the benefit of the computer and the Internet. Translators were in constant communication with each other, and they could turn to their computers to assure consistency.

The differences in the translations is significant, but easily overlooked in a cursory reading. The KJV rendering led a hymn writer to write, “Almost persuaded, now to believe;” and it led countless preachers to prepare sermons in which there was an effort to show the congregation that Agrippa was on the verge of believing, but in the end, he dismisses Paul with the words, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” - “Almost persuaded, now to believe.” The preacher then extended the invitation to any who were almost persuaded: “Please do not do what Agrippa did! Do not leave this building without believing.” That is good preaching, but it is poor exegesis.

When Dr. Leon Hyatt was in the Missions Department of the Louisiana Baptist Convention, a number of years ago, he arranged for mission-minded churches to co-sponsor certain missions in south Louisiana. When I was pastor of Forest Baptist Church, Forest, our church usually ranked number two or three in the Louisiana Baptist Convention in percentage giving to missions through the Co-operative Program. In addition, we co-sponsored Little Pass Mission at Charinton, home of the Chattamachai Indians in south Louisiana, the Stephenville mission at Stephenson, and the Larto Baptist Mission near Jonesville. My older son John accompanied me when I visited these mission churches. One week-end, he and I drove down to Larto, visited with a member, Buddy Book, and spent the night in a mobile home they had set up near the church. The church was located on the only hill anywhere in the area. Having been flooded when the 1974 flood covered the delta, members decided to build up a hill and then build the church on the hill. Farmers with heavy dirt-moving equipment built up an artificial hill from that black soil and then they had someone build them new church building.

One got a strange sensation driving up the only hill in that part of the state to the church, but we were met by some very gracious people. When time came for Sunday School, John was invited to a youth class and I was invited to attend a men’s class. The Sunday School lesson that Sunday morning was from this passage. It was interesting to listen to **the teacher, the principal of a nearby high school**, teach the lesson. It did not take long to determine that **he had not ever read his lesson**. It seemed that he didn’t have to worry about that. In the class there was a retired pastor on whom he often called for help. The teacher sat midway of a table and I sat opposite him. He would read a verse, comment, and then look to his left and say, “Brother Brown, what do you think about that?” Brother “Brown” (not his real name), would then offer his comments.

That morning, after the principal read this verse, he looked across the table at me and asked, “Dr. Sanders, what do you thing about that?” **I not only gave my interpretation, I gave him the interpretation we had in the Sunday School lesson**. When I finished, I was very much aware of the fact that he had never heard that interpretation before. He turned to the elderly retired pastor and asked, “Brother Brown, what do you think about this verse?” Brother Brown then proceeded to give the old traditional interpretation of the verse, based on the unfortunate KJV translation. I knew right

then that **Brother Brown had not read his Sunday School lesson either!** That does not take away my love for the King James Version of the Bible, but as most preachers know, much of the preaching over the past centuries has involved explanation of some of the old English words we find in the 1611 KJV.

Note that Herod asked, “Are you going to persuade me to become a Christian so easily?” He is not “almost persuaded”, he is flabbergasted! This was incredible. Herod was speaking to Paul, but we must not forget the fact that he was speaking before the governor of the province and a rather large group of Roman dignitaries. What Agrippa express is incredulity! This is preposterous! To paraphrase it, the King demands, “Do you think you can persuade me to become a Christian so easily?” To him, this was absurd, but it was more than that, for Paul was trying to “convert” him before this official hearing. The prisoner questioning the king! Dr. Eddleman offers the following comments on this verse:

“The context here is evangelicalism and evangelism at its best: but we see spiritual indifference at its worst. Not to decide for Christ is to decide against Him (Matt. 12:30). Literally, Agrippa II’s response was ‘in a little thou persuadest me....but the passage is still difficult. It is not clear whether ‘in a little’ points to time, e.g. ‘in a little time,’ or a kind of gimmick with which to trip up the king” [HLE: 368].

This passage loses nothing in evangelistic appeal, or as a text for an evangelistic sermon, but we need to understand what is really happening. Far from being under conviction of sin, Agrippa was greatly offended. The Gospel confronts people with their sin and while some are persuaded to believe, others will arrogantly reject the message, the promise of the prophets (vs. 27).

26:29 - I WISH BEFORE GOD. *“I wish before God,” replied Paul, “that whether easily or with difficulty, not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am—except for these chains.”* Paul’s response was sincere, but mostly simply a response without much hope, for this is a “Conclusion of fourth-class condition (optative with an), undetermined with less likelihood, the so-called potential optative (Robertson, Grammar, p. 1021). Polite and courteous wish (first aorist middle optative of *euchomai*)” [ATR].

MIGHT BECOME AS I AM. This statement must have met with scorn from those assembled dignitaries who had come to the governor’s hall to see the show. They must have been thinking, “I wouldn’t trade places with this prisoner for anything on earth!” But Paul knew what they needed.

Paul had Agrippa point blank if he believed the prophets, and then answered his own question by saying, “I know you do.” To which the surprised but still arrogant king demanded, in essence, “Do you think you are going to make a Christian of me with so little persuasion?” The great evangelistic sermons based on the KJV rendering, appealed to people, “Please do not be like King Agrippa who was ‘almost persuaded’ to become a Christian.” The literal translation still lends itself to an evangelistic appeal to those who are under conviction of sin, but thinking of excuses not to do postpone that commitment. We can make Paul’s same appeal, but with greater appeal, and then trust

the results to the Holy Spirit.

26:30 - SO THE KING. “*So the king, the governor, Bernice, and those sitting with them got up...*” Upon hearing Paul’s response, King Agrippa, Festus, Bernice and the assembled dignitaries stood, so Agrippa might express an opinion to Festus. The hearing was over as far as Paul was concerned.

26:31 - NOTHING THAT DESERVES DEATH. “*...(A)nd when they had left they talked with each other and said, “This man is doing nothing that deserves death or chains.”* This probably means that Agrippa and Festus conferred, but some of the leading men may have been included, especially political leaders and attorneys. Festus was still faced with the problem of sending a prisoner to Rome to stand before Nero without any charges whatsoever that merited either death, which the Jews demanded, or the chains with which Paul would be restrained. He simply was not guilty of breaking any Roman law.

28:32 - AGRIPPA SAID. “*Then Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man could have been released if he had not appealed to Caesar.’* Agrippa states the obvious: he “could have been released.” He does not say he should be released because it is now too late for that. He should have been released two years earlier but Felix had kept him in prison, convinced that sooner or later Paul or his friends would offer him a bribe for Paul’s release. Then, as soon as Festus arrived and heard him he could have released him. Instead, he played politics with the Jewish leaders. Now, it is clear that Paul should have been released, but now it is too late. He had appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar he must go.

One footnote to this is that it seems incredible to us that Jesus would appear to Paul and assure him that he was going to Rome, and then permit him to be held as a prisoner in Caesarea for two long, trying years. We are tempted to cry, “What a waste!” However, the risen Lord knew what he was facing and though there was delay, Paul time was not wasted. His imprisonment gave Luke, his friend, companion, and physician an opportunity to research carefully all the things of which we was inspired to write the Third Gospel as well as this Book of Acts.

Chapter 27

SPECIAL NOTE: No one can study the New Testament, Church History, or even the secular history of the world without an appreciation for the role of Rome in shaping the history of the nations that would become known as “the West”. For example, centuries of discoveries in Great Britain have underscored the influence of ancient Rome on the people of England through the centuries. Dr. William R. Cooper sent me, by e-mail, a site where I read the following article which illustrates just one contribution Rome made to that island:

The Romans carried out cataract ops

By Jane Elliott

Health reporter, BBC News

Feb. 8, 2008

“Think of the Roman legacy to Britain and many things spring to mind - straight roads, under-floor heating, aqueducts and public baths.

“But they were also pioneers in the health arena - particularly in the area of eye care, with remedies for various eye conditions such as short-sightedness and conjunctivitis.

Perhaps most surprisingly of all is that the Romans - and others from ancient times, including the Chinese, Indians and Greeks - were also able also to carry out cataract operations. The Romans were almost certainly the first to do this in Britain.

Surgical skills

“Nowadays the procedure can be carried out with the help of ultrasound, but in Roman times technology was rather more basic - needles were inserted into the eye. The sharp end of the needle was used for surgery and the blunt end heated to cauterise the wound. Blows to the head were sometimes used to try and dislodge the cataract.

“Dr Nick Summerton, GP and advisor to the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has written a book "Medicine and Health in Roman Britain". In it, he details how various medical instruments found in Britain indicate that the Romans carried out other advanced procedures, such as head surgery and induced abortions. "Archaeological finds of eye medicine stamps, representations of eyes together with a sickness report from the Roman fort at Vindolanda suggest that eye diseases were a particular concern within Roman Britain," said Dr Summerton. "Interestingly the Roman author Celsus described cataract extraction surgery using a specially pointed needle - and possible cataract needles (specilla) have been found in Britain as well as elsewhere in the Roman Empire."

“Detailing the procedure Celsus said: "A needle is to be taken, pointed enough to penetrate, yet not too fine, and this is to be inserted straight through the two outer tunics. "When the (correct) spot is reached, the needle is to be sloped.....and should gently rotate there and little by little." Dr Summerton explained how eye doctors (oculists) manufactured ointment sticks (collyria) stamped with the ingredients and the name of the eye specialist.

“These were used to treat a range of eye problems such as conjunctivitis and other inflammatory or infectious eye condition in addition to short-sightedness. A large number of the eye remedies contained antiseptics in one form or another. "The

vinegar lotion of Gaius Valerius Amandus (from a stamp found at Biggleswade) or the copper oxide of Aurelius Polychronius (from a stamp found at Kenchester) would have been very effective antiseptics either in treating conjunctivitis or in preventing any scar on the eye becoming infected while it healed."

Excavations provide clues

"Dr Summerton has also discovered that religion played an important role in eye care. "It may be somewhat artificial to seek to rigidly separate out the spiritual from the physical aspects of Romano-British health care," he said. "At Wroxeter in Shropshire there may have been a particular focus on eye care with the discovery of two collyrium stamps in the names of Tiberius Claudius and Lucillianus together with a case of probable surgical instruments including an eye needle for cataract extraction. "However, this evidence of 'physical medicine' is complemented by the presence of eye votives (offerings to the Gods).

"In 1967 a piece of sheet-gold in the shape of a pair of eyes was found at the north-west corner of the Baths-Basilica. "In the same area bronze eyes have been unearthed in addition to numerous eyes carved from wall plaster. "Wroxeter has also yielded an altar to Apollo who was considered to have a particular association with eyes." Dr Alex Ionides, eye surgeon at Moorfield eye hospital said an ancient method for treating cataracts was referred to as "couching".

"A cataract is a clouding of the lens, which loses its transparency and becomes misty and foggy and white," he said. "The lens is held in place within the eye by multiple radial 'strings' called zonules. These become weaker with age and with cataract formation. "Couching' breaks these weakened strings so that the lens is no longer suspended in the correct position and falls away from the pupil, dropping into the back of the eye, allowing light into the eye once more. "There are different ways of performing couching, one is with a blunt stick to 'knock' the eye hard from the outside, thus dislodging the lens from the zonules by shear blunt force. "Another form of 'couching' was with a sharp metal probe that would be inserted, without anaesthetic through the edge of the iris, into the eye, and wiggled around to dislodge the cataract from the pupil.

"It wasn't until the 18th century that Daviel in France suggested opening up the eye and removing the cataract. "This technique met with various success and blinded many people including Handel, who as a result of his cataract surgery, was blind for the last few years of his London life." Cataract surgery is now the commonest operation performed on the NHS with vastly superior techniques and generally excellent visual outcomes - although no surgery is without some risk."

Paul had made plans to visit the church at Rome, he had been inspired to write a great and deep

epistle to that church long before he became a prisoner of Rome. While in prison in Caesarea, he had been assured by Jesus that he would go to Rome, and after two years he had appealed to Caesar, and the governor, Festus, had ruled that he was going to Rome. The Lord knew the significance of Rome and her potential contribution to the entire western hemisphere when He placed in Paul the desire to go to Rome. Imagine what it would have meant if Rome had been converted to Jesus Christ and had then spread the Gospel throughout Europe. As it was, believers in Rome had already taken the Gospel to Briton two years before Paul stood before King Agrippa II. Ancient British records, according to Dr. William R. Cooper (OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH] indicate that Bran, who had been captured along with his warrior son Carodoc, and taken to Rome in A. D. 49, had returned to Briton about the time Paul was writing his Epistle to the Romans in A. D. 58-59. He was accompanied by Aristobulus and others, and those ancient records tell us that Bran had taken the Gospel of Jesus Christ to that island. While Rome did not evangelize the world, individual believers did reach out from that city to various nations with the Gospel. None of this was by accident. God had raised up Rome to provide: (1) the safest travel by land or sea the world had ever known; (2) the best highway system the world had ever known; and (3) the greatest postal system the world had ever known.

The Voyage to Rome

HISTORICAL NOTE: The voyage from Caesarea, located some seventy miles north west of the city of Jerusalem on the Mediterranean Sea coast, to Rome may have taken place in the Fall of A. D. 60 - Spring of A. D. 61. In the verses we are about study we have a graphic account of Paul's voyage, shipwreck, and deliverance. Some have made the point that there is no such valuable account of a working ship in ancient times to be found elsewhere. Luke uses nautical terms, but some authorities insist that his description is that of an observant landlubber and not the record of a trained sailor. I once talked with Mel Neuschwanger, a retired naval officer who dismissed Luke's description of the handling of anchors at Malta by noting the way the navy handled anchors during the WW II era. Mel had fought through the War in the Pacific, had hand-delivered messages to and from Admiral "Bull" Halsey, and then served many more years before retirement. He was saved and called to preach the Gospel before leaving the navy, and he went on to earn degrees from Louisiana College and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, but he still judged this voyage from the perspective of a sailor, and not a Bible student.

I once went into the Agricultural Stabilization, and Conservation Service office (ASCS, a branch of the USDA) to check a map (aerial photograph) for my father who farmed in Tunica County, Mississippi. I had worked several summers for the ASCS in Quitman County and was very familiar with the maps. As I looked at our farm on the aerial photograph, I said, "I see that this line has been vinculumed out." To which the person helping me said, "You must have worked for the ASC!" I thought about it and realized that in five years I had never heard a farmer refer to the little slanted, long, thin "Z" as a vinculum. Attorneys, lawyers, theologians, carpenters, and mechanics all use terms and expressions that will identify them as individuals with a lot of experience in their field.

Luke was a physician, not a professional sailor, but he had sailed on many ships in the past and he would have gained a lot of additional experience on this voyage. Someone, and I did not note the source in my notes made in the mid-seventies, noted that Luke's account throws more light on ancient seafaring than all other ancient writings combined. Whether or not that is true I will leave to others to debate, but here is one thing I will not compromise on: **the fact that Luke was a "Gospel writer" does not mean that he was not an historian!** Enemies of the Cross may well identify themselves by dismissing Luke's account as "moral lessons", and not real history. In the Bible, that which is parabolic is parabolic; that which is metaphoric is metaphoric, and **that which is historical is historical!**

27:1 - WHEN IT WAS DECIDED. *"When it was decided that we were to sail to Italy, they handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial Regiment."* "When it was decided" means that officials worked out the details for the voyage and made the decision for Paul, his companions, other prisoners, and for the guards.

WE. Luke is with Paul on this voyage as we see in this resumption of the "we" sections in Acts. The last time we saw it was in 21:18. He probably came and went freely during Paul's two year imprisonment in Caesarea. He may have lived there during this time, or he may have stayed with Philip, who lived there with his family, including four daughters who prophesied. From The Holman Bible Dictionary we learn that Philip "transported by the Spirit to Azotus (Ashdod) and from there conducted an (itinerant) ministry until he took up residence in Caesarea (Acts 8:39-40). Then, for nearly twenty years, we lose sight of him. He is last seen in Scripture when Paul lodged in his home on his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts 21:8). He had four unmarried daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9)" [HBD]. Robertson comments on Luke's use of "we" here:

"In Caesarea Paul was the centre of the action all the time whether Luke was present or not. The great detail and minute accuracy of Luke's account of this voyage and shipwreck throw more light upon ancient seafaring than everything else put together. Smith's Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul is still a classic on the subject. Though so accurate in his use of sea terms, yet Luke writes like a landsman, not like a sailor. Besides, the character of Paul is here revealed in a remarkable fashion" [ATR].

Various commentaries entertain some interesting questions, many of which have little influence on the basic narrative. For example, one writer wonders if Luke paid his own way, or if Festus had Luke sent along to minister to Paul. All we know is that Luke and Aristarchus were traveling with Paul, so it is natural for him to use "we".

Luke tells us in the introductions to both the Third Gospel and the Book of Acts that he carefully researched everything of which he wrote. It is my conclusion that he did much of this research during the two years when Paul was a prisoner in Caesarea. No doubt, he spent a lot of time with Paul in Caesarea, but probably left from time to time to travel to Jerusalem and possibly to Galilee to talk with those who followed Jesus during His earthly ministry. Now, he will share an incredible voyage with Paul, which he was inspired to include this inspired account.

TO SAIL TO ITALY. It had been Paul's desire to go to Rome when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans in A. D. 58 (this writer's assumption), but he had been delayed by the Jewish leaders who made every effort to kill him. They are finally on their way to the center of the vast Roman Empire.

HANDED OVER PAUL. The Roman authorities under the governor (Festus) "handed over Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Imperial Regiment." The "other prisoners" may have been fellow prisoners who had appealed to Caesar, or condemned criminals on the way to Rome to be slaughtered in the Roman amphitheater.

The centurion is named here, as Cornelius had been named (Ch. 10). The Roman centurion was an important officer, and I had heard that his responsibilities were similar to those of the sergeant in today's army. I had accepted that until I began working on this series. I contacted my good friend, General Dutch Shoffner (retired three star general), to whom I have often looked for help in matters like this, and asked him if that was correct. General Shoffner wrote back that the Roman centurion would compare in rank and responsibilities to a Captain in the U. S. Army. That would explain the responsibilities given to centurions, who are spoken of with favor in the New Testament.

27:2 - WHEN WE HAD BOARDED. *"So when we had boarded a ship of Adramyttium, we put to sea, intending to sail to ports along the coast of the province of Asia. Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, was with us."* In chains and under guard, the prisoners were commanded to board the ship. Luke and other free men boarded the ship at the appropriate time.

SHIP OF ADRAMYTTIUM. The New Commentary on the Whole Bible carries the note: "They were bound for the Greek port of *Adramyttium*, located on the northeast coast of the Aegean Sea" [NCWB]. Robertson adds that this was: "A boat belonging to Adramyttium, a city in Mysia in the province of Asia. Probably a small coasting vessel on its way home for the winter stopping at various places (topous). Julius would take his chances to catch another ship for Rome. The usual way to go to Rome was to go to Alexandria and so to Rome, but no large ship for Alexandria was at hand" [ATR].

ARISTARCHUS, A MACEDONIAN FROM THESSALONICA. We often read about various associates of Paul, especially Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Silas, and Luke. There were many others who are not as well known to us, who nonetheless were very important to his work and supportive of the great missionary to the Gentiles. One of those faithful, courageous companions was Aristarchus, who had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem and stood by him during some really hard, dangerous times. He had been "seized by the Ephesians as he had traveled with Paul (19:29; 20:4). He was again identified as Paul's companion in Rome (Col. 4:10; Philem. 24)" [NCWB].

We are probably safe in assuming that Aristarchus and Luke, along with the family of Philip (the deacons (Acts 6-8) would have been among those who were given permission to visit Paul and minister to him during his two year imprisonment in Caesarea. In Colossians 4:10, Paul refers to Aristarchus as "my fellow prisoner", but Luke and Aristarchus were not

prisoners at this time, and seem to have gone with St. Paul merely as his companions, through affection to him, and love for Christ. “How Aristarchus became his fellow prisoner, as is stated Colossians 4:10, we cannot tell, but it could not have been at this time” [CLARKE].

27:3 - SIDON. *“The next day we put in at Sidon, and Julius treated Paul kindly and allowed him to go to his friends to receive their care.”* The verb translated “put in” is used here and in 28:12 in a technical nautical sense. Luke was an historian and linguist but he uses nautical terms freely, which is no surprise considering the fact that he had grown up in Troas and had sailed many times, both with Paul and on his own. Sidon was seventy miles from Caesarea, so they must have had a good wind [NCWB]. They by-passed Tyre and put in at Sidon, though they both had great harbors.

JULIUS TREATED PAUL KINDLY. Like other centurions we have met, Julius carries out his duties with a sense of responsibility, tempered with compassion and common sense. Clarke’s comments here are applicable:

“At the conclusion of the preceding chapter, it has been intimated that the kind treatment which Paul received, both from Julius and at Rome, was owing to the impression made on the minds of Agrippa and Festus, relative to his innocence. It appears that Julius permitted him to go ashore, and visit the Christians which were then at Sidon, without using any extraordinary precautions to prevent his escape. He was probably accompanied with the soldier to whose arm he was chained; and it is reasonable to conclude that this soldier would fare well on St. Paul's account” [CLARKE].

HIS FRIENDS. It is amazing that Julius would show this kind of compassion and consideration for Paul after one day, but he may have known him for some time in Caesarea before the voyage began. He must have known that both Agrippa and Festus believed him innocent of all charges. Perhaps that is the reason he allowed him “to go to his friends to receive their care.” One wonders what Luke meant by “their care”, but we may assume that he meant fellowship and prayer.

27:4 - WE SAILED. *“When we had put out to sea from there, we sailed along the northern coast of Cyprus because the winds were against us.”* While the ship loaded and unloaded cargo, the centurion Julius permitted Paul to visit friends, fellow Christians in Sidon (vs. 3). Then, they put out to sea in their coastal vessel, and, fighting contrary winds, they sailed past the northern coast of Cyprus, which had been the first stop for Barnabas and Saul on the First Missionary Journey. They were sailing to the northwest into the face of strong winds from the west or northwest [NCWB]. The Bible Knowledge Commentary carries the note that

“The information in these verses points up the difficulty of sailing from east to west in the Mediterranean Sea. **The prevailing winds** blew from the west so the ships would sail to the east **of Cyprus** and proceed with **difficulty** along the southwest coast of Asia Minor and to the east **of Crete**. When Paul sailed in the opposite direction, the ship took a more direct route (21:1-2)” [BKC].

