



The Life and Writings of St. Paul

Lesson 5

Lesson 5 Commentary
Lesson 6 Questions

Imprisonment in Caesarea and Travel to Rome
Paul's Theology of the Trinity

Introduction

When we left Paul in the last session, Paul was in prison in Caesarea (in Herod's Praetorium), after being snuck out of Jerusalem under a threat on his life. As we will see, Paul will spend a great deal of time in Caesarea before heading towards Rome.



Caesarea

In Caesarea sat the governor, Antonius Felix. “Felix was a callous, corrupt official who had squashed a rebellion, instigated the murder of a high priest, and, rather like Gallio when the mob beat up Sosthenes in Corinth, stood by as Jews in Caesarea were attacked by a local crowd.”¹ However, Felix was married to Drucilla, one of the daughters of Herod Agrippa I (who had James the Apostle murdered) and sister to Herod Agrippa II (who would later hear Paul’s arguments). Her great-grandfather was Herod the Great, who had the innocent male babies of Bethlehem murdered and her grandfather killed. Nice family tree! Felix will not hear Paul until his accusers arrive, which happens five days later. The Jewish aristocracy states their charges and Paul simply denies them. Felix puts Paul back in custody, but with “some liberty” and that his friends should not be prevented from attending to his needs.² Felix keeps Paul locked away for two years, trying to extract a bribe from him. He is succeeded by Porcius Festus. Wanting a good report to Rome from his Jewish subjects, Felix keeps Paul in prison until Festus arrives.

Festus arrives and heads up to Jerusalem, “where the chief priests and Jewish leaders presented him their formal charges against Paul. They asked him as a favor to have him sent to Jerusalem, for they were plotting to kill him along the way.”³ Festus refuses and returns to Caesarea where they are to come and make their accusations. Paul categorically denies the charges and Festus asks Paul if he is willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried. Paul, probably thinking about how he was whisked out of Jerusalem because of the plot to kill him, appeals to Caesar as was his right as a Roman citizen.

Before departing for Rome, Paul has an audience with Herod Agrippa II, the last of the Herodian (and Hasmonean) dynasty, and his consort Bernice. They were brother and sister but had an incestuous affair for many years. The high point of the speech is the third and final rendition of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus. This is the fullest version of the story. This version has an interesting addition. “We all fell to the ground and I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goad.’”⁴ This is a “Greek proverb about useless and harmful resistance. The idea was well understood among farmers: yoked oxen that kick against the plowman only injure themselves on the sharpened spikes that follow behind them. Jesus was telling Paul that his resistance to the gospel was futile to the point of being personally harmful.”⁵

¹ N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 361.

² Acts 24:23. All Biblical citations are from the NABRE.

³ Acts 25:2–3.

⁴ Acts 26:14.

⁵ *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 249–250.

Going to Rome

Paul is handed over to a centurion and boards a ship. First, they go to the southern side of Asia and land in Myra. There they find another ship that was sailing from Alexandria in Egypt to Italy. They head to Crete where Paul warns them. “Men, I can see that this voyage will result in severe damage and heavy loss not only to the cargo and the ship, but also to our lives.”⁶ The centurion ignores Paul’s warnings. As you can guess, Paul was right. They experienced hurricane force winds. The crew jettisons the cargo and the tackle. It appears that all is lost. Paul has a vision that no lives will be lost: “For last night an angel of the God to whom [I] belong and whom I serve stood by me and said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul. You are destined to stand before Caesar; and behold, for your sake, God has granted safety to all who are sailing with you.’”⁷

They shipwreck and, after abandoning ship, reach the shore of Malta. The natives of Malta are hospitable and began by lighting a fire for the shipwrecked sailors. Paul gathers wood and throws it on the fire, when a viper pops out and bites him. When nothing happens, they begin thinking Paul is a god. Paul cures several people and then the crew, with provisions, sets out for Rome. They stop at Syracuse and Rhegium before arriving at Puteoli, a port that was located on the north side of what we know as the Gulf of Naples. From here, Paul travels to Rome where he is held under house arrest for two years. Archeologists have found a first century dwelling that may have been where Paul was held based on the decorations in the house.

The house in question, below the modern street level, is just beside the Corso, the main street running northwest to southeast through Rome, roughly halfway between the Forum and the Pantheon. It is underneath a church, in the lower part of the building that now houses the Palazzo Doria Pamphili. If this is right, it would put Paul in the very middle of the ancient city.⁸

At this point, Acts ends with Paul under house arrest. We have no contemporary evidence of what happened next, but there are several theories, which we will cover below.

Remaining Writings

There are three remaining letters of the Pauline Corpus that we have not addressed. These are referred to as the Pastoral Letters, consisting of First and Second Timothy and Titus. Although it is hard to give a good date to these based on the contents, Second Timothy does seem to suggest

⁶ Acts 27:10.

⁷ Acts 27:23–24.

⁸ Wright, *Paul*, 384-385.

that Paul is near the end of his life: “For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand.”⁹ That seems to suggest that this would be after the end of Acts, which gives no indication that Paul is near death. In addition, all three of these letters are written to people who had traveled with Paul. It appears that Timothy was leading the church in Ephesus, while Titus was developing the church in Crete. We will discuss them here simply because it is difficult to date them elsewhere.

