

ALL OF PAUL'S ROADS LED TO ROME

Acts 28:16-31

Paul and company took a ship that had recently arrived from Alexandria. It bore the mythological signage of Castor and Pollux, the Gemini twins that superstitiously protected, in this case, the sailors aboard. They first landed in Syracuse on the island of Sicily, and then on to the mainland where they landed in Rhegium, located on the toe of Italy (the mainland of Italy is in the shape of a boot, so pin-pointing the location within the mainland is often done in the perspective of the boot). Reggio Calabria is the modern name of Rhegium. Then they sailed northwest to Peteoli, known today as Pozzuoli. Puteoli was a harbor city located on the north side of the Gulf of Naples, about five miles west of Naples. Evidently the news of Paul's coming had reached the ears of Christians in Rome. Now they are traveling by land and the Bible says that their "brethren" came to meet them first at Appi Forum, which was 43 miles southeast of Rome and then others met them at The Three Taverns, just a little more than 33 miles from Rome.

As Paul entered the city of Rome he would have seen the temple of Jupiter, which stood out and dominated the city. There was no Coliseum in Rome at this time. He would have seen on the Palatine hill the three houses of Augustus, Tiberius and Caligula, which now had been tied together to make one formidable and massive palace, the home of Nero. He would have seen the great temple of Mars. He would also have seen chariot stadium, Circus Maximus. Nero was the current emperor, a total madman given to murder, even orchestrating the deaths of his mother and wife. Suetonius wrote that Nero started the fire to clear the site for his planned palatial Golden House. He falsely accused the Christians of starting the fire and while using them as scapegoats, he burned many alive.

I. TO THE JEW FIRST

Acts 28:17-24; Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."

Paul was imprisoned at least twice in Rome. The first time was more amicable. The second time ended in his martyrdom. In his first imprisonment, he could have visitors. He invited the chief of the Jews to visit him. There were seven to twelve synagogues in Rome at the time. He explained that although he was made a prisoner of the Jews in Jerusalem, he had done nothing against the people or the custom of the fathers. He reviewed the accusations that were leveled against him, yet he did not speak evil of his home nation.

Paul explained that he had been bound with this chain because of his adherence to the hope of Israel. What is the Hope of Israel? We return to his defense back in Jerusalem in Acts 23:6: "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question." Notice the two mentions of Israel's *sehnsucht*, the mysterious German word which means a deep longing, yearning and pining. The hope and the resurrection go hand in hand. The hope of Israel is her Messiah. Joel 3:16: "The Lord also shall roar out of Zion,

and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the Lord will be the Hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.” The Messiah’s coming is associated with resurrection. Isaiah 26:19: “Thy dead men shall live, together with My dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is like the dew of the herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” Job 19:26: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” John 11:25: “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.”

The Jews in Rome said they had not heard anything about Paul or even who he was, but they were quick to say that this new “sect,” in reference to Christianity, was everywhere spoken against. At this time, Paul gives forth the truth of the Gospel encapsulated in the Word of God. He expounded to them from the law and prophets of the Kingdom of God and of Jesus. This would be one of the places I would love to take a trip back in history to attend. He spoke of Jesus from the law. Perhaps he would begin by quoting Deuteronomy 18:15: “The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” Or Deuteronomy 18:18, 19: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which He shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.” He spoke of Jesus from the prophets. Perhaps he would have flown to Isaiah 53:4, 5: “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.”

Paul’s final word to the Jews is Acts 28:24: “And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.” And for 2,000 years, as the Gospel has been faithfully proclaimed, these are the two categories that everyone who hears falls into—the believers and the non-believers.

II. THE MISSION TO THE GENTILES

Acts 28:25-31

Paul now quotes from Isaiah 6:9 and 10 showing the consequences of continual rejection which launches Paul into the all-out mission to the Gentiles. Acts 28:28: “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.” Acts 13:46, 47: “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.” This was prophesied in Isaiah 49:6b: “...I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.”

III. THE PRISON EPISTLES

Acts 28:20c: “...I am bound with this chain.”

II Timothy 1:16: “The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.”

In reference to Paul's imprisonments, C.I. Scofield wrote, "The tradition from Clement to Eusebius favors two imprisonments, with a year of liberty between." It has been speculated there was an eighteen-month or a twenty-four month statutory period in which the prosecution must state his case. At the end of that time, if the case had not been stated, the prisoner would be released. The documentation for Paul's accusations could have been lost in the mighty storm. Also, the Jews back in Jerusalem who were making the case against Paul knew they did not have a chance in Roman law and did not think it was worth their while to make the trip to Rome for a court appearance. It is believed the epistles of Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians were written in Paul's first imprisonment. Then I and II Timothy and Titus were written in his second imprisonment. Whether in the jail or out, he preached. Acts 28:31: "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him." Everywhere he preached he got results. In Philippians 4:22 Paul writes: "All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household." And who were these of whom Paul spoke? They were Caesar's servants, some of his military officers and soldiers. In fact, it is believed Nero's whole Praetorian guard, were the equivalent to the U.S. President's Secret Service, had heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ and, no doubt, some of them had converted to the Christian faith. This may well be the reason that Nero saw Paul and the Kingdom he preached as a threat to his kingdom, which led to Paul's death. Acts 20:24 summarizes Paul's tenacity that kept him moving ever forward in the will of God, no matter what: "But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

-Pastor Pope-