27:5 - OFF CILICIA AND PAMPHYLIA. “*After sailing through the open sea off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we reached Myra in Lycia.*” “The Etesian winds were blowing from the northwest so that they could not cut straight across from Sidon to Patara with Cyprus on the right. They must run behind Cyprus and hug the shore of Cilicia and Pamphylia” [ATR].

MYRA IN LYCIA. “This seaport served as the center for cross-sea traffic and was one of the chief ports of the Egyptian grain trade. It was located slightly east of Patara” [NCWB]. Robertson adds that “This town was two and a half miles from the coast of Lycia. The port Andriace had a fine harbour and did a large grain business. No disciples are mentioned here nor at Lasea, Melita, Syracuse, Rhegium” [ATR].

27:6 - ALEXANDRIAN SHIP. “*There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy and put us on board.*” The centurion is Julius (27:1), who had shown Paul kindness at Sidon (27:3). Here he demonstrates the qualities of command that must have led to his promotion to the office of centurion when he found a ship from Alexandria which was sailing for Italy and secured passage for his troops and his prisoners. “Egypt provided the grain for Italy and this ship, with its load of wheat (27:35), could easily carry around 300 men. Though it was round about for a ship going from Alexandria to Italy to be stopped at a Lycian port, this was most likely the best route due to the constant western wind and the direction of the current” [NCWB].

27:7 - SAILING SLOWLY. “*Sailing slowly for many days, we came with difficulty as far as Cnidus. But since the wind did not allow us to approach it, we sailed along the south side of Crete off Salmone.*” For even the larger vessel on which they were now sailing, the contrary winds were a problem. They sailed slowly against the wind for many days before coming to Cnidus.

CNIDUS. “This was a city or promontory of Asia, opposite to Crete, at one corner of the peninsula of Caria. Some think that this was an island between Crete and a promontory of the same name” [CLARKE]. Luke tell us that they sailed from “the southwest point of Asia Minor and the western coast. Here the protection of the land from the northwest wind ceased” [ATR]. “This town, with its large harbor, was located on a peninsula with the island of Cos (see 21:1) just to the west. With a good wind they might have made the entire distance to Myra (130 miles) in one day” [NCWB]. They were fighting the winds all the way. We must remember that they were sailing late in the shipping season.

27:8 - WITH YET MORE DIFFICULTY. “*With yet more difficulty we sailed along the coast, and came to a place called Fair Havens near the city of Lasea.*” Luke’s account shows that they were fighting contrary winds constantly. They were sailing along the coast of Crete. “Scarcely being able to pass by it without being wrecked. Being almost driven on it. They passed round the east end of the island, because they had been unable to sail directly forward between the island and the main land” [BARNES].

FAIR HEAVENS. This port is still there and “is known by the same name; it was situated

towards the northern extremity of the island” CLARKE]. Barnes notes that “This was on the south-eastern part of the island of Crete. It was probably not so much a harbour as an open kind of road, which afforded good anchorage for a time. It is called by Stephen, the geographer, “the fair shore” [BARNES]. Lasea was identified in 1856 with the ruins of a small town some four miles east of the Bay of Fair Havens [WALKER].

SUMMARY OF VOYAGE TO THIS POINT: They embark from Caesarea in a ship of Adramyttium, and come the next day to Sidon, vs. 2,3. Then they sailed pass Cyprus, Cilicia, and Pamphylia, and come to Myra, 4,5. There they are transferred to a ship of Alexandria going to Italy; and sailed past Cnidus, Crete, Salmone, and came to the Fair Havens, vs. 6-8.

Paul’s Advice Is Ignored

27:9 - MUCH TIME. *“By now much time had passed, and the voyage was already dangerous. Since the Fast was already over, Paul gave his advice.”* We cannot determine how “much time had passed” but the “Fast” denotes the Day of Atonement: “This is to be a permanent statute for you: In **the seventh month, on the tenth [day] of the month** you are to practice self-denial and do no work, both the native and the foreigner who resides among you. Atonement will be made for you on this day to cleanse you, and you will be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (Lev 16:29-30, bold added by this writer). This would mean that the Fast was observed on the tenth day of Tishri, which is parallel to our tenth of September [HLE]. However, Robertson writes that

“the great day of atonement of the Jews, Lev 16:29) occurring about the end of September. The ancients considered navigation on the Mediterranean unsafe from early October till the middle of March. In A.D. 59 the Fast occurred on Oct. 5. There is nothing strange in Luke using this Jewish note of time as in Acts 20:6 though a Gentile Christian. Paul did it also (1Co 16:8). It is no proof that Luke was a Jewish proselyte. We do not know precisely when the party left Caesarea (possibly in August), but in ample time to arrive in Rome before October if conditions had been more favourable. But the contrary winds had made the voyage very slow and difficult all the way (verse Acts 27:7) besides the long delay here in this harbour of Fair Havens” [ATR].

There seems to be a contradiction as to the date of the Fast, and indeed there would be a contradiction, unless this voyage occurred in A. D. 60 (as Dr. William R. Cooper suggests in OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH), rather than A. D. 59, as Robertson holds.

PAUL GAVE HIS ADVICE. Paul is sailing on a ship which sailed under the command of an experienced captain, who may also to have been the owner of the ship (27:11). He is a prisoner of Rome, committed to an experienced centurion. What kind of advice would he have for such men? He had sailed many times, but never as the captain of a ship. Yet, Luke tells us that Paul advised the captain of this ship, and from the way Luke tells it we may safely infer that Luke knew the source of

this advice. Some believe “Paul was perhaps included in the ship’s council because of his experiences in travel (cf. 2 Cor. 11:25, “three times I was shipwrecked”) and his natural leadership” [BKC]. That may have some merit but the Lord is the source of this advice.

Today, there are those who declare that they receive direct messages (“a word of knowledge”) from the Lord. While the Holy Spirit guides believers, and while the individual who is being led by the Spirit might be convinced that the Lord is communicating with him or her, others may be doubtful, and in many cases the doubt seems justified. The Holy Spirit will never give us extra-biblical revelations which will in any way contradict the Word which He has inspired. The modern reader who doubts those claims of special communication, must remember that during the Apostolic age the Lord communicated directly with certain of His ministers, and some of those revelations may well have been to apostles and missionaries not mentioned in Acts. How else do we account for those apostles who moved out in different directions to witness, plant churches, and be martyred for the sake of Jesus Christ and His church? God communicated directly with Paul on a number of occasions, beginning on the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

27:10 - I CAN SEE. “...(A)nd told them, “Men, I can see that this voyage is headed toward damage and heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” By “men”, Luke probably means that Paul was addressing the ship’s officers and the centurion. One can imagine their thoughts when this prisoner declared, “I can see that this voyage is headed toward” disaster, and there will be a “heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.” These men were the veterans! A prisoner is announcing that he “can see” that they are headed for disaster. Paul could “see” because the Lord had revealed it to him. We may remind ourselves that Jesus had appeared to Paul and assured him that he was going to Rome. No student of the Word should have a problem discerning the source of this information. Paul is not just a frightened prisoner on this vessel, speculating as to the risks they were facing.

One question we may consider is how Paul came to be in a position to address the ship’s officers while they were fighting the angry winds of the sea. The logical conclusion is that he had the confidence of the centurion and he took him to the captain and others who were on duty and serving near him.

THIS VOYAGE. Paul stated, “I can see” that his voyage is headed for disaster. There would be a “damage” to the ship, “loss” of the cargo” and perhaps the total loss of the ship and “also our lives”. Even though some are convinced that Paul was consulted because of his wisdom and experience, the captain and the owner of the ship are not convinced, as we see in the next verse.

27:11 - BUT THE CENTURION. “*But the centurion paid attention to the captain and the owner of the ship rather than to what Paul said.*” Note that the centurion had authority over the ship, its cargo, the soldiers, and the prisoners. The captain and the ship’s owner may have been the same person, with the owner functioning as his own captain.

Paul may have asked the centurion to take him to the captain, whereupon he had given his advice. The ship’s owner and his officers clearly did not believe Paul and the centurion paid attention to

them rather than to Paul. This implies that “the authority rested ultimately in the hands of **the centurion** because grain ships were considered to be in government service” [BKC].

27:12 - THE HARBOR WAS UNSUITABLE. *“Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided to set sail from there, hoping somehow to reach Phoenix, a harbor on Crete open to the southwest and northwest, and to winter there.”* The name Fair Havens may have sounded like a safe place, and it must have been a safe harbor in this storm that was raging at the time, but the captain and the ship’s owner did not want to anchor there for the entire winter, possibly because it offered too much exposure to the elements. It would not have afforded adequate protection from “strong winds out of the northwest” [HLE: 377]. Also, if they had to spend the entire winter, say November - March there they may have run out of supplies. All the supplies they would need may not have been available to them locally.

THE MAJORITY. The majority “decided”. This is a condition of the fourth class, with the results yet undetermined. They felt that it was worth the chance of trying to reach Phoenix. Politically, in a democracy the majority is supposed to rule. A representative democracy (a republic) is believed by those who have lived under such a system to be the best system of government in the history of the world. At the same time, a majority of one, a 51 per cent majority, accomplished through the political moves, may thwart the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The majority here is clearly wrong, dangerously wrong.

PHOENIX. The majority, including the ship’s owner and his captain (unless he was his own captain), and the centurion (and possibly the ship’s officers) decided to set sail for “Phoenix, a harbor on Crete.” Crete was an island about half-way between Syria and Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. Apparently, the determining factor was that the harbor at Phoenix was “open to the southwest and northwest” which made it a more suitable place to winter. Barnes notes that

“This was a port or harbour on the south side of Crete, and west of the fair havens. It was a more convenient harbour, and regarded as more safe. It appears, therefore, that the majority of persons on board concurred with Paul in the belief that it was not advisable to attempt the navigation of the sea, until the dangers of the winter had passed by” [BARNES].

Storm at Sea

27:13 - GENTLE SOUTH WIND. *“When a gentle south wind sprang up, they thought they had achieved their purpose; they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete.”* Luke is recording real history and that includes details like this. They had been fighting a strong wind that made progress very difficult and threatened the ship, its cargo, and those aboard the vessel. When a “gentle south wind” came up the captain, his officers, and the centurion became confident they could reach Phoenix and winter there. The south wind was not ideal for their purpose, but not a serious problem for a seasoned sail master.

WEIGHED ANCHOR. When the gentle breeze came up they put Paul’s advice behind them and “weighed anchor”, another nautical term, but a natural one, not only for the sailors but also for those who sailed often. Luke had sailed with Paul before, and he had left Paul and returned to join him, possibly a number of times (or so this writer assumes). He was from Troas, a city located near the passageway from the Aegean Sea to the Black Sea. He may have been a landlubber, but he knew the terminology. Robertson adds that “They were so sure of the wisdom of their decision that **they did not even draw up the small boat** attached by a rope to the vessel's stern (verse Acts 27:16). It was only some forty miles to Lutro” [ATR, bold added by this writer]. We will read of this small boat again. Since they were sailing along the south shore of Crete, they must have been very hopeful, because the only real danger they might anticipate was a sudden change in the winds.

27:14 - A FIERCE WIND. *“But not long afterwards, a fierce wind called the “northeaster” rushed down from the island.”* Not longer after they had weighed anchor and begun sailing along the south shore of Crete, trailing the small boat used to go ashore for supplies, a sudden “fierce wind” arose, rushing across the island onto the sea, creating dangerous waves. The Believer’s Study Bible Notes (after this - BSB) points out the difficulty we have with this verse:

“This is a difficult verse to translate and interpret. Some translations use the word “northeaster” or its equivalent for this wind. The Vulgate has *Euraquilo* (Lat.), regarded as being the northeast wind. The name in the Greek is *eurakulon* and appears to give simply the direction of the wind. Luke’s words (*anemos tuphnikos*, Gk.) describing the wind can be translated “arose,” and are from the root word meaning “to throw.” Some have concluded, possibly erroneously, that *tuphognikos* is the base of the modern English “typhoon,” a “violent, turbulent whirlwind,” or a “squall.” The English word may have been borrowed, as others maintain, from elsewhere, possibly from the Chinese word *tai-fung*, referring to the heavenly squalls or tropical cyclones originating in the Philippines and China Sea. In this passage, the wind was clearly “tempestuous.” It descended violently upon the helpless crew and small group of passengers en route to Rome. Little did they realize that this wind was part of the divine purpose to fulfill Jesus’ words to Paul that he should testify of Him as Lord before Caesar” [BSB].

27:15 - THE SHIP WAS CAUGHT. *“Since the ship was caught and was unable to head into the wind, we gave way to it and were driven along.”* This ship could only be controlled by sails and the sails quickly became dangerous if not taken down in a storm like this. They were unable to head into the wind, so they “gave way to it and were driven along” by the fierce wind”vs. 14).

27:16 - RUNNING UNDER THE SHELTER. *“After running under the shelter of a little island called Cauda, we were barely able to get control of the skiff.”* They were driven by the fierce winds from the northeast, but found temporary relief as they were running under the shelter of a little Island called Cauda.” “The island is modern Gavdos, southwest of Crete” [Holman Bible Dictionary

- HBD]. Luke writes, “we were barely able to get control of the skiff” which they had not taken aboard when they set out from Fair Havens because they were sailing in a gentile breeze. In one commentary, Expositions of the Holy Scriptures, The Gospels and Acts (QuickVerse Electronic Bible Library - after this, EHS), the writer summarizes their plight:

“For a time it looked as if they would succeed, but they had a great headland jutting out in front which they must get round, and their ability to do this was doubtful. So they kept close in shore and weathered the point. But before they had made their harbour the wind suddenly chopped round, as is frequent of that coast, and the gentle southerly breeze turned into a fierce squall from the north-east or thereabouts, sweeping down from the Cretan mountains. That began their troubles. To make the port was impossible. The unwieldy vessel could not ‘face the wind,’ and so they had to run before it. It would carry them in a south-westerly direction, and towards a small island, under the lee of which they might hope for some shelter. Here they had a little breathing time, and could make things rather more ship-shape than they had been able to do when suddenly caught by the squall. Their boat had been towing behind them, and had to be hoisted on deck somehow” [EHS].

27:17 - GIRDED THE SHIP. “*After hoisting it up, they used ropes and tackle and girded the ship. Then, fearing they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the drift-anchor, and in this way they were driven along.*” Luke apparently helped hoist the small boat up, where it was secured. Then he watched as seasoned sailors undertook the far more dangerous task of “girding the ship”, which they obviously thought necessary under the circumstances, though we are not told why (Did they observe leaks, or were they afraid the ship was not prepared for the impact if they ran aground?). Again, I turn to the comments in the Expositions of the Holy Scripture:

“A more important, and probably more difficult, task was to get strong hawsers under the keel and round the sides, so as to help to hold the timbers together. The third thing was the most important of all, and has been misunderstood by commentators who knew more about Greek lexicons than ships. The most likely explanation of ‘lowering the gear’ (Rev. Ver.) is that it means ‘leaving up just enough of sail to keep the ship’s head to the wind, and bringing down everything else that could be got down’ (Ramsay, *St. Paul*, p. 329).

“Note that Luke says ‘we’ about hauling in the boat, and ‘they’ about the other tasks. He and the other passengers could lend a hand in the former, but not in the latter, which required more skilled labour. The reason for bringing down all needless top-hamper, and leaving up a little sail, was to keep the vessel from driving on to the great quicksands off the African coast, to which they would certainly have been carried if the wind held” [EHS].

FEARING THEY WOULD RUN AGROUND. Under the circumstances, the captain and

the centurion had to consider all possibilities, including the possibility that they might run aground and fulfill Paul's prophetic warning (vs.10). They were afraid they would run aground on the Syrtis. The Holman Bible Dictionary carries only a brief note on Syrtis: "Translated "quicksands" in Acts 27:17. Probably what is now known as the Gulf of Sidra, a place of shallow water with hidden rocks, sandbanks, and quicksands off the African coast west of Cyrene" [HBD]. Eddleman wrote that Syrtis denotes quicksand and that "it is properly begins with a capital letter. Two quicksands appear off the north Coast of Africa: Syrtis Major and Syrtis Minor" [HLE: 379]. Walker adds that Syrtis Major is intended here [WALKER]. That the northeast wind would drive them onto it if they continued in that direction was a reasonable speculation. All they could do now was drop the drift anchors, and hope they would keep the ship from running aground and being destroyed, with all aboard.

The writer of the commentary in *Expositions of the Holy Scripture*, adds the note here that

"As soon as they had drifted out from the lee of the friendly little island they were caught again in the storm. They were in danger of going down. As they drifted they had their 'starboard' broadside to the force of the wild sea, and it was a question how long the vessel's sides would last before they were stove in by the hammering of the waves, or how long she would be buoyant enough to ship seas without foundering. The only chance was to lighten her, so first the crew 'jettisoned' the cargo, and next day, as that did not give relief enough,'they,' or, according to some authorities, 'we'—that is passengers and all—threw everything possible overboard.

"That was the last attempt to save themselves, and after it there was nothing to do but to wait the apparently inevitable hour when they would all go down together. Idleness feeds despair, and despair nourishes idleness. Food was scarce, cooking it was impossible, appetite there was none. The doomed men spent the long idle days—which were scarcely day, so thick was the air with mist and foam and tempest—crouching anywhere for shelter, wet, tired, hungry, and hopeless. So they drifted 'for many days,' almost losing count of the length of time they had been thus. It was a gloomy company, but there was one man there in whom the lamp of hope burned when it had gone out in all others. Sun and stars were hidden, but Paul saw a better light, and his sky was clear and calm" [EHS].

27:18 - SEVERELY BATTERED. "*Because we were being severely battered by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo the next day.*" Day by day, the storm was taking its toll, their plight more critical. Still, there was no let up in the wind and they were being so "severely battered" that they had no option but to jettison the cargo. Though this writer finds no comment on it in any commentary consulted, it is assumed here that this was the "next day" after they had dropped the drift anchor (vs. 17). The centurion may well have made this decision after consulting the captain. Since they had neither the technology, nor the mechanics that a modern ship has, this would have been a major undertaking under the circumstances. Some have suggested that as they ship was

tossed from side to side the grain may have been shifting in such a perilous manner that the stability of the vessel was effected. Grain will shift, though not as easily as some may believe. Further more, the ship was running with the wind, not sideways to it, so that may not have been as much a problem as buoyancy and weight, especially if the grain was getting wet, which is a distinct possibility.

27:19 - THE SHIP'S GEAR. *“On the third day, they threw the ship’s gear overboard with their own hands.”* This seems to mean that on the third day after they had dropped the drift anchors, after they had thrown the cargo overboard, they began to jettison the ship’s gear. This would have included “The anchor, sails, cables, baggage, etc. That is, they threw over everything that was not indispensable to its preservation” [BARNES]. They did not jettison essential gear, for we see in Acts 27:29 that they still had the four stern anchors. Literally, they “flung out” the ship’s gear: their situation was getting desperate.

27:20 - MANY DAYS. *“For many days neither sun nor stars appeared, and the severe storm kept raging; finally all hope that we would be saved was disappearing.”* “It was actually **fourteen days** (27:27). **Having no stars by which to navigate** due to the storm clouds, they were lost” [NCWB, bold added by this writer]. They were totally dependent on the sun and stars to navigate, and since they did not see either for fourteen days they had no idea where they were.

THE SEVERE STORM KEPT RAGING. The storm may well have been intensifying since jettisoning the cargo and ship’s gear had not improved their situation. I have tried to think about their situation and I must admit that I cannot imagine what it would be like to be caught in a storm at sea that and raged for fourteen days. Then, I recalled something that made it a little more personal. My father, Joe. B. Sanders, was drafted toward the end of World War II, one of the oldest men to be drafted in that war. He once told me, “I don’t laugh at a person who was scared, “because I was scared one time.” Considering all the times I had been scared, even that early in my life, I had to know what it had taken to frighten him! Let me add that my father never bragged and I have never known a more honest man in my life. He never wanted to be anyone’s hero. Most World War II veterans I knew were like that.

My father told me that they got word that the war in Europe had ended about the time he was boarding the ship in Newark, New Jersey for France. They would be going to Berlin to serve as a part of the Occupation Force. In crossing the Atlantic there was a fire on board ship and the order had been issued to “prepare to abandon ship”. He was on deck and his life preserver was down in the sleeping quarters. Everyone was scrambling to get on deck, so there was no way he could get to his life preserver. He said those life preservers were only guaranteed for twenty-four hours and there was no way they were going to swim to land in twenty-four hours (the nearest land was seven miles, and that was straight down, so the captain had announced earlier!). My father was going to jump into the water and wait to see if he could find something floating he could hold onto and ride it out until help came. That would have scared me, but not my Daddy! I nearly drowned in a deep mill pond when I was eight years old and that scared him, but he had not been scared on that ship. That is still hard for me to believe. What would it take to scare him?

The order to abandon ship never came, so obviously they got the fire under control. On the return voyage they were caught in “the tail end of a hurricane” and at the worst part of it he was assigned to guard duty. He was on deck, in the bow, when the raging sea and the howling wind seemed to reach their zenith. He told me that he could look over the side and toward the front and the ship would rise on a giant wave and then it looked like when the bow fell it would have to plunge beneath the surface. Then it would roll from side to side, and when it did, he said, “I remembered that they told us in the shipyard, that if one of those ships rolled over, it would right itself. I had already stopped wondering if it was going to roll over: I knew it was! I was just wondering if it would really right itself.” Being on guard duty, he would not have had a chance of surviving if that had happened. So, he walked into the captain’s cabin and took a seat in front on the ship’s captain and army officers. He said, “I looked at them and saw that they were as scared as I was, and no one said a word to me.” The way he described it, it was like the ship was on a mountain peak one moment, and then plunging into a deep gorge the next. He was in a modern day troop transport, welded in ship yards by certified welders. He knew how they were made for he had been one of those welders (welding thirty foot overhead seams) before being drafted.

After writing the above note about my father’s experience in a storm at sea, I e-mailed it to family members, wondering if they had ever heard him tell this story. I copied the e-mail to a few close friends, including Dr. Leon Hyatt, whom I have known and respected for forty years. I had heard Dr. Hyatt mention service in WW II, but, like so many others who fought for our freedom, he never went into details about his experiences. One thing I remember from my college and seminary days was that there were a number of WW II veterans on both campuses. In many cases, they were men who had been saved and called into the ministry while overseas or soon after returning. Dr. Hyatt responded to the note about my father:

Dear Johnny,

Thank you for sharing with me your father's experiences going overseas and returning. The story does not tell what happened when he prepared to jump overboard because of a fire on the ship. Did he have to jump, or did they get the fire out? Obviously, he lived to have some other exciting adventures. The record of his experiences with the storm on his return journey brought back a lot of memories for me. (NOTE: This writer corrected that oversight.)