Unlike Paul’s earlier writings, in First Timothy Paul does not focus on people like the Judaizers or whether Jesus followers had to become Jewish first. Paul is concerned about false teachers who stress “knowledge” (*gnosis*). These false teachers may have been the forerunners of the Gnostics. Gnosticism is a “system of religious thought that emphasized secret knowledge.”¹⁰ The knowledge that was central to the Gnostics teachings was only available to a select few, which happened to be the Gnostics! “Gnosticism thus divided all of humanity into two main groups, the select (the saved—a small group) and those of the flesh (the damned—most of humanity).”¹¹ The letter covers numerous pastoral issues ranging from the appointment of pastors to support for widows.

Second Timothy is more personal than First Timothy. As noted above, it appears that Paul is near death. It almost feels like a final exhortation or last will and testament. Like First Timothy, Second Timothy also deals with the issue false teachers. Paul clearly wants Timothy to join him as quickly as possible.¹² “As death approached, Paul placed his confidence for the future in the hands of Timothy (and Titus) and gave fatherly advice to those who would succeed him.”¹³

The letter to Titus, like First and Second Timothy is written to a trusted colleague and travel companion. Titus was left in Crete and now needs to organize the church on that island. It has several themes in common with First Timothy, such as dealing with false teachers. Paul tells Titus to appoint elders and bishops and gives Titus criteria by which he should judge people worthy to take on these responsibilities. He expresses a great deal of confidence in Titus.

After Acts

There is reason to believe that Luke was a trusted friend and travel companion of Paul. Some have suggested that the reason that Acts ends where it does is that Luke wrote Acts (or at least the portion related to Paul’s travels) in order to give Paul something by which he could defend himself before Nero, the emperor at the time of Paul’ journey to Rome. That, in some way,

⁹ 2 Tim 4:6.

¹⁰ Scott Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary* (New York; London; Toronto; Sydney; Auckland: Doubleday, 2009), 315.

¹¹ Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 316.

¹² 2 Tim 4:9, 17.

¹³ Hahn, ed., *Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 916.

makes sense of the books abrupt ending. If Acts were written after the 70 AD, it seems unlikely that Luke would not have talked about the death of Paul, the death of Peter or the fall of Jerusalem. Those would have been three of the most important events of the early church. So... what happened to Paul after his imprisonment in Rome?

Tradition has it that Paul was martyred in Rome around 67 AD. According to Tertullian (160 AD to 220 AD), he was beheaded, which makes sense as it would have been illegal to crucify a Roman citizen. “How happy is its church, on which apostles poured forth all their doctrine along with their blood! where Peter endures a passion like his Lord’s! where Paul wins his crown in a death like John’s [the Baptist].”¹⁴ Eusebius (260 AD to 340 AD) suggests that Paul’s martyrdom did not take place in the time in Rome recorded in Luke’s writings.

But these things have been adduced by us to show that Paul’s martyrdom did not take place at the time of that Roman sojourn which Luke records. It is probable indeed that as Nero was more disposed to mildness in the beginning, Paul’s defense of his doctrine was more easily received; but that when he had advanced to the commission of lawless deeds of daring, he made the apostles as well as others the subjects of his attacks.¹⁵

Clement (150 AD to 215 AD) writes the following.

Because of jealousy and strife Paul by his example pointed out the way to the prize for patient endurance. (6) After he had been seven times in chains, had been driven into exile, had been stoned, and had preached in the East and in the West, he won the genuine glory for his faith, (7) having taught righteousness to the whole world and having reached the farthest limits of the West. Finally, when he had given his testimony before the rulers, he thus departed from the world and went to the holy place, having become an outstanding example of patient endurance.¹⁶

This would suggest that Paul was found innocent at his trial before Nero and set free. He then would have been able to fulfill the objective of going to Spain, what would have been the “farthest limits of the west.” All these writings were dated at least a century after Paul’s death, but they give us the closest thing to contemporaneous evidence that we have.

¹⁴ Tertullian, “The Prescription against Heretics,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 260.

¹⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, “The Church History of Eusebius,” in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890), 124–125.

¹⁶ Michael William Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, Updated ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 35.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 6

Paul's Theology of the Trinity

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read the Catechism paragraphs 222-267.

Summarize in a few sentences our Catholic beliefs concerning the Trinity.

Day 3 – Read 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:1-6, 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 1 Corinthians 1:9, 2 Corinthians 1:19, and Galatians 4:4-5

What is Paul's stance on "monotheism?"

How does Paul understand Jesus's relationship to God? Is God a Father, irrespective of Jesus?

Day 4 – Read Galatians 1:1-5, Romans 4:24-25, Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 8:6, Philippians 2:5-11, and Isaiah 45:18-25.

What is one unique relationship that God has with Jesus?

Summarize your thoughts on the reading from Philippians and its relationship to the reading from Isaiah.

Day 5 – Read 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 4:4-7, Romans 8:9, and 1 Corinthians 2:10-12.

Summarize your thoughts related to Paul’s view of the Holy Spirit.

Day 6 – Read Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:13, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Ephesians 1:11-14.

Does Paul write about the same Trinity that we believe in today? Why or why not?