When I went overseas in World War II, I went in a Victory Ship (a very small vessel to make a smaller target for U-Boats, but loaded to the gills with men). **We slept in a deck with only a six foot ceiling, and we were stacked in bunks four deep** in that small space. We ran into a North Atlantic storm the first day out, and it continued for **six days**. In addition to the storm, the ship made a constantly turning route to make it harder for German radar to find it. Your father's description vividly portrays what we experienced. No one could go on deck, because waves constantly covered it. **We only ate cracker and apples during the entire length of the storm. Cooking was impossible.**

After we arrived in Europe, I fought with the 70th Infantry Division until the war ended. I remained in Germany for a year with the occupation army. Four months after I returned, I entered Louisiana College. Three months after that I began to pastor a church and continued as a pastor for thirty years before going to work out of the Baptist Building in guiding the start of new churches. I did not need to add all of that other information. I better stop, or I will make this little note too long.

Really I wanted to say "Thank you" for the story about your father and the vivid way in which it was portrayed. I appreciate all of the information your share with me. I should reply to more of them, but this one was especially meaningful to me. (Bold added by this writer)

Leon

Dr. Hyatt answered a question I had never asked, but one about which I had wondered. The “very small” Victory Ship. Why were they used to transport troops? To avoid the German U-boats. Makes perfect sense!

My father and Leon Hyatt were on well built, modern ships (for WW II), built to withstand violent storms. Paul and Luke were on a much smaller wooden vessel and it was in danger of breaking up in this storm. Dr. Hyatt’s ship battled the storm for six days, and my dad’s for four or five days. Paul and those on board that ancient vessel fought the storm for 14 days!

Dr. Hyatt has been one of my “faith heroes” for many years. Now, I add him to my list of WW II heroes. I have always been in awe of those who served in any branch of the military during that period, possibly because I wanted to know more about their experience, but found that they almost never talked about it. I never asked many questions, but when I found some of those veterans talking among themselves, I listened. Now, I am indebted to Leon Hyatt for helping me to have a little better sense of the danger to which Paul and all the others were subjected on that ancient ship in a raging sea.

NOTE: Please see **Appendix B** at the end of this volume for Dr. Hyatt’s battlefield experiences after those soldiers disembarked from that ship.

27:21 - PAUL STOOD UP. *“Since many were going without food, Paul stood up among them and said, ‘You men should have followed my advice not to sail from Crete and sustain this damage and loss.’”* They had not had an opportunity to prepare a meal for many days. The only thing they could have eaten was what they could grab and choke down as they fought to save the ship. At this point, Paul stood up and spoke to the men. Paul, the prisoner, became the leader. He seems to have had a way of becoming the leader in most situations. His calmness and assurance were what the others needed at this time.

YOU SHOULD HAVE FOLLOWED MY ADVICE. He is not simply saying, “I told you so!” They knew that. He had advised them not to sail from Crete, and because they had not listened then they had lost the valuable cargo and the ship’s gear; and now they were in danger of losing the whole ship, and the lives of all aboard. They had not followed his advice and now they were all in danger of losing their lives. His message now is simple enough: they cannot afford to make that mistake again.

27:22 - I URGE YOU. *“Now I urge you to take courage, because there will be no loss of any of your lives, but only of the ship.”* Because they had not listened to his advice earlier they were now in danger of losing their lives. Now, he has a new message for them, and this is a message of comfort and hope. He assures them that there would be no loss of life, even though the ship would be lost.

27: 23 - ANGEL. *“For this night an angel of the God I belong to and serve stood by me...”* He did not say that a particular angel appeared to him, but “an angel of the God I serve”, which distinguishes his God from all other gods. Robertson explains that this is the: “Second aorist active (intransitive) indicative of paristêmi with the locative case (beside me). The very form used by Paul of his trial (2Ti 4:17) when ‘the Lord stood by me’ (ho de kurios moi parastê) when others deserted him. This angel of the God whom Paul serves (in distinction from the heathen gods) is the reason for Paul’s present confidence” [ATR]. Another writer adds:

“This Divine communication was intended to give credit to the apostle and to his doctrine; and, in such perilous circumstances, to speak so confidently, when every appearance was against him, argued the fullest persuasion of the truth of what he spoke; and the fulfillment, so exactly coinciding with the prediction, must have shown these heathens that the God whom Paul served must be widely different from theirs” [CLARKE].

27:24 - DON’T BE AFRAID, PAUL. *“(S)aying, ‘Don’t be afraid, Paul. You must stand before Caesar. And, look! God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.’* It has been both amusing and edifying to me to observe from the reading of the Bible that any time an angel of the Lord visits a man or woman, the first thing he says is, “Don’t be afraid” (“Fear not”). Man in his arrogance thinks of himself as making up his own mind about God, or deciding for himself if he needs God, never realizing that God always takes the initiative in revealing Himself to man. Apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, no one would ever realize his lost state or his need for God’s salvation. At the same time, the sudden appearance of one who speaks to him is enough to strike fear in the most boldest individual. Paul has had visits from Jesus, so he would not have been terrified by the angel, but he would have been reverent because of the One who had sent him.

YOU MUST STAND BEFORE CAESAR. Jesus had promised two years that he would go to Rome, and now He has sent His angel to tell him he would stand before Caesar. No circumstances could prevent it. “Look” (“behold”) simply accentuates the promise the angel is making. Not only was Paul going to stand before Caesar, but, he says, “God has graciously given you all those who are sailing with you.” Right now, the ship’s owner and crew, the centurion and his soldiers, other

prisoners, and Luke and Aristarchus would be safe because of God's promise to Paul.

In the work, *Expositions of the Holy Scripture, the Gospels and Acts*, the writer makes some important points here:

“Hope, as well as timidity and fear, is infectious, and one cheery voice will revive the drooping spirits of a multitude. Paul had already established his personal ascendancy in that motley company of Roman soldiers, prisoners, sailors, and disciples. Now he stands forward with calm confidence, and infuses new hope into them all. What a miraculous change passes on externals when faith looks at them! The circumstances were the same as they had been for many days. The wind was howling and the waves pounding as before, the sky was black with tempest, and no sign of help was in sight, but Paul spoke, and all was changed, and a ray of sunshine fell on the wild waters that beat on the doomed vessel.

“**Three points are conspicuous** in his strong tonic words. First, there is the confident assurance of safety. A less noble nature would have said more in vindication of the wisdom of his former advice. It is very pleasant to small minds to say, ‘Did I not tell you so? You see how right I was.’ But the Apostle did not care for petty triumphs of that sort. A smaller man might have sulked because his advice had not been taken, and have said to himself, ‘They would not listen to me before, I will hold my tongue now.’ But the Apostle only refers to his former counsel and its confirmation in order to induce acceptance of his present words....

“The angel's message must have included particulars unnoticed in Luke's summary; as, for instance, the wreck on ‘a certain island.’ But the two salient points in it are the certainty of Paul's own preservation, that the divine purpose of his appearing before Caesar might be fulfilled, and the escape of all the ship's company. As to the former, we may learn how Paul's life, like every man's, is shaped according to a divine plan, and how we are ‘immortal till our work is done,’ and till God has done His work in and on and by us. As to the latter point, we may gather from the word ‘has *given*’ the certainty that **Paul had been praying for the lives of all that sailed with him**, and may learn, not only that the prayers of God's servants are a real element in determining God's dealings with men, but that a true servant of God's will ever reach out his desires and widen his prayers to embrace those with whom he is brought into contact, be they heathens, persecutors, rough and careless, or fellow-believers. If Christian people more faithfully discharged the duty of intercession, they would more frequently receive in answer the lives of ‘all them that sail with’ them over the stormy ocean of life.

“The third point in the Apostle's encouraging speech is the example of his own faith, which is likewise an exhortation to the hearers to exercise the

same. If God speaks by His angel with such firm promises, man's plain wisdom is to grasp the divine assurance with a firm hand. We must build rock upon rock. 'I believe God,' that surely is a credence demanded by common sense and warranted by the sanest reason. If we do so believe, and take His word as the infallible authority revealing present duty and future blessings, then, however lowering the sky, and wild the water, and battered the vessel, and empty of earthly succour the gloomy horizon, and heavy our hearts, we shall 'be of good cheer,' and in due time the event will warrant our faith in God and His promise, even though all around us seems to make our faith folly and our hope a mockery" [EHS].

27:25 - TAKE COURAGE. *"Therefore, take courage, men, because I believe God that it will be just the way it was told to me."* Now we see that Paul's, "you should have listened to me" introduction did not mean, "I told you so". Instead, he urges them, "take courage, men." "Men" does not address an individual or group, but everyone on board (276 men). They had not listened to him, and they had gotten into serious trouble, but they are not beyond the reach of his God.

I BELIEVE GOD. Faith is not believing there is a God; the devil believes that. The late Stephen Olford once said, "Faith is not believing God can do it, faith is believing God will do it." Paul said, "I believe God", but just what does that mean? It means that Paul believed "that it will be just the way it was told to me." Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had that kind of faith? Maybe someone would argue, "If I had seen and angel I would believe..." In Hebrews, we read that Jesus is greater than the angels. But, one might argue, "Jesus had spoken to Paul." We have every advantage over Paul. We have the New Testament Scriptures! We have the perfect Word of the Perfect God, often in various translations, along with all sorts of resources to help us understand it. We are without excuse when we say we wish we had the faith of Paul. Francis Schaeffer once wrote:

"Let us understand that the beginning of Christianity is not salvation: it is the existence of the Trinity. Before there was anything else, God existed as personal God in the high order of the Trinity. So there was communication and love between the persons of the Trinity before all else. This is the beginning" [Scaheffer, Francis, A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE CHURCH, in The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer: A Christian World View, Crossway Books, 1982, p, 39].

Being a Christian is not a matter of identification with one denomination as opposed to another. Being a Christian is all about believing the God who is there (as Schaeffer expresses it in his initial Trilogy). Interestingly, the first and third books in that trilogy are THE GOD WHO IS THERE and HE IS THERE, AND HE IS NOT SILENT. The second book in that series was ESCAPE FROM REASON. The God who is there had sent his angel to speak with Paul, and Paul believed Him.

27:26 - HOWEVER. *"However, we must run aground on a certain island."* Paul believed God. God promised he was going to Rome, so he knew he was going to Rome. No storm could prevent that. "However", there was a price to pay for not believing God (there always is). Because the owner and the centurion refused to hear Paul's earlier warning they were headed for disaster. There

was a price to pay for their disobedience. The ship would run aground (“upon a certain island”) and be destroyed, but no one soul would be lost, as long as they listened to him now.

27:27 - THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT. *“When the fourteenth night came, we were drifting in the Adriatic Sea, and in the middle of the night the sailors thought they were approaching land.”* They had been driven by the wind and tossed from wave to wave like a cork for fourteen days and on the fourteenth night they were drifting closer and closer to disaster. I cannot imagine Leon Hyatt’s experience in a modern ship that had an engine that continued to work and instruments to guide them for six days in the horrific storm described by him in the notes on verse 20. Fourteen days in a ship that had no power but the wind is beyond my comprehension. Their situation was made worse because they had no guidance system, and no control over the vessel.

WE WERE DRIFTING. They were drifting (driven by the wind) “in the Adriatic Sea”. This had given me a problem because of the direction, but I went back to my original study in Acts and discovered a note I had made on a yellow legal pad after I had completed that study. In that note I found the answer: “Adriatic is not the Adriatic Sea which is the present Gulf of Venice. It is the larger portion of the lower Mediterranean just north of Africa, extending approximately from the area below Italy to that below Greece” [HLE: 382]. That confirms the fear Luke describes in verse 17, where he writes, “fearing they would run aground on the Syrtis, they lowered the drift-anchor, and in this way they were driven along.” Syrtis (Major Syrtis and Minor Syrtis) denotes the quicksand along the northern coast of Africa.

A ship drifting for 13 days at the rate of a one and one-half miles per hour would cover a distance of 468 miles. The distance between Cauda and Malta is less than 480 miles and Malta lies in the direction they were traveling. They were now in their fourteenth night, which makes the distance about right.

THE SAILORS THOUGHT. Luke notes that “in the middle of the night the sailors thought they were approaching land.” Experienced sailors would have been alert to the difference in the sea. Luke uses the “imperfect active indicative of *huponoeô*, inchoative, began to suspect” [ATR] that they were approaching land. This suggests that the experienced sailors may have heard the sound of breakers and began watching for land.

27:28 - A SOUNDING. *“They took a sounding and found it to be 120 feet deep; when they had sailed a little farther and sounded again, they found it to be 90 feet deep.”* Luke’s narrative speaks for itself. The sailors, fearing they would run aground on some land (vs. 27), began taking soundings by throwing out a line with a weight on the end to determine the depth. They quickly moved from a depth of 120 feet to a depth of 90 feet, a clear indication that they were in danger of running aground. Paul’s declaration that the ship would be lost must have played on their minds as they took the soundings. He had said assured them no life would be lost, but “we must run aground on a certain island” (27:26). What God promises, God accomplishes!

27:29 - RUN AGROUND. *“Then, fearing we might run aground in some rocky place, they*

dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight to come.” Their fears were realistic. Paul had announced that the God he served had assured him they would indeed run aground on some island, and even though Paul’s God had promised that there would be no loss of life, these men did not know His God, so, fearing they were about to “run aground in some rocky place, they dropped four anchors from the stern.” Jimmy Furr, my brother-in-law, is a Director of Missions for two Baptist Associations in western Tennessee and he recently went to Malta to help launch a mission commitment by the Tennessee Baptist Convention to take the Gospel to that island. He showed me pictures of that island, including what they have designated as St. Paul’s Bay, and I immediately understand their fears. There were indeed many rocky places. In fact, as I told my brother-in-law, I had envisioned a shore like I have seen on the U. S. Gulf coast, from Texas to Florida, or the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Florida. These pictures reveal sheer rocky cliffs and incredibly deep gorges, as well as a large, beautiful harbor. The water near one rock cliff is 15 to 20 feet deep and so clear you can see the bottom.

The frightened sailors in charge of the ship carrying Paul to Rome were not enjoying the beauty, they were in a panic mode, knowing that the ship was about to run aground or crash into a rocky shore. Adam Clarke writes: “By this time the storm must have been considerably abated; though the agitation of the sea could not have subsided much. The anchors were cast out of the stern to prevent the vessel from drifting ashore, as they found that, the farther they stood in, the shallower the water grew; therefore they dropped the anchor astern, as even one ship's length might be of much consequence” [CLARKE].

The New Commentary on the Whole Bible, New Testament carries the following note on this verse:

“Most ships today are equipped with anchors only at the bow. Since both ends of this ship were built alike, it needed anchors at both ends. Two anchors were usually used during a storm, which shows the severity of this gale. **wished**—they anxiously waited. **for the day**—At that time they could see where they were and whether there was a safe place to dock the boat” [NCWB].

27:30 - SOME SAILORS. *“Some sailors tried to escape from the ship; they had let down the skiff into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out anchors from the bow. Self preservation is a powerful motivation and these sailors, looking out for themselves, were about to abandon the ship and let everyone left aboard perish, including the ship’s owner, the centurion, and his men. They were not concerned about the prisoners and other passengers. They were only thinking of themselves.*

The comments made by the late Mel Neuschwanger continued to challenge me as I read this verse. Mel was a retired naval officer who was saved and called into the ministry after fighting through World War II in the Pacific Theater. He went to Louisiana College and then to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He had retired from the pastorate when I met him and I often invited him to travel with me when I made out of town hospital calls, from Jackson, MS to Shreveport, LA. We often talked about the Scripture and I was surprised to discover that Mel read this account through the lens of a modern sailor,

assuming that Luke did not understand the sea or sailing. Mel, speaking with conviction based on his years aboard ships in the Pacific, declared, “one of those anchors would have sunk that boat!” I tried to explain that they were not using anchors as large or heavy as those on a modern battle ship like the one on which he had served when he hand-delivered critical messages to and from Admiral “Bull” Halsey. Those ancient mariners, as Mel pointed out, could not have moved those anchors from the bow to the stern if they had been like modern anchors on large naval vessels. They had apparently moved those anchors to the stern as the winds let up enough to permit it. However, Paul did not believe them when they said they were going to move the anchors back to the bow.

27:31 - PAUL SAID TO THE CENTURION. “*Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, ‘Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.’*” Paul knew exactly what the sailors were doing and he alerted the centurion, the Roman officer in command, and his soldiers. He had not forgotten his announcement that God had promised him He would spare the lives of all on the ship when the ship was destroyed. The sailors were abandoning the ship with all aboard, revealing themselves to Paul as merciless cowards who were going to sacrifice the ship and all aboard to save themselves. Paul trusted God’s promise, but he understood that the ship would need experienced sailors the next day if they were to survive an effort to run aground on the shore of this strange island. He said, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved”, and the “you” is emphatic. They would need the sailors to handle the ship the next day. Paul had not forgotten the Lord’s promise, but neither had he forsaken his own mental faculties.

The author of the material in *Expositions of the Holy Scripture* is a little verbose, but worth the time and effort to read:

“This minute narrative is evidently the work of one of the passengers who knew a good deal about nautical matters. It reads like a log-book. But as James Smith has well noted in his interesting monograph on the chapter, the writer’s descriptions, though accurate, are unprofessional, thus confirming Luke’s authorship. Where had the ‘beloved physician’ learned so much about the sea and ships? Did the great galleys carry surgeons as now? At all events the story is one of the most graphic accounts ever written. This narrative begins when the doomed ship has cast anchor, with a rocky coast close under her lee. The one question is, Will the four anchors hold? No wonder that the passengers longed for daylight!

“The first point is the crew’s dastardly trick to save themselves, frustrated by Paul’s insight and promptitude. The pretext for getting into the boat was specious. Anchoring by the bow as well as by the stern would help to keep the ship from driving ashore; and if once the crew were in the boat and pulled as far as was necessary to lay out the anchors, it would be easy, under cover of the darkness, to make good their escape on shore and leave the landsmen on board to shift for themselves. The boat must have been of considerable size to hold the crew of so large a ship. It was already lying alongside, and landsmen would not suspect what lay under the apparently

brave attempt to add to the vessel's security, but Paul did so. His practical sagacity was as conspicuous a trait as his lofty enthusiasm. Common sense need not be divorced from high aims or from the intensest religious self-devotion. The idealist beat the practical centurion in penetrating the sailors' scheme.

“That must have been a great nature which combined such different characteristics as the Apostle shows. Unselfish devotion is often wonderfully clear-sighted as to the workings of its opposite. The Apostle's promptitude is as noticeable as his penetration. He wastes no time in remonstrance with the cowards, who would have been over the side and off in the dark while he talked, but goes straight to the man in authority. Note, too, that he keeps his place as a prisoner. It is not his business to suggest what is to be done. That might have been resented as presumptuous; but he has a right to point out the danger, and he leaves the centurion to settle how to meet it. Significantly does he say ‘ye,’ not ‘we.’ He was perfectly certain that he ‘must be brought before Caesar’; and though he believed that all on board would escape, he seems to regard his own safety as even more certain than that of the others” [EHS].

27:32 - THE SOLDIERS. *“Then the soldiers cut the ropes holding the skiff and let it drop away.”* The soldiers are now listening to Paul. They understood that the sailors were going to take the skiff and try to make it to shore, leaving the ship and all aboard to the mercy of a merciless sea. They moved quickly to cut the ropes holding the skiff so that it dropped into the sea. The cowardly sailors were forced to do all they could to position the ship for the inevitable crash then next day.

27:33 - PAUL URGED THEM. *“When it was just about daylight, Paul urged them all to take food, saying, ‘Today is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting and going without food, having eaten nothing.’* They had survived the night and now in the dawn's early light, Paul assessed their situation and urged everyone on board to “take food”.

FOURTEENTH DAY. This does not mean that they had not eaten a bite of anything in fourteen days, but that there had been no way to prepare a meal in fourteen days. In Dr. Leon Hyatt's account (see notes on verse 20), he says that they ate only crackers and apples for six days as they rode out that storm during World War II. These ancient sailors may have eaten some dried bread, or dried fish, but they had not been able to cook on fourteen days.

27:34 - I URGE YOU. *“Therefore I urge you to take some food. For this has to do with your survival, since not a hair will be lost from the head of any of you.”* They may have been more inclined to grab a piece of dried fish and then face whatever was ahead of them, but Paul strongly urged them to eat a good meal. It had been fourteen days since they had done so. Paul was practical, but he was also trusting the Lord to fulfill His promise. They needed to eat a good meal before the inevitable shipwreck they were facing. They would be spared, but they would need their strength.

NOT A HAIR. This was a Jewish proverbial expression, denoting complete immunity from harm (1 Sam. 14:45; 1 Kings 1:52). One often hears it today.

27:35 - HE GAVE THANKS. *“After he said these things and had taken some bread, he gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, and when he had broken it, he began to eat.”* The author of the material in the Bible Knowledge Commentary adds that:

“Because of Paul’s confidence in the Lord to keep them all safe (v. 24), he encouraged them **to eat** (vv. 33-34). **He** then **took some bread**, unashamedly thanked **God** for it, and **broke it and** started eating. Though this sounds like an observance of the Lord’s Table, it probably was not. Most of those 276 people were not Christians. Rather it was a public testimony by Paul of his faith in the God and Father of the Lord Jesus as well as a practical expedient of eating in order to muster strength for the ordeal ahead” [BKC].

27:36 - THEY BECAME ENCOURAGED. *“They all became encouraged and took food themselves.”* They were encouraged, both by Paul’s words and his example. It is amazing that they are now listening to their prisoner. They were also following his example.

27:37 - IN ALL. *“In all there were 276 of us on the ship.”* Luke is not keeping the ship’s log, but his account would almost pass for one. We are reading real history here. As Francis Schaeffer used to stress, this is space/time history. Through this entire experience not one soul had been lost. There were 276 people aboard, including soldiers, sailors, and prisoners. “This grain **ship** not only carried cargo but also had **276** passengers and crew members. The number of prisoners (v. 42) is not stated. This was not an excessively large ship, for Josephus wrote about a ship which he boarded to Italy which carried 600 passengers” [BKC].

27:38 - LIGHTEN THE SHIP. *“And having eaten enough food, they began to lighten the ship by throwing the grain overboard into the sea.”* This is interesting! In verses 18-19, we read: “Because we were being severely battered by the storm, they began to jettison the cargo the next day. On the third day, they threw the ship’s gear overboard with their own hands.” They had jettisoned the cargo on the second day and the ship’s gear on the third day. Was the grain not part of the cargo? This obviously means that they had only partially jettisoned the grain on the second day. In the first place, they were fighting a raging sea when they threw out the grain on the second day. They may not have intended to throw out all of it at first. They may have needed some of it in the hold for stability and buoyancy. Another possibility is that they threw overboard the grain on the deck but not that in the hold on the second day.

The Shipwreck

27:39 - SIGHTED A BAY. *“When daylight came, they did not recognize the land, but sighted a bay with a beach. They planned to run the ship ashore if they could.”* The sailors did not recognize the land, and the Jewish prisoners could not have been expected to recognize it. I have a picture of St. Paul’s Bay on the Island of Malta, made in March, 2008, that shows what the people of Malta believe to have been the bay where this ship landed. They call it St. Paul’s Bay. It is a rugged, treacherous site for a shipwreck. It is amazing that all the crew and passengers survived.

THEY PLANNED. Their plan was logical. They would try to run it ashore, which implies at least a small sandy beach, amidst all the rocky cliffs that overlook much of the sea. It was a good plan, if only they could avoid a rocky ledge underneath the surface.

27: 40 - CASTING OFF ANCHORS. *“After casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that held the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind and headed for the beach.”* Luke, continuing his remarkable historical account of this voyage, notes that the sailors cut the ropes and left the four anchors on the floor of the sea. As an interesting side-note, I recall listening to an interview with Dr. Norman Geisler on AFR Radio sometime after the discovery in Jerusalem of what some believed to have been the ossuary of James, the brother of Jesus, based on an inscription which most people rejected. Dr. Geisler, at the time, accepted the possibility that the ossuary which read something like, “James, brother of Jesus, son of Joseph”, was authentic. There were many who would not have wanted to believe it. For one thing it would destroy the Roman Catholic teaching concerning the perpetual virginity of Mary. For another, Jews would not want to see that affirmed. Apparently, evidence suggests that it was not authentic. However, Dr. Geisler stated that someone was doing computerized searches for these four anchors! If there is anything left of that ship it would surely be those anchors. That would be an amazing find.

LOOSENED THE ROPES. They untied the ropes that held the rudders and then “hoisted the foresail” so the wind could carry them onto the beach. The ship’s sailors were indeed needed for this operation. This was not just a shipwreck, it was a controlled beaching, even though Paul had already told them his God had told them the ship would be lost. What they were doing increased the expectation of the survival for all on board.

27:41 - STRUCK A SANDBAR. *“But they struck a sandbar and ran the ship aground. The bow jammed fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to break up with the pounding of the waves.”* When they had cut the ropes to the four anchors and raised the foresail, they wanted to ground the ship on the main coast of the island. Instead, as Robertson explains, “There is a current on one side of St. Paul’s Bay between a little island (Salmonetta) and Malta which makes a sand bank between the two currents. Unexpectedly the ship stuck in this sandbar” [ATR]. It was nonetheless fortunate that they hit the sandbar rather than a rocky ledge that would have caused the ship to break up quickly and violently. As it was, the stern began to break up from the force of the waves that were now pounding it from the side.

27:42 - TO KILL THE PRISONERS. *“The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners so that no one could swim off and escape.”* This drastic step seemed logical to the soldiers for two reasons.

First, they would be held accountable for the prisoners if any escaped. Second, these prisoners might turn on the soldiers and kill them. They did not want to take a chance on losing any prisoners, and they could not swim ashore weighted down with their swords, spears, shields, and armor.

27:43 - BUT THE CENTURION. *“But the centurion kept them from carrying out their plan because he wanted to save Paul, so he ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land.”* “Julius had been greatly influenced by Paul’s previous testimony as well as by his conduct during this trip. Therefore, he determined to save Paul’s life” [NCWB]. This centurion had come to respect Paul and he had at first been disposed to treat Paul with kindness from the beginning of the voyage (Acts 27:3). And his conduct on board the ship, the wisdom of his advice (Acts 27:10), and the way he had conducted himself through this storm were factors in the centurion’s attitude toward this prisoner and his order to spare the prisoners

“The centurion saw that Paul was not only an innocent, but an extraordinary and divine man; and therefore, for his sake, he prevented the massacre; and, unloosing every man's bonds, he commanded those that could to swim ashore and escape. It is likely that all the soldiers escaped in this way, for it was one part of the Roman military discipline to teach the soldiers to swim” [CLARKE].

The centurion ordered the soldiers to spare the prisoners, and then ordered all who could swim to jump overboard and swim ashore. He obviously ordered the prisoners released from their chains.

Amazingly, for the sake of this one righteous man, the lives of all were spared. Barnes observes :

(1.) that it is possible for a pious man, like Paul, so to conduct in the various trying scenes of life--the agitations, difficulties, and temptations of this world--as to conciliate the favour of the men of this world; and,

(2.) that important benefits often result to sinners from the righteous. Paul's being on board was the means of saving the lives of many prisoners; and God often confers important blessings on the wicked for the sake of the pious relatives, friends, and neighbours with whom they are connected. Ten righteous men would have saved Sodom, Ge 18:32; and Christians are in more ways than one the salt of the earth, and light of the world, Mat 5:13,14. It is a privilege to be related to the friends of God--to be the children of pious parents, or to be connected with pious partners in life. It is a privilege to be connected with the friends of God in business, or to dwell near them, or to be associated with them in the various walks and dangers of life. The streams of blessings which flow to fertilize their lands, flow also to bless others; the dews of heaven which descend on their habitations, descend on all around; and the God which crowns them with loving-kindness, often fills the abodes of their neighbours and friends with the blessings of peace and salvation [BARNES].

27:44 - SOME ON PLANKS. *“The rest were to follow, some on planks and some on debris from the ship. In this way, all got safely to land.”* There would have been some planks on board, if

only tables and benches, but as the ship was being broken up by the waves, there would have been many large planks that were falling into the water, or planks that could be pulled free of the ship. Robertson adds, “So Luke in this marvellous narrative, worthy of any historian in any age, shows how Paul's promise was fulfilled (verse Acts 27:24). Paul the prisoner is the hero of the voyage and shipwreck, a wonderful example of God's providential care” [ATR].

As Paul had promised, not one life was lost among the 276 people aboard. Some swam ashore and others floated in on planks and boards. God had miraculously saved every person aboard, just as he had promised Paul.

Barnes offers a fitting summary to this account:

“1. PAUL had appealed to Caesar; and he must go to Rome to have his cause heard. God admitted of this appeal, and told his servant that he should testify of him at Rome; and yet every thing seemed to conspire together to prevent this appeal, and the testimony which the apostle was to bear to the truth of the Christian religion. The Jews laid wait for his life; and when he had escaped out of their hands, and from their territories, then the winds and the sea seemed to combine to effect his destruction. And God suffered all this malice of men, and war of elements, to fight against his servant, and yet overruled and counterworked the whole, so as to promote his own glory, and bring honor to his apostle. Had it not been for this malice of the Jews, Festus, Felix, Agrippa, Berenice, and many Roman nobles and officers, had probably never heard the Gospel of Christ. And, had it not been for Paul's tempestuous voyage, the 276 souls that sailed with him could not have had such displays of the power and wisdom of the Christians' God as must have struck them with reverence, and probably was the cause of the conversion of many. Had the voyage been smooth and prosperous, there would have been no occasion for such striking interferences of God; and, had it not been for the shipwreck, probably the inhabitants of Malta would not so soon have heard of the Christian religion. God serves his will by every occurrence, and presses every thing into the service of his own cause. This is a remark which we have often occasion to make, and which is ever in place. We may leave the government of the world, and the government of the Church, most confidently to God; hitherto he has done all things well; and his wisdom, power, goodness, and truth, are still the same.

“2. In considering the dangers of a sea voyage, we may well say, with pious Quesnel, To what perils do persons expose themselves, either to raise a fortune, or to gain a livelihood! How few are there who would expose themselves to the same for the sake of God! They commit themselves to the mercy of the waves; they trust their lives to a plank and to a pilot; and yet it is often with great difficulty that they can trust themselves to the providence of God, whose knowledge, power, and goodness, are infinite; and the visible effects of which they have so many times experienced.

“3. What assurance soever we may have of the will of God, yet we must not forget human means. The life of all the persons in this ship was given to St. Paul; yet he does not, on that account, expect a visible miracle, but depends upon the blessing which God will give to the care and endeavors of men.

“4. God fulfils his promises, and conceals his almighty power, under such means and endeavors as seem altogether human and natural. Had the crew of this vessel neglected any means in their own power, their death would have been the consequence of their inaction and infidelity” [CLARKE].

Chapter 28

MALTA’S INCREDIBLE HOSPITALITY

28:1 - MALTA. *“Safely ashore, we then learned that the island was called Malta.”* All 276 people aboard the vessel made it safely to shore. There, they met local citizens and were able to communicate with them. That is not surprising, since Alexander the Great had Hellenized the known world, imposing the Greek language on all subjects. Yahweh had announced through Old Testament prophets that was going to raise up Babylon to take citizens of Judah into captivity for seventy years (during which time they would finally be purged of idolatry); Persia to return them to the Promised Land; Greece to give the world a common language (the New Testament was written in Greek and the Old Testament had been translated into Greek - the Septuagint); and then Rome to give the world the safest travel by land or sea the world had ever known, along with a vast highway system and postal system. Those early missionaries took advantage of the highways, sailed the seas of the region, communicated through the postal system, and now they were communicating with inhabitants of a remote island in a common language, or at least some of them spoke Greek. These 276 people were victims of a shipwreck, but they were a part of something far greater than mere coincidence.

They learned that they had landed on Malta (the KJV has Melita). Luke is still giving a first-hand account of the accident and their deliverance from the sea. Here he is not using the imperfect tense as in 27:39, but the aorist tense (we knew). Some of the sailors might have recognized land-marks, but the residents of the island probably told them where they were. Bible dictionaries I checked carried little or nothing on Malta. However, Barnes notes that “It was celebrated formerly for producing large quantities of honey, and is supposed to have been called Melita from the Greek word signifying honey” [BARNES].

Jesus had appeared to Paul and assured him he was going to Rome. And angel had appeared to him and told him all aboard the ship would be spared if they did as he told them. The hand of the Lord in seen in everything that had happened. They might have been blown all the way to the quicksands along the northern coast of Africa. Instead, the winds blew them onto this one tiny island where they

might be saved. They were driven by a violent wind, tossed by a raging sea for fourteen days, and now they come ashore on this little island. A map of the Mediterranean Sea will show that if the wind had not driven them to this little island they might well have perished before coming upon any other land. This should be enough to convince any believer that God was working to accomplish His purpose.

JIMMY FURR ON MALTA TODAY

My brother-in-law, Jimmy Furr, went with a group from the Tennessee Baptist Convention to the island of Malta early in 2008 to launch a mission commitment to the people of that island. I asked him to help me to understand a little more about the island than I find in commentaries and dictionaries. He sent the following information: “The Maltese Islands are a group of 6 small islands, the largest of which is Malta and it is approximately 17 miles long and 9 miles wide. The next largest is Gozo and it is about 9 miles long and 4.5 miles wide. The remaining islands consist of Cominotto, Comino, Filfla, and St. Paul’s Island.”

Manufacturing for export, ship construction and repair and tourism are the chief industries of the islands. The language spoken is Maltese and English. Maltese is similar to Aramaic but has a Latin influence on the alphabet and grammatical usages. Continuing, Jimmy Furr says, “The island is a beautiful island with construction and destruction (WW II) every where you look. The capital city is Valetta and it is on a hill. The streets are literally up and down and very narrow. They have a great public transportation system with the use of buses. They move about the city effortlessly even within the areas with the tiny streets. Fruit trees and flowers are all over the island. There are natural harbors and inlets as well as rocky shores and sandy beaches. They boast of one of the deepest natural harbors in the world. This aids in the docking of large cruise ships that bring in a large number of the visitors over the course of the year.” He adds:

“Tennessee (Baptist Convention) has agreed to a five year partnership with the islands of Malta and Gozo. We hope to help start Bible studies and new churches over the next five years. The Islands are approximately 98 percent Roman Catholic. **They are different from Catholics you meet here in the States because they worship Mary, carry around icons on Easter and other festive holidays and really believe that Mary is the co-redemptrix. They worship Mary along with, or more than Jesus.** They pray to Mary and the cathedrals are full at times of worship. An apparition of Mary has supposedly been seen on the island of Gozo and she is supposedly have healed many there.

“The Maltese Islands have a population of about 385,000 people. Approximately 345,000 live on a piece of land that is 9 miles by 17 miles called Malta. It is a rocky island, known for the limestone used to build houses and other buildings. There are about 40,000 on the island of Gozo. You travel to Gozo via ferry from Comino, Malta. **St. Paul's bay, where Paul supposedly landed on Malta is a beautiful**

place but it is grown up and buildings are all around the area. Malta is located 60 miles from Sicily, 180 miles from North Africa, 142 miles west of Gibraltar, and 944 miles east of Alexandria.

“Malta has no rivers or mountains. The climate ranges from the low fifties in winter to the high 90's in summer. It never snows and rarely ever frosts on the island. Malta has been inhabited by the Phonicians, Greeks, Romans and the Byzantine Empires. Arabs invaded it around 870. Napoleon also inhabited the islands for a while. After Napoleon was defeated, Malta became a part of the British Empire in 1814. It became a republic on March 31, 1979, with the departure of the British Serviceman. Malta became a member of the European Union on May 1, 2004. The Catholic Church is the state church. You can still see forts and fortified cites all over the island. **The harbor in Valetta is one of the deepest natural channels in the world** and that made it easy in the past for the warships to dock and today many cruise ships dock there.

“Malta has over 1 million tourists a year. The principal crops are potatoes, tomatoes, melons, wheat, and citrus fruits. Many of the homes have orange and lemon trees growing in their yards. Rabbit is a staple meat for the people along with lamb, beef, and poultry. Most of the food is imported, however, because of the poor quality of the soil (rocky). The average income is around \$5,820 and the currency is now the Euro.

“The Carroll-Benton Baptist Association has adopted the township of Siggiewi and that is the area we went to do prayer walking and scripture distribution. There are about 8500 persons living in this area and about 2800 homes. We distributed literature to about 2300 homes. There were already inquirers from some of the people to the local church before we left. The secretary or leader in the town is a charismatic Pentecostal Catholic. Can you believe that? He prayed for us after we had prayed for him and his assistants. I believe he is truly a born again believer. He welcomed us with open arms and was very gracious to us. I had the privilege of leading one young Catholic man to the Lord on the first day we prayer walked. **Most of them could not believe that we were there and willing to pray for them without going to the temple and without charging them for the prayers.** They are steeped in that tradition” [Jimmy Furr, Feb. 12, 2008, upon return from mission trip to Malta with a group from the Tennessee Baptist Convention, bold added by this writer].

28:2 - LOCAL PEOPLE. *“The local people showed us extraordinary kindness, for they lit a fire and took us all in, since rain was falling and it was cold.”* The NASB has “the natives”, but the Authorized Version has “the barbarous people”. The Greeks called anyone who did not speak Greek a barbarian because those speaking some languages sounded like they were repeating one syllable over and over (bar-bar-bar). Robertson adds:

“The barbarians (hoi barbaroi). The Greeks called all men "barbarians" who did not speak Greek (Rom 1:14), not "barbarians" in our sense of rude and uncivilized, but simply "foreign folk." Diodorus Siculus (V. 12) says that it was a colony of the Phoenicians and so their language was Punic (Page). The word originally meant an uncouth repetition (barbar) not understood by others (1Co 14:11). In Col 3:11 Paul couples it with Scythian as certainly not Christian. These are (with verse Acts 28:4 below) the only N.T. instances” [ATR].

The original inhabitants of the island were probably Phoenicians, but they were now probably a mixed race since the island had passed into Greek hands, and then to Roman. This writer has assumed that Greek was not their native language, but a second language for many of the residence. When my brother-in-law talked with one man on Malta, the man said he believed in God. When asked if he had a personal relationship with Jesus the man considered the question before saying, “No.” When asked if he would like to know Jesus personally the man said that he would. After Jimmy Furr explained the Lord’s provision for his salvation, he asked if the man would like to pray to receive Jesus. The man asked, “May I pray in Maltese?” He assured him that was all right, so the man prayed in his own language and then assured him that he had indeed received Jesus as Lord. This man’s native language is Maltese, but he knows English. The residents of that Island in Paul’s day probably communicated without too much difficulty in Greek.

Luke notes that the people of the island showed them “extraordinary kindness”. Some local inhabitants may well have spotted the ship while it was grounded on the sand and realized that it was breaking up from the force of the waves. Word may well have spread, bringing many of the islanders to the spot where the people were washed ashore. One part of the miracle of this landing is that they landed where they might be seen, and helped by the inhabitants, who were more than willing to help as soon as they were ashore. Now that they had been delivered from the sea, they were wet and cold and needed practical assistance.

Luke tells us that the people showed extraordinary kindness (“took us all in”), doing that which was practical and pressing. First, they built a fire. They survivors apparently came ashore in a rain storm for Luke tell us that it was raining and it was cold. As Jimmy Furr noted that it never snows on Malta, and rarely frosts, but when one is wet and the wind is blowing anything below fifty degrees would lead to severe discomfort. The people of the island apparently did more than simply build them a fire. They befriended them in every way possible .

28:3 - PAUL GATHERED. *“As Paul gathered a bundle of brushwood and put it on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself to his hand.”* In the first place, they had to find a place where they could build a fire, since it was raining. There are many caves and overhangs along the coast, so they probably found a place out of the rain. There had been 276 people on board the ship (27:37), and all had made it ashore, so they would have needed a significant shelter. The first order of business was a fire, and the people of the island apparently prepared a big enough fire to warm all the survivors. A lot of wood would have been required for such a fire, so Paul was out gathering wood for the fire. He had “gathered a bundle of brushwood and put it on the fire”. Brush

may have been abundant, but there were no forests on the island and they would have had to fan out and gather the brush.

A VIPER. Luke writes that “a viper came out because of the heat and fastened itself to his hand.” If the people were cold, the viper, a cold blooded animal, would have been hibernating. As soon as the brush hit the fire the viper’s body temperature was raised and he came out of the fire and fastened itself onto Paul’s hand. A viper normally strikes, injects its venom, and then retracts its fangs, but this one was hanging to Paul’s hand by its fangs. Its position in the brush might have been a factor, but it is possible that the viper has warmed up enough in the fire to strike, but it had not warmed sufficiently to strike and release as it normally did.

28:4 - THE LOCAL PEOPLE. *“When the local people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, ‘This man is probably a murderer, and though he has escaped the sea, Justice does not allow him to live!’”* The viper must have been a small, but deadly snake, known to the people of the island. The fact that it was hanging from his hand was a clear indication that it was hanging by its fangs from Paul’s hand. The people of the island must have discovered that some of the survivors were prisoners, convicted of a serious crime, being taken to Rome for punishment. Their conclusion? The man was probably a murderer on his way to Rome for execution. Ironically, they concluded, he has escaped death by drowning in the storm tossed sea, only to meet justice on this island: “Justice does not allow him to live.” This was not a conclusion drawn in the vacuum of the island called Malta, as Clarke explains:

“These heathens had a general knowledge of retributive justice; and they thought that the stinging of the serpent was a proof that Paul was a murderer. There is a passage in Bamidbar Rabba, fol. 239, that casts some light on this place. **‘Although the Sanhedrin is ceased, yet are not the four deaths ceased.** For he that deserves stoning either falls from his house, or a wild beast tears and devours him. He that deserves burning either falls into the fire, **or a serpent bites him.** He that deserves cutting of with the sword is either betrayed into the power of a heathen kingdom, or the robbers break in upon him. He that deserves strangling is either suffocated in the water, or dies of a quinsy” [CLARKE, bold added by this writer].

28:5 - HE SHOOK THE CREATURE OFF. *“However, he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no harm.”* Paul simply shook the creature from his hand into the fire. How could he have been so calm? Jesus had told him he was going to Rome, so he knew he was not going to die. At the same time, he was not conducting a snake-handling demonstration for the inhabitants of the island. How do we account for the fact that there were no ill effects from the bite by the viper.

Years ago, there was an article in an outdoor magazine by a man named Jack Raymond (if memory has not failed this writer) about his experience in handling rattlesnakes and cotton-mouth moccasins for audiences. He wrote about the time when he got careless and a rattle snake in a basket struck as his hand came near the top. He did not want the audience to panic, so he pulled out a handkerchief and wrapped it around his hand and continued his lecture. There were no ill effects at all. On

another occasion, a basket was knocked over, spilling a rattlesnake onto the stage. It immediately began crawling toward the audience. Realizing the danger to anyone who might be bitten by the large rattlesnake, Jack Raymond reached down and caught hold of the snake. It immediately struck, burying its fangs into this arm. Once again, he was not even sick from the bite. His conclusion? Either those two snakes were “dry”, they had been milked for venom, or they had recently struck something and used up their venom.

The third time, it was a cotton-mouth moccasin that got him, and this time his life was in danger. While the cotton-mouth was smaller than the rattlesnakes, it carries a venom that creates serious problems for one who is bitten. Even if one survives, he may face a lot of trouble with nerves and rotting flesh where the fangs entered the flesh. Jack Raymond survived, but never forgot the experience.

The viper that bit Paul had been in hibernation, so it had not been milked, and it had not used up its venom by injecting it into some small animal. There is no way we could prove that this was not a “dry” snake, but the natives of the island asked no proof. They were convinced that it was fully loaded with a deadly venom.

28:6 - THEY EXPECTED. *“They expected that he would swell up or suddenly drop dead. But after they waited a long time and saw nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god.”* These people knew the symptoms to expect from a snake bite, so they assumed that Paul would die a horrible death. There would be tremendous swelling, which would produce incredible pain and nausea. However, they watched and saw none of the symptoms they associated with the bite of this viper. There was no swelling, no vomiting, no pain. Nothing unusual was happening to this prisoner.

A GOD. What had been their initial reaction when the viper struck Paul? “They changed their minds.” When he was bitten by the viper, they were saying, “This man is probably a murderer, and though he has escaped the sea, Justice does not allow him to live” (28:4). They had watched long enough to realize that the viper bite was having no effect on Paul, so they “changed their minds” and concluded that he was a god.” The imperfect tells us that the word passed from one to another. There was quite a clamor over what they had witnessed. Before we dismiss those ancients of being ignorant pagans who had not yet evolved culturally, remember what Jimmy Furr reported about worship on the island of Malta today. They worship Mary! They view her as the co-redemptrix with Jesus. That is totally unscriptural. In fact, it is idolatry. Two thousand years of civilization and they still practice idolatry! And that after the testimony about what happened to Paul. They have a bay they designate as St. Paul’s Bay, so the story was passed on from generation to generation. Somewhere along the line the message was corrupted.

It is amazing how the prince of this world deceives people. Those people were pagans and they thought like pagans. Those people from Tennessee who went on the mission trip to Malta in 2008 introduced themselves to a lot of people and told them why they were there. Some threw up their hands and said, “I’m Catholic, I’m Catholic.” The following Sunday a priest stood before his

congregation and told his people, “You must not listen to those people.” However, some did listen and when they asked if they might pray with them there were two questions they always asked: First, “You mean right here? (Or right now?); and second, “How much will it cost?” They were surprised when they learned that these people had flown all the way from America to pray with them and share Scripture with them without charging them. With true believers it is not all about money!

28:7 - PUBLIUS. *“Now in the area around that place was an estate belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us hospitably for three days.”* Word of what had happened when the viper bit Paul probably spread quickly across the little island. The story soon reached the owner of a large estate, a “leading man of the island”. The KJV has “a chief man of the island”, but the NASB has “a leading man of the island.” Robertson notes that “An inscription in Malta calls Prudens ‘Primate of the Maltese’ (prôtos Melitaiôn). Here it is plainly a title and not the common use seen in Acts 13:50; Acts 25:2; Acts 28:17” [ATR]. “This title is another proof of the accuracy of St. Luke, who uses the very epithet by which the Roman governor of that island was distinguished” [CLARKE].

Publius, whose name may have been derived from Popilius or Publius [ATR], invited Paul and his companions (Luke and Aristarchus) to stay with him three days. Though the centurion Julius may have been included, there is no reason to assume that the all 276 survivors were invited to this estate. Publius “entertained” them as guests.

28:8 - PUBLIUS’ FATHER. *“It happened that Publius’ father was in bed suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went to him, and praying and laying his hands on him, he healed him.”* In Luke 4:38, Luke wrote that Peter’s mother-in-law had a high fever. Here, the physician Luke uses two words, fever and dysentery. He naturally uses medical terms. “Hippocrates often mentions these two diseases together” [ATR]. Actually, the word dysentery is a transliteration from the Greek.

PAUL WENT TO HIM. Paul went to the father of Publius, prayed for him, laid his hands on him, and healed him. This must have been the most phenomenal things these people had ever seen, but Paul was simply doing what Jesus had foretold: “And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new languages; they will **pick up snakes**; if they should drink anything deadly, it will never harm them; they will **lay hands on the sick, and they will get well**” (Mark 16:17-18, bold added by this writer). Residents of this island saw Paul fulfill two of those prophecies.

Paul was not a professional “faith healer”, but a man who prayed, a man who was led by the Holy Spirit. Prayer was an integral part of his life, and it was his practice to go where the Spirit led him and do what the Spirit moved him to do. This kind of miracle served a special purpose during the First Century, before all the New Testament had been written, and long before it was canonized.

This writer believes strongly in divine healing, but he is very leery of divine healers. After a pinched nerve in my left foot (many years ago) caused a lot of pain, my secretary asked if she might call her family’s foot specialist. I asked her to go ahead and call for an appointment. This man made

medical errors, so I went to another “foot specialist” who extended the damage. Believe me, I did a lot of praying for a miracle. One Sunday morning, a lady asked my permission to call a well known faith healer. I was standing in an aisle before a worship service. I told the lady that she could do as she felt led, “but if you have faith in the Lord I have as much faith in your prayers as I do in (in the faith healer).” I prayed for many years for the Lord to “lift me up and let me stand”, and for Him to give me the steps I needed to continue my work for Him. He did it His way. My way would have been an instantaneous healing (and I probably would have forgotten about it before much time passed). His way kept the awareness of my dependance upon Him before me for years before that Sunday morning when I felt that I could stand an preach, rather than sitting on a barstool. The next Sunday I stood to preach both the morning and evening sermons.

I know something of divine healing. I know the importance of trusting the Lord to do as He wills with us. I also remember my love for hunting, fishing, and gun collecting. If I had been healed instantly, I may never have developed The Bible Notebook (this will be the thirty-sixth volume , set to go on the PastorLife.Com web site), or The Sermon Notebook (more than 150 sermon manuscripts already sent to Dr. Mike Minnix of the Georgia Baptist Convention for posting on the PastorLife.Com web site). I cannot tell anyone how I prayed for divine healing, but it was not His will to heal me instantly. Instead, He gave me a constant reminder of my dependance on Him for every step and for every moment on my feet. Remarkably, over the years He provided the strength I needed, when I needed it. I saw His hand of providence on my life daily over a period of twenty-five years before He lifted me up, enabled me to stand, and let me walk for more than a short distance at a time.

28:9 - AFTER THIS. *“After this, the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.”* Word of Paul’s healing of a prominent man of the island spread quickly among the common people and they began going to him with all sorts of diseases and were cured. Interestingly, reports of divine healing spreads rapidly by word of mouth. A young Oral Roberts set up a tent in Memphis and reports of divine healing spread quickly all over western Tennessee, northeast Arkansas, and northwest Mississippi. News reports and newspaper accounts helped spread the word and people drove in from all over the region, some in hopes of being healed, others to see what was causing all the excitement. Sadly, the only individual people from my community knew was not healed. Even though Oral Roberts had slapped her forehead with the palm of his hand and proclaimed her “HEALED”, she was not healed. When the family contacted the Oral Roberts organization to report that Virginia, who was both deaf and mute, had not been healed, they received a letter suggesting to the family that she must have gotten out of her place in the line. That makes me wonder what happened to the person who got her place! Incidentally, Oral Roberts read from a card the name of the individual and the illness for which healing was being requested before he pronounced them healed.

Many people came to Paul and, while there might well have been some people there with psychosomatic illnesses, the people of the island knew those who were being healed. As reports spread, others continued to come to Paul and were healed.

28:10 - MANY HONORS. “*So they heaped many honors on us, and when we sailed, they gave us what we needed.*” Because of the ministry of Paul on the little island of Malta, the people “heaped many honors” on Paul, and his companions. They sailed for Italy as soon as the seas were safe after the winter season, and the residents of the island “gave us what we needed.” The people of the island must have provided basic provisions for the crew, the soldiers, and sailors, but Luke seems to be speaking of the three of them (Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus) here. “These were gestures of appreciation. Most likely Paul’s stay in Malta provided the beginning of the Christian community there” [NCWB].

Rome at Last

28:11 - AFTER THREE MONTHS. “*After three months we set sail in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered at the island, with the Twin Brothers as its figurehead.*” They had been on the island three months when the sailing season opened again and they found passage “in an Alexandrian ship that had wintered” on Malta. This ship had arrived there before the end of the sailing season, sometime before great storm that had wrecked the ship on which Paul was sailing.

TWIN BROTHERS. One writer explains that this is from the “Greek, Dioscuri, referring to the two sons of Zeus. These gods, as the guardians of the sailors, were thought to bring good luck to all who sailed under them, and their images were carried on board many ships” [NCWB]. “This sign was the name of the ship. So they start in another grain ship of Alexandria bound for Rome” [ATR].

28:12 - SYRACUSE. “*Putting in at Syracuse, we stayed three days.*” It was about 80 miles from Malta to Syracuse and the voyage probably took two days. They put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days, probably because the ship was unloading cargo that was being shipped to that city. The ship’s captain would have kept a log, and Luke either kept a journal or was simply inspired by the Holy Spirit to recall the places where the ship put in and a summary of events that occurred there. We must never forget that the Holy Spirit is the divine Author of this material, nor should we lose sight of the fact that Luke was a scientist and he did careful research (see Acts 1:1ff). Adam Clarke has a very interesting, if somewhat verbose comment about Syracuse:

“In order to go to Rome from Malta, their readiest course was to keep pretty close to the eastern coast of Sicily, in order to pass through the straits of Rhegium and get into the Tyrrhenian Sea.

“Syracuse is one of the most famous cities of antiquity: it is the capital of the island of Sicily, and was built about 730 years before the Christian era. It lies 72 miles S. by E. of Messina, and about 112 of Palermo. Long. 15° . 30'. W., lat. 37° . 17'. N. In its ancient state, it was about 22 English miles in circumference; and was **highly celebrated for the martial spirit of its inhabitants**. This was the birthplace of the illustrious Archimedes; who, when the city was besieged by the Romans, under Marcellus, about 212 years before Christ, defended the place with his powerful

engines against all the valor and power of the assailants. He beat their galleys to pieces by huge stones projected from his machines; and by hooks, chains, and levers, from the walls, weighed the ships out of the water, and, whirling them round, dashed them in pieces against each other, or sunk them to the bottom: several also, he is said to have destroyed by his burning glasses. When the city was taken by treachery, Archimedes was found intensely engaged in the demonstration of a problem. A Roman soldier coming up, and presenting his dagger to his throat, he cried, "Stop, soldier, or thou wilt spoil my diagram!" The brute was unmoved, and murdered him on the spot.

This city was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake in 1693: its present population amounts to but about 18,000. Christianity, in some form or other, has existed here ever since St. Paul spent the three days in it, mentioned in the text" [CLARKE].

28:13 - RHEGIUM. *"From there, after making a circuit along the coast, we reached Rhegium. After one day a south wind sprang up, and the second day we came to Puteoli."* Their course lay northward up the straits of Messina, but apparently the wind was not favorable, forcing them to "tack" repeatedly in an indirect way. For that reason the progress would have been slow and difficult.

Luke continues with the details and here is one reason many have concluded that Luke made a valuable contribution to our understanding of ships and sailing in ancient times. "Rhegium (Rhêgion) is from rhêgnumi, to break off, the place where the land breaks off, the southern entrance to the straits of Messina" [ATR]. Puteoli was "located on the northern part of the bay of Naples, about 180 miles north of Rhegium" [NCWB]. The Bible Knowledge Commentary summarizes this voyage in this way:

"The journey was carefully traced by Luke: from Malta to **Syracuse**, Sicily; to **Rhegium** (today Reggio) on the "toe" of Italy; to **Puteoli** (today Pozzuoli), 152 miles south of Rome; and finally to **Rome** itself. Puteoli was an important commercial seaport halfway between Rhegium and Rome" [BKC].

We are reminded time and again in Acts that we are reading space-time history. Incredibly, even Christians today have joined the enemies of the cross in proclaiming the Gospels religious writings, not history. One well known television news show host proclaimed the Gospels a series of moral lessons. He often professes that he is Catholic, but insists that the Gospels were written to provide moral lessons. Francis Schaeffer held an unapologetic position that the Bible is inerrant, and he often wrote about that. He once wrote:

"Unless the Bible is without error, not only when it speaks of salvation matters, but also when it speaks of history and the cosmos, we have no foundation for answering questions concerning the existence of the universe and its form and the uniqueness of

man. Nor do we have any moral absolutes, or certainty of salvation, and the next generation of Christians will have nothing on which to stand” [Schaeffer, Francis, Appendix B in A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF THE CHURCH, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, Crossway Books, Vol. 4, p. 103].

28:14 - THERE WE FOUND BELIEVERS. *“There we found believers and were invited to stay with them for seven days. And so we came to Rome.”* Some believe Paul and his companions (Luke and Aristarchus) must have been surprised to have found believers there. I might have bought into that if I had not read (three or four times) the amazing research by Dr. William R. Cooper, *OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH*. Dr. Cooper makes the point that Paul was well informed about the work of the church in Rome when he wrote the Epistle to the Romans about A. D. 58. He makes a strong case for Paul’s having known that about the time he was writing to the church at Rome, a mission trip was underway from Rome to the Island of Briton, led by Bran, who is given credit in ancient British records for taking the Gospel to that island. Bran was the son of Caradoc, the warrior king of that island who had defeated the Roman army in 30 pitched battles before being betrayed, captured, and taken to Rome in A. D. 49.

As noted in another volume in this series on Acts, Dr. Cooper writes that Caradoc showed such courage that the Roman emperor and the senate refused to put him to death. Instead, they placed his family in the home of an important senator, whose wife may well have led the family to faith in Jesus Christ, several years before Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans. Cooper also points out that Paul, in sending greetings, wrote, “Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus” (Rom. 16:10). It is his contention that if Aristobulus had been at home, Paul would have simply said, “Greet Aristobulus”, but he knew he was not in Rome at the time. Where was he? Dr. Cooper makes a strong case for his claim that Aristobulus had gone to Briton with Bran to take the Gospel to that island nation.

If Paul had such knowledge, this means that Paul was communicating with them. If that is the case, he may have known about these Christians in Puteoli before they landed. Regardless of whether he had known about them in advance or not, there must have been quite a celebration as Paul and his friends shared with these believers something of their experience during the seven days they were there. Again, the seven days were not to accommodate Paul, but to allow time to unload cargo, and possibly to take on new cargo.

AND SO WE CAME TO ROME. Paul finally made it to Rome, even though he had come as a prisoner. He was accompanied his loyal companions, Luke and Aristarchus, as well as other prisoners, and the soldiers and sailors with whom they had set out months earlier.

Rome, the capitol and the center of the mighty Roman Empire, was located on the Tiber River, fifteen miles from the sea. It was built on seven hills. Clarke notes that Rome was

“One of the most celebrated cities in the universe, the capital of Italy, and once of the whole world; situated on the river Tiber, 410 miles SSE. of Vienna; 600 SE. of Paris;

730 E. by N. of Madrid; 760 W. of Constantinople; and 780 SE. of London. Long. 12° . 55'. E., lat. 41° . 54'. N. This famous city was founded by Romulus, at the end of the seventh Olympiad, A. M. 3251; of the flood, 1595; and 753 years before the Christian aera” [CLARKE].

Paul had written to the church at Rome expressing his desire to visit that church on the way to Spain, and Jesus had promised that he was going to Rome. After two years as a prisoner at Caesarea, he had appealed to Rome and the governor had ruled in favor of the appeal. They set sail late in the sailing season and were caught in a violent storm which wrecked the ship on Malta. They had stayed there three months before the centurion Julius found passage on a ship to Rome. The Lord had sent his angel to assure Paul that he and all aboard would be spared, but the ship would be lost. Nothing was going to prevent his going to Rome and continuing his ministry there, even though it would be as a prisoner instead of a missionary with all the freedom of a Roman citizen.

28:15 - BELIEVERS THERE HAD HEARD. *“Now the believers from there had heard the news about us and had come to meet us as far as Forum of Appius and Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.”* In the previous verse, Luke tells how they came to Rome. In this verse, he digresses briefly to tell how they came into contact with the Roman believers. We are not told how the believers in Rome heard that they had reached Rhegium (vs. 13), but we would be safe enough to assume that Julius may have sent word to authorities in Rome that they had arrived in Italy. It is also reasonable to assume that merchants or messengers may have carried word to the Christians in Rome that Paul was on his way there. They had no cell phones, no radio or television, but word spread over any region quickly by word of mouth and by letter.

These believers would have known that Paul was going to come to Rome, and they may well have known that he had appealed to Rome. While they may not have known about the shipwreck, they did know that a new shipping season was open, so they may have been waiting for word from him.

FORUM OF APPIUS AND THREE TAVERNS. Believers in Rome heard that Paul was on the way to Rome, so some of them set out to meet them. They wanted to meet the great missionary and reassure him of their support. They wanted a time of fellowship with him and they would want information. The Greek for “Forum of Appius” is a transliteration of the Latin name “Appii Forum”. It was located on the great Appian Way. The Forum of Appius was about 90 miles north from Puteoli, 43 miles from Rome. “The Censor Appius Claudius had constructed this part of the road, B.C. 312. Paul probably struck the Appian Way at Capua. Portions of this great stone highway are still in use. If one wishes to tread where Paul trod, he can do it here. Appii Forum had a bad reputation, the haunt of thieves, thugs, and swindlers” [ATR].

“Three Taverns is again a transliteration of Latin “Tres Tabernae”. The word “tavern” probably would apply, in Latin usage, to shops and wooden constructions of all kinds and probably denotes an inn or some kind of resting place. It was ten miles nearer to Rome than the Forum of Appius, where other Christians from Rome met Paul. Each group probably left as soon as they received word that Paul was on the Appian Way.

In Expositions on the Holy Scripture, the writer gives the following overview:

“So the whole company set off on their march to Rome—about a hundred and forty miles. The week’s delay in Puteoli would give time for apprising the church in Rome of the Apostle’s coming, and two parties came out to meet him, one travelling as far as Appii Forum, about forty Roman miles from the city; the other as far as ‘The Three Taverns,’ some ten miles nearer it. The simple notice of the meeting is more touching than many words would have been. It brings out again the Apostle’s somewhat depressed state, partly due, no doubt, to nervous tension during the long and hazardous voyage, and partly to his consciousness that the decisive moment was very near. But when he grasped the hands and looked into the faces of the Roman brethren, whom he had so long hungered to see, and to whom he had poured out his heart in his letter, he ‘thanked God, and took courage.’ The most heroic need, and are helped by, the sympathy of the humble...

“There would be some old friends in the delegation of Roman Christians, perhaps some of those who are named in Romans 16, such as **Priscilla and Aquila**, and the unnamed matron, **Rufus’s mother, whom Paul there calls ‘his mother and mine.’** It would be an hour of love and effusion, and the shadow of appearing before Caesar would not sensibly dim the brightness. Paul saw God’s hand in that glad meeting, as we should do in all the sweetness of congenial intercourse. It was not only because the welcomers were his friends that he was glad, but because they were Christ’s friends and servants. The Apostle saw in them the evidence that the kingdom was advancing even in the world’s capital, and under the shadow of Caesar’s throne, and that gladdened him and made him forget personal anxieties. We too should be willing to sink our own interests in the joy of seeing the spread of Christ’s kingdom” [EHS, bold added by this writer].

We have met Priscilla and Aquila before. Paul had worked with them for a long time in Corinth, and again in Ephesus. They had been driven out of Rome when Nero ordered all Jews to leave the city, but they are now back in Rome. As Dr. William R. Cooper points out, Rufus (Rom. 16) is probably the Pudens of 2 Timothy (Rufus Pudens). Pauls reference to “his mother and mine” may be a reference to Lady Pamponia, one of the most remarkable ladies in Christian history. If Dr. Cooper is right, this lady took the family of Caradoc of Briton into her home and led them to faith in Jesus Christ. Caradoc’s son Linus, according to Dr. Cooper, was the first bishop of the church at Rome, and his sister Claudia, who was married to Lady Pomponia’s son Rufus, wrote some of the hymns Christians sang in the latter part of the first century [William R. Cooper, OLD LIGHT ON THE ROMAN CHURCH]. There was contact between Paul and the saints at Rome and they were anxious to see him.

HE THANKED GOD. “When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took courage.” It had been

well over two years since he had written that he was planning to visit the believers in Rome, and now they have come down the road to meet him before he arrived in the city. They obviously believed they would be permitted to see him, to encourage him, and to assure him of their support. He thanked God for those who saints who had come to meet him and assure him of their support. His conviction that he was both in the Lord's will and under His protection must have been deepened as he met these two groups of Christians.

28:16 - WE ENTERED ROME. *“And when we entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him.”* Paul had finally made it to Rome, the capitol city of the greatest empire the world had ever known. As Jesus had promised, Paul finally made it to Rome, that legendary city on the Tiber River.

This is still a part of the final “we” section in Acts. Luke is with Paul all the way to Rome, as is Aristarchus. When they arrived in Rome, the centurion Julius would have turned over his prisoners to the officer in charge of the prison, and we may assume that he gave Paul such a glowing report that he was permitted to stay in his own private residence, chained to a Roman soldier. This was certainly not the way Paul imagined himself traveling to Rome when he had written of his plans in the Epistle to Romans, but as the Lord had promised, he did go to Rome. Barnes notes that he was turned over to “The commander of the Pretorian cohort, or guard. The custom was, that those who were sent from the provinces to Rome for trial were delivered to the custody of this guard. The name of the prefect or captain of the guard, at this time, was Burrhas Afranius. Tacit. Ann. 12, 42, 1” [BARNES].

The modern reader can hardly appreciate the prison system of Rome, but “This privilege was given to many of the better-class prisoners who were not charged with any serious crime. Festus's letter and Julius's high recommendation probably helped Paul to secure this arrangement. His guards were changed often, which gave him a good chance to spread the gospel among the Praetorian guard (see Phil. 1:7, 13; 4:22)” [NCWB].

Paul Meets Jewish Leaders in Rome

28:17 - CALLED TOGETHER. *“After three days he called together the leaders of the Jews. And when they had gathered he said to them: ‘Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our forefathers, I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans...’* Because He had been given the privilege of living in his own private residence, Paul may have been able to meet with individual Christians, or even small groups of believers during his first three days in Rome. He was living in his own private home with a Roman soldier to guard him, but the Lord would provide him opportunities beyond his imagination to spread the Gospel. It may have taken a significant part of those three days to send word to the Jewish leaders that he would like to meet with them. I

n an earlier volume in this series on the Book of Acts, I mentioned the help I received in my initial

study in Acts from the late Dr. H. Leo Eddleman, former President of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, who was writing his commentary on Acts at the time. I had taken intensives in Acts, both at Mississippi College and NOBTS, but I had not had an opportunity to sit and question my teachers as I did Dr. Eddleman. Not only was he one of the most brilliant people I have ever known, he had been a missionary to Israel leading up to World War II. In fact, Dr. Gene Jeffries sent me a website on Baptists in the Holy Land and in that article one name was mentioned in the thirties, and that name was Leo Eddleman, with the note that he had mastered both Hebrew and Arabic.

In the Spring 2008 edition of the VISION (NOBTS quarterly publication, Vol. 64.1), there is an article informing readers of the death of Mrs. Sarah Eddleman, who passed away at age 95. Mrs. Eddleman is identified as a former missionary. I had met Mrs. Eddleman had I had seen her many times, but my appreciation for her comes from personal conversation with the husband who loved her deeply.

He was working on that commentary while preaching in the first revival he preached for me and I took advantage of his patience on a number of occasions to ask his opinion. I even “interviewed” him for one hour in my study and taped his response! I might add that Dr. Eddleman was at the forefront of studying the Doctor of Ministry degree, which had been introduced to the world by Luther Rice Seminary, with an eye toward implementing the program in the six Southern Baptist Seminaries. Also of interest was the fact that he held the PhD degree in his biblical studies at a time when most other Baptist theologians who received a doctorate held the ThD. He pushed to have that degree changed in all our seminaries to the Doctor of Philosophy in Theology. With the help of other seminary heads, he was successful in that endeavor.

On this verse, Dr. Eddleman writes, “So confident was Paul that distorted reports had reached Rome, he hastens to make an accurate statement of what took place in Jerusalem to leading Jews in Rome” [HLE: 395]. He wasted no time in reaching out to his own people. No one will ever be able to blame Paul for the Jews who rejected Christ.

BROTHERS. A Jew in that day addressed fellow Jews as Brother, Men, or Men of Israel. Before he became a prisoner of Rome, Paul made a practice of going to a synagogue wherever he went to proclaim Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. He was now a bound prisoner and could not go to their synagogue, so he invited leading Jews to come to his lodging so he might explain the circumstance of his arrival in Rome as “a prisoner with an appeal to Caesar. He is anxious that they may understand that this appeal was forced upon him by Festus following Felix and lot because he has come to make an attack on the Jewish people. He was sure that false reports had come to Rome. These non-Christian Jews accepted Paul’s invitation” [ATR].

When Paul went to Corinth on his Second Missionary Journey, he met Priscilla and Aquila, Jews who had been forced to leave Rome. “The Jews had earlier been banished from Rome. Now, however, they were tolerated and had obtained considerable wealth and influence there. Prior to this time, a Christian body had formed, to which Paul had written a letter” (The Epistle to the Romans) [NCWB].

It seemed especially important for Paul to get the message across to the leading Jews in Rome that he had not broken any Jewish law or custom. He said, "I have done nothing against our people or the customs of our forefathers." There was no basis for the charges against him by the Jews in Jerusalem. He had been falsely accused of taking a Gentile to the temple complex and a mob scene had resulted, in which those "worshippers" had dragged him from the temple complex and were in the process of beating him to death when Roman troops stopped them and took Paul into custody. Paul didn't know how much of this information had reached Rome, but it was important for them to know the truth. For what reason? He had a great burden for his people, the Jews, which they would have known if they had read his letter to believers in Rome (The Epistle to the Romans).

I WAS DELIVERED. As soon as he met with these Jewish leaders, he declared, "I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans." He does not mention the circumstances under which he had been delivered into the hands of the Roman authorities. To have done so might have cost him the opportunity to finish his statement, for the simple reason that these Jewish leaders in Rome, as all Jews everywhere, were subject to the authority of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Some of these leaders would probably have instantly felt compelled to side with the Sanhedrin against Paul. He simply states that he had been delivered into the hands of the Romans.

28:18 - WANTED TO RELEASE ME. *"(W)ho, after examining me, wanted to release me, since I had not committed a capital offense."* This statement refers to the hearings before Claudius Lysias, the captain of the Roman guard in Jerusalem, and before Felix, the Roman governor in Caesarea. No mention is made of the fact that Felix kept Paul a prisoner, calling for him often to try to solicit a bribe from him. The Roman officials wanted to release Paul after hearing the charges against him, because he had not committed a capital offense. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem were not interested in any other offense: they wanted him dead, and no other sentence or punishment interested them. Those religious leaders hired a Roman attorney to state their charges against him, they plotted his murder, both in Jerusalem and two years later when they tried to persuade the new governor Festus to take him to Jerusalem for a hearing there. Certainly, if any news from the Sanhedrin had reached the leading Jews in Rome, it would not have been favorable for Paul.

28:19 - BECAUSE THE JEWS OBJECTED. *"Because the Jews objected, I was compelled to appeal to Caesar; it was not as though I had any accusation against my nation."* Paul is stating it mildly, for the Jews in Jerusalem tried every trick in the book to have Paul sentenced to death. They lied, deceived, pressured, and even plotted to kill Paul, lest the Roman officials release him. One wonders why those Jews in Jerusalem did not take the fight against Paul to Rome. They hated him enough to have done so; they were politically astute enough to have done so; and they were sufficiently motivated by their hatred for Paul and for Jesus. They hired a Roman Attorney (Acts. 24) and they were certainly not too timid to write to Caesar. Why then didn't they take the fight to Rome? It is possible that they were on shaky ground with the Roman authorities. After all, they were only a few years away from the time when Titus would lead a Roman army against Jerusalem, lay siege to the city, and finally breached the walls, loot the city and destroyed the temple in A. D.70.

APPEAL TO CAESAR. This explained his present imprisonment in Rome. He had been compelled to appeal to caesar in order to escape the charges and attempted manipulation of the Roman authorities by the high priest and elders of the Jews in Jerusalem.

ACCUSATION AGAINST MY NATION. Paul is not only concerned with telling the leaders of the Jews in Rome about the circumstances under which he came to be a prisoner in Rome, he wants them to know that he has no desire to denigrate the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem. That is why he said, “it was not as though I had any accusation against my nation.” He does not want to say anything against his own race, but neither does he want to lose this audience before he finishes his testimony.

28:20 - FOR THIS REASON. *“So, for this reason I’ve asked to see you and speak to you. In fact, it is for the hope of Israel that I’m wearing this chain.”* “So”, it was because of the circumstances he had just described (28:17-19), that he is in the unfortunate situation in which they now see him that he has sent for them and is now speaking to them. No doubt he had rather be speaking to them in the synagogue, but that was not possible. He was chained to a Roman soldier. **HOPE OF ISRAEL.** It, Paul states, “is for the hope of Israel that I am wearing this chain.” They could not have missed the chain, not could they have missed his Roman guard. His point is that Jesus Christ did not come to destroy Israel but to fulfill the law and the prophets. Instead of being a threat to Israel, He is the hope of Israel. There is no doubt that the messianic hope is the emphasis. Jesus is not only the hope of Israel, He is the hope of all nations and all peoples.

Paul may have said more to these Jewish leaders than Luke records here, as one commentary suggests:

“As if he had said: This, and this alone, is the cause of my being delivered into the hands of the Romans; I have proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah; have maintained that though he was crucified by the Jews, yet he rose again from the dead; and, through him, I have preached the general resurrection of mankind: this all Israel professes to hope for; and yet it is on this account that the Jews persecute me. Both the Messiah and the resurrection might be said to be the hope of Israel; and it is hard to tell which of them is here meant: see Acts 13:6; Acts 24:15, 21; Acts 26:6. It is certain that, although the Jews believed in the general resurrection, yet they did not credit it in the manner in which Paul preached it; for he laid the foundation of the general resurrection on the resurrection of Christ [CLARKE].

28:21 - THEY SAID. *“And they said to him, ‘We haven’t received any letters about you from Judea; none of the brothers has come and reported or spoken anything evil about you.’”* These leaders of the Jewish community, the heads of synagogues in Rome, state that they had received no letter (official document) from the Sanhedrin about the charges against Paul. This was all new to them. There had been a window of opportunity for such a letter, but that window was a narrow one.

NONE OF THE BROTHERS. Not only had they not received an official document or letter from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, no representative from the Sanhedrin had come to report the them, “or spoken evil about you.” Robertson comments on the three verbs (received, come, reported): “The three aorists (edexametha, apêggeilen, elalêsen) cover the past. These Jews do not mean to say that they had never heard of Paul. It is hardly likely that they had heard of his appeal to Caesar, ‘for how could the news have reached Rome before Paul?’ (Page)” [ATR].

That sounds logical. However, it is obvious that either Paul has considered the possibility that they they had received a letter from the Sanhedrin, or that one was on the way, now that the shipping season was open again. It was not likely that a letter could have reached Rome before Paul did, but he apparently considered it possible that the high priest might have written immediately to them and sent it by the very efficient (for that day) Roman postal system on a ship that sailed ahead of Paul. He appealed, but the governor had not put Paul on a ship the next day after his appeal. Not only did they have to find a ship and make arrangements, Festus has scheduled a hearing for Paul before King Agrippa before his departure. There might have been a delay of any where from several days to a few weeks before Paul and other prisoners were put on that ship.

The more question is why the Sanhedrin had not rushed a letter to them with their accusation against Paul to the leaders of the Jews in Rome. There were two very good reasons that they might have sent such a letter. **First**, they certainly did not want any of the Jews in Rome to come under the influence of Paul and convert to Christianity. **Second**, they might have sent a letter to encourage the Jewish leaders in Rome to try to influence the outcome of the appeal. Why they had not sent a letter “to their brethren at Rome, that they might continue the prosecution before the emperor is not known” [BARNES]. Barnes goes on to suggest an answer: “It is probable that they regarded their cause as hopeless, and chose to abandon the prosecution. Paul had been acquitted successively by Lysias, Felix, Festus, Agrippa; and as they had not succeeded in procuring his condemnation before them, they saw no prospect of doing it at Rome, and chose therefore not to press the prosecution any farther” [BARNES].

28:22 - WE CONSIDER IT SUITABLE. *“But we consider it suitable to hear from you what you think. For concerning this sect, we are aware that it is spoken against everywhere.”* Paul had sent a message to the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem, requesting an audience with them. They had conferred and then paid him this visit. They had agreed among themselves that it was important for them to hear Paul personally.

CONCERNING THIS SECT. We can be sure they had heard of “this sect” since the growth of the church had been so phenomenal, both among Jews and Gentiles in Rome itself. However, we do not know how much they knew, or how much credence they gave the reports. All they say is that “we are aware that it is spoken against everywhere.” There were various sects within Judaism and these Jews assumed that it was simply another sect, which was strongly opposed by the Sanhedrin. There are still some intriguing questions here. What had they heard, and how had they heard it? In the first place, they had heard that it was a sect and that it was “spoken against everywhere.” Christians were strongly opposed in the Roman Empire by Jews. The news of this conflict has, not

surprisingly, reached Rome itself. Some of these chief men may have been opposing Christians already. Now, they have an opportunity to hear, and question, the man viewed by many as the ring leader of this “sect”.

As to how they had heard, we might consider Priscilla and Aquila for a possible illustration. Luke recorded that on the First Missionary Journey Paul witnessed to the philosophers in Athens, and

“After this, he left from Athens and **went to Corinth**, where he found a Jewish man named **Aquila**, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with **his wife Priscilla** because **Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome**” (Acts 18:1-2, bold added).

This would have meant that these same Jewish leaders and their families, had been forced to leave Rome by the order Claudius has issued. Apparently, however, none of them had gone to any place where Paul was proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Luke mentions Paul’s association with Priscilla and Aquila at the close of that First Missionary Journey:

“So Paul, having stayed on for many days, said good-bye to the brothers and sailed away to Syria. **Priscilla and Aquila were with him...**” (Acts 18:18, bold added).

Paul left them at Ephesus and continued his voyage to Jerusalem. On the Third Missionary Journey, Paul spent three years at Ephesus, during which time he was associate with Priscilla and Aquila (at least for part of that time). Then, toward the end of the Third Missionary Journey, he wrote the Epistle to the Romans, in which he sends his greetings:

“**Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila**, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life” (Romans 16:3-4, Bold added).

Priscilla and Aquila are now back in Rome. The order had been lifted, as the chief leaders of the Jews in Rome were very much aware, for they had been permitted to return to Rome themselves. We may safely assume that Priscilla and Aquila were among the Christians who ministered to Paul while he was a prisoner in Rome. Some believe that “Paul was not renting a house but was staying with friends, possibly Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3)” [NCWB]. Though that is a possibility, it is also possible that the Christians in Rome had rented this home for him.

Some Were Persuaded

28:23 - ARRANGING A DAY. “*After arranging a day with him, many came to him at his lodging. From dawn to dusk he expounded and witnessed about the kingdom of God. He persuaded them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets.*” We are not told why those men did not hear Paul on the first day when they visited with Paul. Perhaps they wanted to discuss a strategy in hearing and questioning him. Perhaps this means that key leaders had come to him at his initial invitation, but now a larger number visits him to hear more about this “sect”. His “lodging”

was a private house where he was permitted to stay, chained to a Roman soldier.

FROM DAWN UNTIL DUSK. Perhaps this answers the question as to why the leaders set a new day in which they would hear Paul. They wanted to hear all the details, so he began talking with them at dawn and continued until dusk. No doubt, they asked many questions which he answered that day. This was a critical meeting. Israel had prayed for the coming of the Messiah for centuries, but they had to guard against false claims. Perhaps Paul's presentation the first day had convinced a number of the people that they needed to give him an opportunity to try to convince them. They had a lot of questions and it took the entire day to deal with them.

EXPOUNDED AND WITNESSED. Paul continued to explain in detail and with great care, the essential issues of the kingdom of God and the Christian faith. His great persuasive powers were brought to bear on this group of Jews. On his missionary journeys he always began his ministry in each town in a local synagogue, if there was one there, proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth really is the long awaited Messiah. In *Expositions of the Holy Scripture*, the author offers a summary of this verse:

“The usual method was pursued by Paul in arguing from the old revelation, but we may note the twofold manner of his preaching, ‘testifying’ and ‘persuading,’ the former addressed more to the understanding, and the latter to the affections and will, and may learn how Christian teachers should seek to blend both—to work their arguments, not in frost, but in fire, and not to bully or scold or frighten men into the Kingdom, but to draw them with cords of love. Persuasion without a basis of solid reasoning is puerile and impotent; reasoning without the warmth of persuasion is icy cold, and therefore nothing grows from it.

“Note too the protracted labour ‘from morning till evening.’ One can almost see the eager disputants spending the livelong day over the rolls of the prophets, relays of Rabbis, perhaps, relieving one another in the assault on the one opponent's position, and he holding his ground through all the hours—a pattern for us teachers of all degrees.

“The usual effects followed. The multitude was sifted by the Gospel, as its hearers always are, some accepting and some rejecting. These double effects ever follow it, and to one or other of these two classes we each belong. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay; the same light is joy to sound eyes and agony to diseased ones; the same word is a savour of life unto life and a savour of death unto death; the same Christ is set for the fall and for the rising of men, and is to some the sure foundation on which they build secure, and to some the stone on which, stumbling, they are broken, and which, falling on them, grinds them to powder” [EHS].

THE LAW OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS. Every Sabbath in every synagogue the

service began with a reading from the Mosaic Law and one from the Prophets. These Jews were used to hearing reading from both the Law and the Prophets and they knew the laws and customs of the Jews, but they had never heard anything like Paul before. As a matter of fact they may have been listening the single greatest apologist in the history of Christianity. When Jesus looked at the Law and the Prophets He found Himself there and announced that He was the fulfillment of both. When Paul looked to the Law and the Prophets he found Jesus in both. Jesus fulfills all the demands of the Law and all the hopes of the Prophets.

The Law and the Prophets still speak of Jesus today and no Christian should take the Old Testament Scripture lightly. My sister Linda told me of friends who believed that Jesus canceled the Law. He did not cancel the Law, He completed it. He did not cancel Old Testament prophecies, He fulfilled them. I proposed a simple little exercise for my sister to recommend to her friend. Take the Holman Christian Standard Bible and open it to the New Testament. When you turn the pages you will see both red letters and bold red letters. The General Editor of the HCSB, Dr. Ed Blum, explained to LifeWay Christian Resources trustees who were privileged to be on the Broadman and Holman Committee (it was my first meeting) that the words of Christ are in red, but when Jesus quotes from the Old Testament it is in bold red. When anyone else in the New Testaments quotes from the Old Testament the words are in bold black print. It is interesting to turn the pages of the New Testament and see how Jesus viewed the Old Testament, and also to see how the Holy Spirit inspired other writers to reveal the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. To these Jewish leaders in Rome, it was essential to show how Jesus fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets.

28:24 - SOME WERE PERSUADED. *“Some were persuaded by what he said, but others did not believe.”* Robertson explains the Greek verbs in this way: “Some were persuaded” is “Imperfect passive indicative of *peithô*. More exactly, ‘some began to be persuaded’ (inchoative). Some disbelieved (*hoi de êpistoun*). Imperfect active of *apistêô*, to disbelieve, continued to disbelieve. It is usually so” [ATR]. In other words, Paul did everything he could to persuade all of them that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, that he had been sent by the Father, had died on the cross, had risen from the dead and ascended to the Father, where He is waiting for the time of His return. Some believe, but others were not persuaded. Clarke is right in his application:

“His message was there treated as his Gospel is to the present day: some believe, and are converted; others continue in obstinate unbelief, and perish. Could the Jews then have credited the spiritual nature of the Messiah's kingdom, they would have found little difficulty to receive Jesus Christ as the MESSIAH.

“Multitudes of those now called Christians can more easily credit Jesus as the Messiah than believe the spiritual nature of his kingdom. The cross is the great stumbling block: millions expect Jesus and his kingdom who cannot be persuaded that the cross is the way to the crown.” [CLARKE].

Christians must understand certain important lessons about being a witness for Jesus Christ.

- 1) All believers are called to be His witnesses (Matt. 28:19-20)
- 2) The Holy Spirit empowers us to do what Jesus had called us to do (Acts 1:8a)
- 3) We must be His witnesses as we move out into the world (Acts. 1:8b)
- 4) Some people will believe
- 5) All people are not going to believe
- 6) Many who heard Paul refused to receive Christ
- 7) Many who heard Jesus refused to believe Him
- 8) The Lord did not call you to be successful, He called you to be faithful.

28:25 - DISAGREEING. *“Disagreeing among themselves, they began to leave after Paul made one statement: “The Holy Spirit correctly spoke through the prophet Isaiah to your forefathers..”* The Jewish leaders began disagreeing with one another. They were not debating Paul at this point. They did not agree among themselves. “It seems that a controversy arose between the Jews themselves, in consequence of some believing, and others disbelieving; and the two parties contested together; and, in respect to the unbelieving party, the apostle quoted the following passage from Isaiah 6:9” [CLARKE].

BEGAN TO LEAVE. As the Jews began disagreeing with one another, some began to leave and then others began leaving. More than likely, those who rejected Paul’s message more vehemently began leaving first, and then others, who stayed to debate a while longer, began leaving. Those who agreed with Paul and believed that Jesus is the Messiah were probably the last to leave.

PAUL MADE ONE STATEMENT. Isn’t that just like a preacher? He has preached all day, but now he has just one more word for them! It was after Paul quoted from Isaiah that they began leaving.

THE HOLY SPIRIT CORRECTLY SPOKE. What a statement this is for inspiration of the Scripture! “The Holy Spirit correctly spoke through the prophet Isaiah to your forefathers.” First, “the Holy Spirit correctly spoke” (divine inspiration); Second, He “spoke through the prophet Isaiah (through a human instrument); Third, He spoke to “your forefathers” (divine communication of His message to them). It seemed sufficient for a long time to say that the Scripture was inspired by the Holy Spirit; but when liberals began “redefining” that term (“if by that you mean verbal inspiration...”); then more conservative believers added the word “infallible” to their faith and message statements. Before long, some liberals were redefining that word (“if by infallible you mean....”). Finally, Southern Baptists voted to say that the Scripture, as it was originally handed down, was “inerrant”, but some persisted in rejecting that (“I believe the Bible is inerrant; I just don’t want anyone to force me to say so...”).

This writer is not as concerned with the term we use as in the attitude we have toward the Word of God, and whether or not we are obedient to the Word. While I have never seen an original document, I am convinced that there were no errors in that which the Holy Spirit told Isaiah to write.

We will save that argument for another day (after fifty years people still disagree on the term inerrancy). One question is sufficient here: How did Paul, under view the message God gave Isaiah? We would also want to understand Jesus' attitude toward the Old Testament Scripture. That speaks volumes to us today.

28:26 - WHEN HE SAID. *“(When He said, Go to this people and say: ‘You will listen and listen, yet never understand; and you will look and look, yet never perceive.’”* The Lord called four great Eighth Century B. C. prophets to proclaim His word to His people: Amos and Hosea warned Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and Isaiah and Micah prophesied in the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Lord raised up Assyria to destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C., and He sent Isaiah to warn the people of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, that if they did not repent and follow Him He would send the Babylonians to take her into captivity for seventy years. A century later, God sent Jeremiah to the people of Judah with a warning that disaster awaited them if they did not repent and follow Him. The Lord told Jeremiah to tell them to stop crying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” (Jer. 7). Their response? “We will not obey!”

The Lord, Paul says, sent Isaiah to the people of Judah with the announcement, “You will listen and listen, yet never understand; and you will look and look, yet never perceive.” He sent Jeremiah a century later to warn them, but they arrogantly, even “religiously” rejected his message. He had given the people of Judah every opportunity to learn a lesson from what had happened to Israel, but she refused. Judah was given every opportunity to repent, but even after a century, with shadow of Assyria hovering over them, they refused to follow the Lord. So Yahweh sent Jeremiah with a warning that should have brought Judah to her knees:

“In the days of King Josiah the Lord asked me, **‘Have you seen what unfaithful Israel has done?’** She has ascended every high hill and gone under every green tree to prostitute herself there. I thought: After she has done all these things, she will return to Me. But she didn’t return, and **her treacherous sister Judah saw it.** I observed that it was because unfaithful Israel had committed adultery that I had sent her away and had given her a certificate of divorce. Nevertheless, her treacherous sister Judah was not afraid but also went and prostituted herself. Indifferent to her prostitution, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and tree. Yet in spite of all this, her treacherous sister Judah didn’t return to Me with all her heart—only in pretense.’

“[This is] the Lord’s declaration. The Lord announced to me, **“Unfaithful Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah”** (Jer 3:6-11, bold added by this writer).

America today needs to listen to the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah. Instead, she arrogantly (often “religiously”) marches deeper and deeper into the post-Christian period in her history. The nation was founded on Christian principles, yet intellectuals deny it, preferring to quote (out of context) a statement Jefferson made about “a wall of separation”, rather than believe what the Founders

proclaimed (see David Barton's *WallBuilders* on the Internet for more on this). Ancient Israel committed spiritual adultery with gods of stone and wood and we think they were primitive and foolish. America commits spiritual adultery with New Age gods and thinks of her self as enlightened! If God destroyed Israel and sent Judah into captivity for 70 years, how long will he tolerate America's apostasy?

28:27 - THIS PEOPLE'S HEART. *"For this people's heart has grown callous, their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their heart, and be converted—and I would heal them."* Paul continues to quote Isaiah. In the Bible Knowledge Commentary, the author reminds us that "The disagreement **among** the Jewish leaders in Rome about Paul's message showed that they were not amenable to the gospel. With prophetic insight **Paul** applied the words of **Isaiah** (6:9-10) to his own contemporaries. Obstinate refusal to believe results in **calloused** hearts, deafened **ears**, and spiritually blinded **eyes**. This had happened to Israel both in Isaiah's day and in Paul's (cf. Rom. 11:7-10). Interestingly Paul ascribed Isaiah's words to the inspiration of **the Holy Spirit** (cf. Acts 4:25)" [BKC, bold in original].

The hearts of those ancient Israelites had grown calloused. I grew up on a farm in the Mississippi Delta and during the school year, even though I had many farm chores every morning and again every afternoon, the palms of my hands, though firm, were not hard. As soon as school was out I began choppin' cotton (hoeing) ten hours a day, in addition to my regular chores, which included milking and feeding livestock. At the end of the first full day of choppin' cotton my palms would have blisters on them. The next day the blisters would burst. Some people, of course used gloves, but no teenaged boy at the time would be caught dead doing something that might get him labeled as a sissy. After the hands healed, callouses would form and the hands were no longer sensitive to the hoe, shovel, other tools, or to the steering wheel of the tractor. My hands became calloused, of insensitive to the tools of the farmer's trade. This is how the Lord saw ancient Isaiah, and how Paul sees the Jews of Rome in the first century. They were insensitive to the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. They heard the truth but it did not register with them. They preferred to hold onto their traditions.

THEIR EARS. The Lord had sent Isaiah with the announcement that the people of Judah had ears but could not hear Him. Dr. T. J. DeLaughter, who taught me Old Testament at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, often paused to say, "this word means to hear with a mind to obey." The Israelites of Isaiah's day refused to hear with a mind to obey, and that is exactly what Paul says of the Jewish leaders in Rome. Like their ancient kinsmen, many of these Jews turned a deaf ear to the Lord.

SHUT THEIR EYES. They wilfully and decisively closed their eyes to God, even while professing to be following Him. This is not something that had overtaken them, they closed their eyes deliberately to the truth. Walker says, "Three figurative expressions are thus used to express the hardening and growing insensitivity of those who reject the Gospel message. According to Isaiah's original Hebrew, they are as follows:

1. The heard becomes fat or thick (unfeeling).
2. The ears become heavy or dull (unhearing).
3. The eyes become as ‘smeared over, glued together (incapable of opening)’
[WALKER].

Hundreds of years earlier, a Psalmist was inspired to write of such people:

“They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk. They cannot make a sound with their throats” (Ps. 115:5-7).

28:28 - SAVING WORK OF GOD. *“Therefore, let it be known to you that this saving work of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen!”* We need to pay close attention when Paul uses the word “therefore”, for with it he connects the foundation he has laid with the conclusion he is about to draw. He has quoted from the prophesy of Isaiah about the attitude of the Jews in the Eighth Century B. C., and now he goes on to make an application to those who were rejecting his message about the Messiah.

Those Jews worked constantly, “religiously”, for God’s approval, totally blinding themselves to the fact that the “saving work of God” is not by works but by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Sadly, not only do most Jews today reject that message, but many who profess to be Christians reject the clear warning from the Word of God that “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). That name is Jesus.

Paul had preached the Gospel to the Jews in Rome, just as he had in other places. God’s salvation comes only through Jesus Christ. These Jews were “religiously” committed to the Mosaic Law and to the Prophets, but rejected the Messiah of whom they prophesied. The Chosen People chose not to hear the Gospel. Like their ancient ancestors, they were saying, “We will not listen”. To better appreciate the great burden Paul carried for his fellow Jews, see Romans 10-11.

TO THE GENTILES. This announcement reminds us of the scene played out in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:46-48); in Corinth (18:5-7); and in Ephesus (19:8-9). It is now repeated in Rome. Paul is again forced to turn from his own people to the Gentiles. As Paul expressed in his Letter to the Romans, it crushed his heart to see his own people reject the Messiah, who came in fulfillment of their own prophets. The Gentiles would hear him, but there was a distinct advantage in the spread of the Gospel in reaching the Jews, because they knew the Law and the Prophets. That provided a foundation the Gentiles lacked. The Gentiles had to forsake their old religion and start from scratch.

Gentiles knew nothing of the Mosaic Law or the Messianic prophesies, unless they had been studying the Jewish religion, which some had. Today, there is a distinct advantage for a pastor who has grown up church, attending Sunday School and worship services, and received Jesus Christ as Savior as a child or youth, compared to one who is saved when he is thirty years old and then called

into the ministry. He has no background in the Bible, he does not know how a church functions, and he is not aware of ministry of his denomination, or opportunities for training in the ministry. However, we might add, many with no background are keenly aware of the fact that they need to know those things and they make a commitment to learn. Barnes writes of Paul's turning to the Gentiles:

“They will embrace it. Paul was never discouraged. If the gospel was rejected by one class of people, he was ready to offer it to another. If his own countrymen rejected and despised it, he never allowed himself to suppose that Christ had died in vain, but believed that others would be inclined to embrace its saving benefits. How happy would it be if all Christians had the same unwavering faith and zeal as Paul!” [BARNES].

28:29 - THE JEWS DEPARTED. *“After he said these things, the Jews departed, while engaging in a prolonged debate among themselves.”* This verse is not present in all the earliest manuscripts” [NCWB], and few commentaries offer any help with it.

Paul's Ministry in Rome

28:30 - TWO WHOLE YEARS. *“Then he stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him...”* Paul lived in his own rented house, chained to a Roman guard, waiting for his appeal to be heard.

WELCOMED ALL WHO VISITED. “Welcomed” (“received” in the KJV) is imperfect, showing a constant and habitual practice. Visitors continued to come to minister to Paul, to learn from him, and probably to help extend his ministry. As in the case of the two years Paul spent in prison in Caesarea, so it is here. Man's reasoning may well be, “What a waste! What a loss for the most prolific writer of Scripture, the most capable apologist in history, to be held as a prisoner for two years. And for the second time!” How could the Lord let that happen, not once but twice? However, the Lord has a response to that:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways.’ [This is] the Lord's declaration. ‘For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Is. 55:8-9).

Paul was chained to soldiers, who guarded him in shifts. We can be sure that Paul never missed an opportunity to witness to them. It would also be interesting to know what they thought about all the visitors who came to see their prisoner. No doubt, in time some of them did understand. Many believers, and probably, many who were seeking the truth, came to see Paul. He was an effective witness, even from prison, and his freedom to receive visitors greatly enhanced his ministry while in prison in Rome. It was also during this time that he wrote the “Prison Epistles”: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. The Lord was not wasting His servant. He was

overcoming circumstances, and restrictions to spread his Word.

28:31 - PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM. *“(P)roclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full boldness and without hindrance.”* “Proclaiming” means that Paul “heralded” in the imperial city a kingdom greater than Rome. “This verse characterizes the dynamic energy with which Paul preached about God’s kingdom and the Lord Jesus Christ” [NCWB].

TEACHING. This seems to stress the more systematic instruction of inquirers and Christians. He may have held regular classes for new believers and inquirers. Both preaching and teaching are stressed in the Book of Acts, as well as throughout the rest of the New Testament. Both are essential and neither should be neglected.

When I was a young pastor I often heard people comment that their pastor was “a good teacher, but he is not a good preacher.” Some of those people were not interested in expository preaching, they just wanted to see a performance every Sunday from the pulpit. Admittedly, in some cases those people may have been right, but in other cases those people were expecting a performance, complete with jokes, trauma, and captivating stories. They wanted to be entertained. The late humorist Jerry Clowers used to say that the preacher people talked about most during the week was the one who told interesting stories from the pulpit. Who does not want to hear a preacher who is dynamic, dramatic, and passionate? However, when the message is over if no one has learned anything about the Word of God the preacher has failed his people.

The late Professor E. L. Douglas once told his class about a dynamic preacher who preached in chapel at Mississippi College. The students were mesmerized and most faculty members sat spellbound as the man preached. When chapel was over students were raving about the great sermon they had heard, and some faculty members joined in the praise. Professor Douglas said that he walked back to his office with Dr. Bracey Campbell, who said nothing until they entered his office. Then, Dr. Campbell closed the door and turned around and said, “Yes, it was great! But what did he say?!!” Professor Douglas said, “I stopped to think and I couldn’t answer his question. The man really had not said anything of value.”

I grew up listening to R. G. Lee preach. I heard him preach in person many times, and for several years I heard him preach every Sunday on television. We got home from our church just in time to see Dr. Lee, in his white Palm Beach suit, drop down on his right knee by the pulpit at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis and pray before he preached. Then he would preach the most amazing sermons one could imagine. If anyone in America deserved to be called the Prince of Preachers, it was R. G. Lee. I once heard Dr. W. A. Criswell, who preached before Dr. Lee at a state evangelism conference in Clarksdale, Mississippi, say, “The best thing I can do for you is to get out of the way and let you listen to the Prince of Preachers.” Dr. Lee preached one sermon, Pay Day Some Day, over 1200 times and I was privileged to hear him preach it twice.

A number of years later, I met a man named Stephen Olford (now deceased). He and I sat on the

same pew the night we received our doctorates at Luther Rice Seminary. Since then, I have talked with a lot of preachers who, if asked, would tell you they had rather listen to Stephen Olford preach than any other preacher in the world. I served on the board of trustees for LifeWay Christian Resources for seven years with Roger Wilmore, currently President of the Alabama Baptist Convention, and discovered that Roger had worked for Stephen Olford's ministry in Memphis for about seven years. When Dr. Olford was dying Roger drove to Memphis and sat with Mrs. Olford. He affirms what so many of us said about Dr. Olford's ministry.

My personal impression when I talked with Stephen Olford that night in Jacksonville, Florida was that he combined great humility with great power. I never lost that impression. When you listened to Stephen Olford you were both challenged and fed, and you grew as you were being fed. I once heard Dr. Olford declare, "there is a famine in America today, and it is a famine of expository preaching." When I listen to some of those preacher who refuse to preach against sin or call for repentance because they "just want everyone to feel good", I hearken back to what Stephen Olford said. There really is a famine in the area of expository preaching, the kind of preaching which always combine preaching with teaching.

My wife Becky, when we were very young in the ministry, told me she hated the thought of attending a study course taught by a pastor for the simple reason that many of them assumed they knew the subject better than the person who wrote the study course book. She would read the book and then sit and listen to some pastor ramble on about his experience. Becky was a teacher and she was quick to recognize the person who was unprepared to teach, especially when the teacher was a pastor. I might add that some pastors make it a point to be prepared, but some are simply lazy and convince themselves that they are experienced enough to wing it!

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Paul uses His full name and title here, and Luke uses it significantly at the close of this book which chronicles His many great triumphs. His name is Jesus; He is Christ (the Anointed, the Messiah); and He is Lord. He is either Lord of all or He is not Lord at all, as church signs and bumper stickers proclaim. Paul preached Christ and Him crucified, which as he wrote to the church at Corinth, was a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles. Yet, it is God's way of salvation, and there is no other.

FULL BOLDNESS. . "Boldness" characterized the preaching of the Gospel during those early days. Neither prison, Roman guards, nor his pending trial diminished Paul's boldness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and John had preached with boldness, and Paul's ministry was characterized by this boldness.

AND WITHOUT HINDRANCE. Verses 30-31 are Luke's final Progress report (see 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 19:20). The NASB has "unhindered." The Book of Acts ends with an adverb (unhinderedly). With hindrance is a good rendering. Various explanations have been suggested. Frank Stagg wrote a commentary on Acts right after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling ending segregation in public schools. He was a brilliant scholar, but perhaps let his heart override his wisdom here. He took this ending to mean the Gospel over came racial barriers (and other barriers),

and he cited the outreach to the Samaritans as an example. Dr. Leo Eddleman expressed his concern about this to me, and added, “If you stood a Jew and a Samaritan side by side and dressed them alike you couldn’t tell them apart.” Dr. Stagg was a Greek scholar, but while Dr. Eddleman had majored in Greek in seminary, he was widely recognized as a Hebrew and Arabic scholar. The Samaritans, he explained, were Semitic people, but they were hated by the Jews on religious grounds, not racial grounds. The Gospel did overcome racial barriers, age barriers, economic barriers, and barriers between men and women, but we must go else where for proof, rather than stretching the Scripture to make it fit our purpose.

The question has been asked, did Luke leave this work unfinished, or did he intend to close like this for a reason? In the first place, the Holy Spirit is the divine Author and he closed inspired the closing words of the Book. The Book was finished, but the work was just getting started! Robertson sums it up this way:

“I agree with Harnack that Luke wrote the Acts during this period of two years in Rome and carried events no further because they had gone no further. Paul was still a prisoner in Rome when Luke completed the book. But he had carried Paul to "Rome, the capital of the world, Urbi et Orbi" (Page). The gospel of Christ has reached Rome. For the fate of Paul we must turn elsewhere. But Luke had the presence of Paul while he carried the Acts to its triumphant conclusion. Ramsay can give a good deal in proof of his claim that Luke is the greatest of all historians. Beyond a doubt his rank is high and the world can never repay its debt to this cultured physician who wrote the Gospel and the Acts” [ATR].

The Bible Knowledge Commentary takes up the discussion of what happened after Luke penned that last words (“without hindrance”):

“One question commonly raised pertains to Paul’s activities after this **two**-year captivity. What happened? Perhaps no charges were filed in Rome and Paul was released. The Jews would know they had no case against Paul outside of Judea and so would be reluctant to argue their cause in Rome.

“Probably Paul returned to the provinces of Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia and then turned west to Spain according to his original plans (Rom. 15:22-28). Then he ministered once more in the Aegean area where he was taken prisoner, removed to Rome, and executed...

“While Paul was in Rome during this incarceration the gospel was not bound. **He** spoke **boldly** (cf. comments on Acts 4:13). The last word in the Greek text of Acts is the adverb *ako-lyto-s* which means **without hindrance**. Men may bind the preachers, but the gospel cannot be chained!

“And so it was that the kingdom message under God’s sovereign control went from Jew to Gentile, and from Jerusalem to Rome” [BKC].

Luke seems never to have lost sight of the proclamation of Jesus that He would send the Holy Spirit came He would empower His disciples to be his witnesses unto the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). Progress reports throughout the book reveal that there is a theme, of which he never loses sight. Major emphasis was placed upon what the preaching of the Word was doing, beginning in Jerusalem, and then spreading throughout the known world. Here, to the very end of this book, Paul is still preaching and teaching the Word. In spite of his imprisonment, Paul's relative liberty was maintained, some believe through the contributions of the saints at Philippi (possibly supplemented by believers in Rome). Since he was no longer free to make tents, who paid the rent for his own dwelling? The Lord provided. Luke's account ends here, so we may now turn to the Epistles of Paul for further study of phenomenal spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We have seen the history, lets us move on to the deeper things of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Characteristically, Luke leaves Paul in prison in Rome. He makes no effort to give us any answers about the outcome of his appeal. Most Christians would like to know more about this greatest of all missionaries. This, however, is neither Luke's style, nor his purpose.

Luke leaves John in chapter 4 or 5. He leaves Peter in chapter 12. He left Barnabas in chapter 15. One wishes he had told us more about James, the half-brother of our Lord, as well as other apostles and missionaries. This simply was not his purpose, and the Holy Spirit never inspired him to include this information. His message is far greater than any one man, or group of men and women. He wrote to give us a very important record of the spread of the Gospel, and to provide valuable information about our Lord and His work.

Luke is writing this to give us a record of the spread of the Gospel under the leadership of, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, who inspired this work, which has inspired Christians throughout the ages. This Book has provided the text for countless sermons for hundreds of years. Its teaching values are beyond measure.

Paul was released when he had a hearing, traveled possibly to Spain, and back to Ephesus, Macedonia and other places before being arrested and returned to Rome about A. D. 67. He joined the long list of martyrs when he was beheaded in Rome. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, before his martyrdom, said, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die." When He called Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9), He called him to take up his cross and follow Him. Paul was obedient to his heavenly calling.

APPENDIX A

Prison Letters

Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles, to proclaim the Gospel to Gentiles, to Israel, and to bear witness for Jesus before kings and rulers. With such a high calling, why would the One who miraculously saved him, called him, and commissioned him have let him waste so much of his time in prison? He was thrown into prison in Philippi, dragged before officials in Thessalonica, harassed in Corinth and Ephesus, and given an opportunity to speak to philosophers in Athens. He was arrested and imprisoned in Jerusalem at the end of the Third Missionary Journey, taken out of the city at night and rushed under heavy guard to Caesarea, where he was imprisoned for two years, during which time he was frequently called to stand before Felix the Roman governor. Felix was replaced as governor over the province by Festus, who was more interested in pleasing the Jewish leaders than in Justice. Paul appealed to Rome, and after a treacherous voyage, and shipwreck on Malta, he finally arrived in Rome, where he was permitted to live in his own rented house, but remained chained to a guard.

It would not be surprising if one asked, "How could the Lord do that to Paul?" How could he take a man who could plant churches, heal the sick, shake off a poisonous viper, and raise the dead be forced to spend years in prison? Well, Bible students are familiar with the Prison Epistles he was inspired to write. Also, his friends, both in Caesarea and Rome, were permitted to visit him. He could teach them and encourage them, even while he was in prison. He also had an opportunity to witness to authorities whom other believers may not have seen, or even considered as people who would listen to the Gospel.

I was preparing to throw out some old letters when I happened upon some letters I had stuck in the back of a drawer in my desk years ago. When I began reading letters from a man named Bill Griffin, I remembered what it was like to visit people in jail or prison and share the Gospel of salvation with them. I saw some men transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and for that reason I would like to share a few of those prison letters at this point.

Letter # 1 from Bill Griffin
From Hinds County Jail, Jackson, MS

Wednesday Morning, Oct. 29, 1958

My Dearest Friend,

I hope that these few lines find you healthier and happier in life than ever before. Truly, forgive me for waiting so long to answer your letter. For I have been debating with myself for hours hoping to find time enough, from my book that I am writing, to drop you a few lines. Actually, you have been on my mind and in my thoughts constantly since you have been coming here. For, Johnny, you have an implacable will and informal art in bringing the words of God to us here.

Since you have been coming here many of us have set out from the “City of Destruction” to the “Heavenly Mansions.” Before you came many of us were like a prayer lacking any knees, but now something beats within us to prove that God is with us, through your help.

French and Richard are doing all right and said for you to pray for them.

Pray for me

Your Friend Always

Bill

Letter # 2 from Bill Griffin
From Hinds County Jail

Saturday Morning, Nov. 1, 1958

My Dearest Friend,

The terrible moment arrive today for me. The judge set the date for my trial for Monday, Nov. Third. I was shocked, I could hardly stand. For several hours I nearly pulled all my hair out. I never knew anybody could be so miserable and so scared. But, now, as I am writing to you, the initial panic has subsided, for I have begun to regain back my courage.

The thing that has helped most to sustain me through these days while I have been in the security cells, is the fact, you, Johnny. For you have given God to us within these prison cells. I have grieved deeply for my God. For I have now known the endless range for God. I have fought the gray madness of clanking doors, bars, and constant supervision and discipline. Although my mind and body have screamed for freedom, all I have left is hope. Hope to be free. Hope to be given a chance to reestablish my life with God and in society.

You would have been very proud of us Thursday and Friday night if you had seen us in prayer. Yes, it was hard to get Tom to pray, but we stayed after him until he came through.

Tom goes down Monday to be indicted. I sure hope everything goes good for him. Johnny, I think that later on he will come to know Christ.

I guess I had better close for now. Give my best wishes and regards to them all (the Baptist Student Union students who visited with me every Thursday afternoon).

Pray for us all.

Your Friend Always,

Bill

P.S. I may not be here Thursday when you come. Please come up to xxxxxxxxxxxxxx (Mississippi State Penitentiary) and see me.

Letter # 3 from Bill Griffin
Hinds County

Monday Night, Nov. 3, 1958

My Dearest Friend,

The days that have passed since I have been in jail haven't been easy. My heart has hungered for the love of my little son. Who I haven't seen in about three months. And in my lonely need, I have sat here sobbing, wishing I could pray. But in this moment of black despair, I feel like God has deserted me. All I want is what other men take for granted: the belief that somewhere in this world there must be some one who wanted my son and I.

Johnny, something, I know, has happened to me, since this morning. I feel as if this terrible burden that I have is sending me back instead of forward. I have even tried to write some more in my book, and have even read it, but it doesn't do any good. Maybe this will help. This is good. I will put it in my book

“My God, help me, a young man, as I reach the crossroads of life, the good and evil. When the evil part of life is easier to get, help me to work harder to be good, for the satisfaction of knowing Your smile is on me. Guide me and direct me by Thy love and understanding. When I falter along the way, Let me look to you for help. And in the end, when Thy love and understanding and courage are standing in front of me, and evil, disgrace, and temptations are at back of me, let me again look to you and smile. For then I will know that I shall have a happier life beyond. Amen.”

I feel much better now. French is reading his Bible and having a Friends Altar with Richard and I every night. Johnny, many thanks for taking time out of your classes and writing to me. I only wish I knew a nice young girl that would write. But again, though, a nice girl would not write to a person in jail.

I guess I will see you Thursday. They didn't have my trial today.

Pray for Us.

Always Your Friend,

Bill

Letter from Tommy French

Oct. 31; 1958, Friday night

Dear Johnny,

Just a line before the lights go out to let you know that I am reading the Bible now and then and believe me, I am trying hard to accept Jesus. I look forward to Thursday when you come back to see us.

I'm not much of a writer and as you know there isn't much here to write about, but I just wanted you to know I'm trying from my heart to be forgiven.

Johnny, I drew this picture of you. It is what I thought you looked like from the two times you came up here. Good night and God bless you,

Tommy

NOTE: I found in the same place in the back of the drawer a Christmas card from Tommy French, mailed from Parchman, Dec. 23, 1959. It has been fifty years since I had the great joy of seeing twenty-two year old Tommy French trust Jesus to forgive him and save him. When I remember Tommy, I remember a man who had committed a brutal murder while drunk. He deserved to be sentenced to life in the Mississippi State Penitentiary. I still love him and I will see him in Heaven! Here is a very important point: I give Bill Griffin credit for pleading with Tommy to stop talking to reporters ("They are going to get you put in the gas chamber!"); and "listen to Johnny Sanders when he comes back next Thursday." I did not lead Tommy to the Lord in a few brief visits. I thank God that there was a daily witness in that maximum security block.

Special Note on Tommy

In the introduction to my commentary on Ephesians, I share the conversion experience of three prisoners I knew at the Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchman. I visited with all three men in Camp 4. "Porkchop" had an amazing testimony, but Chaplain R. B. Hicks had led him to pray to receive Jesus as Savior. I had seen Tommy and a Mr. Taylor saved at the Hinds County Jail in Jackson and then followed up when I was preaching at Parchman every Sunday morning at 8:00.

Let me mention my first meeting with Tommy. I knew I was going to meet Tommy. I directed the Mississippi College BSU (Baptist Student Union) mission trip to the Hinds County Jail in Jackson every Thursday for two or three years. When I picked up the Jackson Clarion Ledger the first of the week and read the headlines, I was as shocked as anyone else in the area. Tommy, a 22 year old carnival worker was in town with the Mississippi State Fair. He has been living in a motel room with a young woman who was seven months pregnant. It was not his baby, but he told her he could "live with it". However, in a drunken stupor, he decided that he could not live with it, so he brutally beat and strangled her to death.

When I arrived at the jail, I assigned various friends different cells to visit, reserving maximum security for myself. The heavy steel door was open and I heard loud voices coming from the little area in front of the double set of bars. A local reporter was badgering the prisoner. The jailer said, "Go on in. That reporter has been in there long enough." I stepped through the door as the reporter challenged, "You must think you're pretty tough, beating up a woman, don't you?" Tommy snapped, "You come behind these bars and I'll show you how tough I am."

Turning to me, the reporter arrogantly demanded, "Who are you?"

"I'm Johnny Sanders."

"Where are you from?"

I looked him in the eye and firmly said, "Home." We stood facing each other until he finally turned and walked out. I was not going to give him any ammunition to use in an article about Mississippi College or the BSU. The jailer had told me that Tommy had sent for a priest and the priest came in and talked a few minutes and after leaving a tract, said, "I'll come back in a few days and give you a test on that." The jailer also told me that Tommy asked him not to let the priest back in because he needed more help than that.

Tommy listened respectfully, and by the grace of God I was able to get past the horror of Tommy's crime and see a desperate young man who knew he had committed a despicable act. After I left, the other man in maximum security, Bill, advised Tommy, "You should stop talking to reporters. They are going to get you executed! But you need to listen to Johnny Sanders when he comes back." A few days later I got a letter from Tommy in which he said, "Johnny, I am trying to find God." I immediately wrote back, "Tommy, before you ever thought about finding God, He was trying to find you. You never would have known you needed God if He had not revealed that to you. He was loving you before you ever thought of Him and He has provided for your forgiveness through Jesus Christ."

Tommy was saved on my next visit and I visited with him a number of times in the Hinds County Jail. Tommy was sentenced to life for his brutal crime - and rightly so - but by the grace of God, Tommy was forgiven, his sins covered by the blood of the Lamb of God. Tommy is my brother and the two letters I have in my desk drawer are a reminder that God's grace is sufficient for all who call on Him.

Later I preached in Tommy's camp at the state penitentiary at Parchman. Tommy assured me that he was reading his Bible and praying and, he added, "When I get out of here, I want to serve God." I expressed my joy in his testimony and counseled, "Tommy, you don't have to wait until you get out to serve the Lord. You will never find a place that needs it any more that right here."

APPENDIX B

Correspondence with Dr. Leon Hyatt Strom at Sea and WW II Battle Conditions

SPECIAL NOTE: Many people know and appreciate Dr. Leon Hyatt's courageous and uncompromising, yet gentle and humble leadership in the "Battle for the Bible". I often talked with him and observed him in his leadership role in the Conservative Resurgence. I am one of many people who respect and love Dr. Hyatt, but it occurred to me that many of those who have met with him, prayed with him, and heard him preach have no idea what price this man paid to preserve our freedom to worship the Lord as He commands, leads, empowers, and enables. Leon was one of thousands who fought for the freedom to fight for our freedom (theologically, politically, and morally). I am in his debt.

I asked Dr. Hyatt for permission to use his note (see 27:20 comments) and he sent the following note:

"Yes, you may add my experience to your (Bible) Notebook if you think it will help. I did not send it for that purpose, of course. I just said enough to let you know how vivid your father's description was to me. I wrote just enough to let you know I join you in your admiration of your father's courage. If you do add anything of my experience to your notes, you might like to add a portion of the few additional sentences I will write in the next paragraph. I know you do not want to add too many lines, because the description given by your father was graphic and sufficient. Yes, it illustrates Paul's experience well. It will help people who have never been through such a storm understand Paul's stamina and faith. Writers often comment about Paul's poor health. They seldom seem to observe all the evidence for his amazing fortitude. I have traveled some of the routes that Paul traveled--in a bus. And I was exhausted. But on foot or on a burrow? And having the strength immediately on arriving to find a synagogue or a prayer meeting where he could gather a group to start a church! And to spend his nights writing some of the greatest, most influential writings ever penned! What a man! And what a God who could create and empower such a man!

"Below deck sometimes it seemed as if the boat was turned on end by a huge wave, with either the bow or the stern almost straight up. At other times, it seemed as if the ship turned almost completely on its side. Hardly anyone wanted to eat anyway. Almost everyone was sea sick, even most of the crew. The Lord has blessed me with a strong stomach as far as being nauseous. I

was one of the few who did not get sea sick, and I thought then it was even worse for me, because I had to clean up after so many others vomited everything in their insides, until they had nothing more to throw up. There was no such thing as throwing up over the sides of the ship, because no one could go on deck. All we could do was hang on, roll with the ship, wait, and for those of us who knew how, pray. The Lord did answer our prayers and finally we came out of the storm shortly before going through the Straights of Gibraltar. I praise Him for it today." [Dr. Leon Hyatt, e-mail message, dated March 18, 2008, bold added by this writer].

I ASKED PERMISSION TO USE THE ABOVE NOTES AND RECEIVED THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE, WHICH IS I BELIEVE I MUST SHARE:

Dear Johnny,

You are certainly welcome to use the words I wrote. If it helps someone understand Paul's trials and his stamina, I am glad. Our division went over to Europe in December 1944. We landed at Marseilles, France, a week or two before Christmas. We road a "40 and 8s" to the front in Alcase-Lorraine. A "40 and 8" was a railway car that was completely empty. Supposedly it could accomodate 40 men or 8 horses. We were stacked in so tightly, we could not all lie down at the same time. At night we lay interlaced with each other. Sometimes someone would have a cramp in his leg or back, and many of us would have to move to give him relief. We had a steel barrel for a toilet. No one wanted to sleep near it, but someone had to. The trains moved very slowly. It took us three days to reach our destination. We were placed on the front on Christmas eve, butd we did have a Christmas dinner of turkey and dressing, because right at that moment the front was inactive.

We got into very dangerous action right away, and I was wounded on January 5 in Wingen-sur-Moder in the Vosges Mounains. I was hit with a 50 caliber machine gone in my right thigh and in my left rib cage. My wounds were superficial, and I was sent back to the front after four hours. I wore the bandages until the end of the war. We were very green and poorly trained. In the first few days, we did everything wrong. In about three days, a person learns to take care of himself. Soon we became an effective fighting unit.

I had never seen snow before, and the snow never thawed for the entire winter. I never went by a fire the whole winter, and we were only inside when we defended abandoned houses in towns we were fighting through. I had no experience walking in snow. In the mountains, it seemed to me that I slid down as much as I climbed up when we were moving forward.

Well, you did not ask for all of that. Anyway, you know the approximate date we went overseas. It was near the end of the war, but our division was activated to try to replace the many thousands who had been killed or wounded. We defended The Other Battle of the Bulge, which has not been written about much because we were successful in stopping the German attack. If we had failed, the end of the war could have stretched out very much longer. The Germans planned a pincer attack, one column to the north, and the other to the south. They were to break through the line, encircle the American troops, and annihilate us. We held the line in the south. In the north, the line fell back,

forming a bulge, which is the source of the name The Battle of the Bulge. Then we were moved to the north to strengthen the line and participate in driving the Germans back. When the line was straightened again, we began the attack that brought about the final downfall of the German army.

Oh, I should have stopped long before now. Two weeks ago, Ann and I went to a reunion of our infantry company, so these memories have arisen fresh in my mind again. Our company consisted of 268 men. We had about 300 replacements for those killed and wounded. Those who keep up with the men who were in our company only know the whereabouts of 19 that are left. 24 attended the reunion, but most of them were wives, widows, children, relatives, even friends. Only four attended who actually fought with our company.

Please forgive my going on and on.

Sincerely,
Leon

APPENDIX C

Need for Hardcore Bible study

The Greatest Generation. I am not sure who coined the phrase, but for some time during 2007, America heard it over and over: The Greatest Generation! The Generation that won the war against the Nazis on one front and Japan on the other really was amazing any many respects. When the we were attacked by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor we were very poorly prepared to defend ourselves. Political leaders had buried their heads in the sand and refused to believe Europe's war was our war. But suddenly, we were forced into a Second World War, whether we wanted it or not.

As soon as the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor was announced, as soon as President Roosevelt made his famous speech in which he coined the phrase, "a day that will live in infamy", young American boys, and boys they were, lined up to volunteer to fight the enemies of this country. They came from the farms and factories; they came from the college campus, and from the high school class room, often lying about their age because they believed in America and no sacrifice was too great to defend their country and to protect their loved ones. Their parents had done a good job. They were patriotic.

I have a reason to remember and love The Greatest Generation. My father was a soldier. My mother was a soldier's wife, taking care of her family, praying, checking the mail, waiting. I was a soldier's son, forced to live with an Aunt I could hardly remember, attend a strange school, to which I had to walk about a mile every morning and then back in the afternoon. I received letters from my mother and looked forward to visits. Gasoline and tires were rationed. I saw my uncles, cousins, and

neighbors going and coming but really did not understand it all. I was in the second grade.

When I reached Mississippi College, I met some veterans who had fought in the army, navy, and marines. Then in New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, I met some of the men who had fought through the war. I was twenty two years old; they were older men: some of them had to be thirty five years old! I loved to sit in on conversations. My part was to listen quietly, hope for interesting war stories, but most often settle for some amusing incident in which someone had been frightened, or embarrassed. The Greatest Generation didn't brag! I never heard any of those men boast of their courage, sacrifice, exploits, or fighting ability.

As Jesse Sebastian told a group of fellow veterans about one experience in a town in Germany, I did what I always did - listened without making a comment. His sergeant sent to him to reconnoiter the blind street just around the next corner. He was eighteen years old and scared. Jesse said, "The closer I got to the corner, the more sure I was that when I looked around that corner I would see a street full of Germans. I was so certain of it that before I reached the corner, I got down on my stomach and eased forward until I was about six inches from the corner. I slipped my helmet off, and with it in one hand and my carbine in other, I placed my face on the sidewalk and quickly stuck my head around the corner. When I did I almost butted heads with a young blonde haired, blue eyed German boy who was doing he same thing I was doing. We both jumped up and ran!"

I roomed with another veteran James King. As interested as I was, I did not quiz him about his experience. I only listened when he told of something amusing. The greatest generation did not talk of their heroism, but I listened and I learned from them. I suppose I wanted to hear Audie Murphy stories, but learned instead about humility, courage, and strength.

The Greatest Generation returned home, and with the GI Bill, and the support of faithful wives and family members, they went back to school, got jobs, and guided America through the transition from a war time America to a peace time America. They had just fought "the war that would end all wars." Of course, an America that would believe that had not learned from World War I, which had not been the war to end all wars.

The Greatest Generation returned to their homes, schools, and jobs and helped build America. They gave us a newer, more beautiful, and more comfortable automobile. They gave us air travel, the likes of which no generation had ever seen before. They gave us technology the world had never dreamed possible. The Greatest Generation found a cure for polio, improved medical facilities, did the research that gave us a longer life span, and the solution to health problems that had claimed lives by the hundreds of thousands in the past. In short, The Greatest Generation brought us out of the horse and buggy age, through the automotive age, through the jet age, and into the computer age and the space age.

I am a beneficiary of the contributions of The Greatest Generation. I have a vivid memory of my father coming home from the war, working long hours to make the farm a success, applying new technology, and making the transition from farming our land with mules to farming with tractors.

Anyone who cannot appreciate that has never spent a long hot summer day in the Mississippi Delta looking at the north end of a south bound mule, entertained only by the switching of the mule's tail as it brushed the flies off its hind quarters. These are just a few of my memories of The Greatest Generation. In time, I came to understand some negative contributions. Because I am a product of the Greatest Generation and because of my admiration for their courage, patriotism, and ingenuity, I very reluctantly began to assess the negative benefits of their lives, programs, and commitments. I will mention a few.

The Greatest Generation would become the best educated, most enlightened generation in the history of America. They would see their children accomplish the things they could not accomplish. America should be in for a great future. Along with advances in transportation and communication, they gave us the highest income Americans had even known. They gave us a shorter work day, and that allowed for more vacations, more time for recreation and entertainment.

Along with everything else, The Greatest Generation gave us the Boomer Generation, which took the advancements of The Greatest Generation, and took and took them, quite literally, out of this world. I am alive today because of the medical advances the Boomers have made in medical science. I had a very severe heart attack at age fifty-nine, the kind, according to one nurse, one has and never lives to get to the hospital. I was on the table in ICU, listening to the doctor tell me he didn't think it was my heart when I had my heart attack! I not only had by-pass surgery, I was one of the first in the area to have it without having to go on life support.

The Greatest Generation gave us the Boomers, who in turn, gave us the Busters. In the process, America did not turn to the Lord as many Christian leaders of The Greatest Generation envisioned as they came home and began to rebuild their lives and raise families. A segment of the Boomers gave us profane, vile demonstrations, marched against about everything one can imagine, burned the flag, shouted anti-American slogans, and spat on servicemen returning from Viet Nam. They gave us what radio talk show host Laura Ingraham calls "The pornographication of America." America today calls entertainment what their grandparents would have called filth. Children can hardly carry on a conversation without constant references to body parts and body function. Television programs, even in the family hours, are filled with vulgar language, profanity, the use of God's name in vain, and the bedroom scenes which should shock all Christians. Instead, Christians seem undisturbed as they join their unsaved neighbors and go to the same depraved movies.

What happened? **The Greatest Generation lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War. They came home determined that their children would never have to work the way they did; they would never have to do without the thing they were denied.** This, for many, was a worthy commitment, but for others it was an obsession. When someone tried to come up with an answer to the Jesus freaks in the sixties, it was said that "they were so heavenly minded they were of no earthly good." To which, another person added, but "their parents were so earthly minded they were of no heavenly good." What happened?

The Greatest Generation was the first generation in America to be taught godless evolution in

public schools. The Scopes Trial in 1925 was staged by the ACLU in order to have evolution taught as an alternate theory to special creation. The media had a field day. Never mind that no one checked to see if the teacher actually taught that lesson on evolution that day (he later claimed that he did not get to the lesson the day it was reported that he taught it). Never mind that Clarence Darrow lost the case. He won the battle for media attention. Within one generation, that of The Greatest Generation, special creation could not be taught along with evolution.

How could evolution have possibly had such a negative impact on our society? I am convinced that if you wanted to create a society that would embrace abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, homosexuality, and immorality of every kind, you would want to **sell them on godless evolution first.** Please understand that I am not accusing all evolutionists of all these vile things. What I am saying is that if you wanted to sell a society on any of these things, it will be much easier if you can first sell them on evolution. **If you do not have a Creator at the beginning, you will need no Redeemer in the middle, because you can have no Judge at the end.**

The Greatest Generation received their training from their parents, who permitted their children's minds to be shaped by people like B. F. Skinner. A new generation was introduced to Behavior Modification. They sat by and watched as their children were being seduced by social scientists who valued the writings of Freud and Jung above the wisdom of Jesus Christ. Little could the parents of The Greatest Generation have appreciated how the Humanist Manifesto would influence future generations to reject the Word of God for humanistic principles, and then for New Age movements of every kind.

What happened to the America which had an opportunity for a modern day Great Awakening, but instead chose "darkness rather than light", for her deeds were evil (John 3:19)? Francis Schaeffer [The New Super-Spirituality, Schaeffer, Francis Schaeffer, Vol Four in the Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer, Crossway Books, Westchester, IL, 1982, p. 383] stated that a few years earlier, students were asking, "Are religious things reasonable? Does one have to commit intelligent suicide to become a Christian." He mentioned other questions before adding, "In many countries where I and other members of L'Abri have been, the questions have radically changed" [Schaeffer, The New Super Spirituality, p. 383]. Schaeffer went on to state that young people a few years prior to the time he was writing (around 1982) would go home and ask their parents questions. He adds, "**Too often personal peace and affluence were the only values that these young people saw in their parents, and they were rightly turned off.**" [Schaeffer, THE NEW SPIRITUALITY, p. 383, Bold added by this writer].

Francis Schaeffer taught that England entered the post-Christian era in her history in 1895, America in 1935. We probably did not see it in the south until after the Second World War. There are two observations I have made about Schaeffer's statement. **First**, in both cases, the nation entered the post-Christian era only a short time after embracing evolution and rejecting creation. **Second**, the seeds of despair and depravity had been sown, but the Second World War clouded issues. Communism had begun to spread, but in the darkness of the twenties and thirties, the West was not aware of the millions being slaughtered by this evil brainchild of Karl Marx. Little did we realize

how Lenin's revolution would impact us. No one could imagine that Stalin was slaughtering more people than Hitler could have imagined.

Communism, a spawn of evolutionary philosophies, had been forced into dormancy during the Second World War, but as soon as the War was over, Stalin began to invade other countries and enslave them. His purpose was to establish one world wide society, a godless, classless, stateless society in which the seemingly grand principle, "to each according to his need, from each according to his ability" would be established. In reality, the Communists were saying, "we are going to give you peace if we have to kill you to do it!" A similar form of Communism was spreading throughout China, and extended to its neighbors.

Sadly, many Americans were influenced by Communism, Humanism, and New Age philosophies. Within fifty or sixty years of the great sacrifices made by The Greatest Generation, America turned its back on God, moved deeper and deeper into the post-Christian era, and rejected the Word of God. Today, there is a war going on in America, and it is a war against God. There are many people in America, many in positions of power, who are willing to give terrorists a pass in order to get the Christian message out of the public arena.

I would predict that if there is not a genuine spiritual awakening in America very soon, Christians are going to see their freedom evaporate. The next step could possibly be persecution. However, the enemies of the Cross had better be careful because the Gospel has often spread in spectacular ways in response to persecution. What is the answer?

HARDCORE BIBLE STUDY. What is the answer today? First, America needs to repent and call on the Lord (2 Chron. 7:14). Then, America needs to make a serious commitment to some hardcore Bible study, trusting the Holy Spirit, who miraculously inspired it, and miraculously preserved it, to miraculously illuminate the hearts of believers to understand it and apply it.

Sadly, many churches have adapted their services to the world in order to attract the world, but in doing so they have risked conforming the church to the world. Jesus preached the truth, and the multitudes turned and followed Him no more. Many seemed convinced that we can succeed where Jesus failed! If you preach and teach the Word of God, many will not follow you. However, if we reach as many as possible on Scriptural grounds and get them involved in what I call hardcore Bible study, the Holy Spirit will use them mightily in the spread of the Gospel around the world. We have no right to compromise the Word God has given in order to put up greater numbers on the nickels and noses board, or in the record books.

What exactly is hardcore Bible study? A group of people sitting around a room, reading a verse and asking, "what does that mean to you", is not hardcore Bible study! Hardcore Bible study is study that prepares us to say, "This is what the Bible says." It is not what I think that is important, but what God declares. What is needed is a commitment on the part of individuals to personal Bible study, with help from pastors, commentaries, and other references works. I once heard the late Stephen Olford say, "There is a famine in America today, and it is a famine in the area of expository

preaching.” The Bible must be proclaimed from pulpits across America. Then we may take a look at some of the innovative Bible studies offered by various groups.

I was anticipating a conference scheduled for church in our town a number of years ago. The conference leader had grown up in that church and he attended Mississippi College with me. I spoke with him often, but were not close friends. He was a couple of years ahead of me in school but I remembered him well and looked forward to hearing him. I was, as a very young pastor, very impressed with what Tommy had to say. He taught us how to get people involved in a Bible study. He suggested that we might use this in a small group setting. Read a passage from the Bible and then ask someone, “What do you think of this?”, or “How do you feel about that?” He went on to point out that you do not embarrass people by asking, “What does this passage mean?” He stressed that you tell people that they cannot give a wrong answer because you are only asking them to tell you what they think or how they feel.

This is good psychology. However, if what that individual thinks is not what the Bible is saying, how do you correct it without embarrassing the individual? Do you want other members to leave with the wrong answers? A passage of Scripture has one interpretation, but it has many applications.

Hardcore Bible study involves personal Bible study, but it also involves small group Bible study. That is called Sunday School! No one has ever found a more effective small group Bible study program than a Sunday School class. However, the teacher must be well prepared and he or she should try to motivate members to study the lesson.

I personally worked with John Kramp, President of LifeWay Church Resources (a division of LifeWay Christian Resources), before he replaced Gene Mims in that position. During the time he was being considered for the office some of us talked with him about the need to get more Bible study in our Bible study materials. John was totally committed to that and for that reason a few of us urged Dr. Jimmy Draper to nominate him for the position. He immediately began working to provide a more in depth Bible study series.

A number of years earlier, a lady called me and asked, “Have you seen our young people’s Sunday school lessons lately?” I told her that I had seen them but not the most recent lessons. She asked me to get a quarterly and read it. I did, and then I contacted the department director, Mrs. Peggy Bankston, and asked her about it. She said, “Dr. Sanders, what we have in our Sunday School books for young people is about like the material we used to have in Vacation Bible School for younger children. There is nothing to it.” That was a sad commentary, especially coming from a very competent and highly respected high school teacher who was teaching my own sons in the school next door. John Kramp recognizes the need to get the Bible back into our Bible study materials.

Dr. Mike Minnix, Editor for PastorLife.Com (Georgia Baptist Convention), had told me he was going to feature my commentaries on the front page of the web site. Later, he told me he had not done so because LifeWay was not promoting the Winter Bible Conference this time, as they always had in the past. One reason is that many young adults today are simply not interested in hardcore

Bible study. What can we do about that? For one thing, we can take young children and continually teach them the Scripture, and then continue to make the Bible relevant to them as they grow older. We must then try to impress upon their parents the importance of serious Bible study in the home.

When my son John was about twelve years old, I asked him every week if he had studied his Sunday School lesson. One day, he said, “Daddy, I read every lesson three times. When I get a new quarterly I read all of it then. Then, every week, I read the lesson for the next Sunday and the one for the following Sunday.” On his fifteenth birthday, he told me he had just finished reading the Bible through for the fifth time. I had not done that when I was fifteen years old, and I was teaching “Juniors” in Sunday School! Serious Bible study must never be left up to a Sunday School teacher or even to the pastor. Parents need to promote it in the home. Sadly, what more and more children are seeing in the home today does not encourage them to study the Bible, no matter how much they need it.

Paul had taught Timothy, his son-in-the ministry, for many years, yet, when he wrote to him he urged him to “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15).