

And So We Came To Rome – I

Introduction and Custody in Philippi

Introduction

The Roman Citizenship and Custody

When one analyzes the book of Acts, one will notice the amount of priority that Luke, the writer, places on the imprisonment of the Christian leaders, such as Acts 4: 3,21, Acts 5:40-42, Acts 9: 22-25, Acts 12: 1-23, Acts 16: 19-40, Acts 18:12-17, Acts 21: 27-36 and Acts 22- Acts 28. In fact, almost 30% of the book of Acts deals with accounts relating to Paul's arrests, custody, defense and imprisonment. This fact alone merits this subject be given a serious study. Perhaps Luke wanted to educate his readers about this aspect of Paul's life. We will approach this study by focusing on the following:

- a. The major places where Paul was placed in custody and the manner of his arrests, beginning in Philippi and ending up in Rome
- b. The different characters that interacted with Paul - their true colors will show clearly from the scriptures.
- c. The priority Paul put on spreading the gospel over above his Paul's rights and entitlements as a Roman citizen.

It is my hope that all this material will translate into deep conviction and provide us a fresh perspective of the mission to which the Lord Jesus has called us.

The Different Forms of Custody

In order to appreciate and understand this subject fully, it is important to grasp the practice of custody under Roman law in Paul's days. Roman custody served not only to punish guilty offenders but also to protect those whose cases had not yet come to trial. The severity of custody also depended on a number of factors. The different forms of custody that existed then, in descending order of severity, are explained briefly as follows:

- a. Prison
The most severe form was when a person is placed in the Roman quarry prison,¹ where prisoners were shackled and chained into a dark cell at night. The people put here were those that had officially been sentenced to imprisonment. However, imprisonment without chains could be obtained depending on the prisoner's high standing in society and his wealth.²
- b. Military Custody
Less severe than confinement in prison was when the accused was handed over into the care of military³. Military custody could be employed in a variety of ways like within a barracks or camp, within one's home, when prisoners were

sent to provincial capitals or to Rome for trials and when watch was kept over those sentenced into exile. It should be noted that military custody should not be confused with imprisonment where soldiers served as guards⁴. The most important reason for military custody was to protect the prisoner, whether for trial, sentencing or execution. To protect sometimes implies two soldiers were given to experienced persons.⁵ An example of this is cited in Josephus of the custody of Jewish prince Agrippa and his German fellow prisoner. The German prisoner was under the care of an ordinary foot soldier while Agrippa was under the care of a centurion with others under him.⁶ Thus rank, the experience of the soldier assigned and the number of co watchers all are dependent on the importance of the prisoner.

From the early days of Roman Empire penalty was also placed on guards who allowed the escape of the prisoners, perhaps through neglect, sympathy or for other reasons. Such penalties would range from corporal punishment without loss of rank to the death penalty.⁷ Physical restraints were also employed where prisoners and guards were often chained together. The usual practice was for the prisoner to be chained by his right wrist to the soldier's left.⁸

c. Entrustment to Sureties

Less common than military custody was the entrustment to sureties⁹ This type of custody consisted of one with or without the use of chains and could be inside or outside the prisons. This form of custody was nearly exclusively preserved for high ranking persons, particularly those who have Roman citizenship¹⁰

d. Release With Conditions

Then finally, the least severe form of custody was the one where the magistrate might have sufficient confidence to permit the accused to retain his liberty¹¹ but not permit him to travel outside the city.

It should be mentioned that the crime of inciting riots, which Paul was accused of many times, was a serious one. The Roman Empire valued order and commerce. For example, Trebilco notes that in AD 59 the Roman city of Pompeii had a riot after a gladiator show. As a result, many of the leaders of the riot were exiled and the city was barred from such shows for ten years. Such crimes were taken very seriously.¹²

The Roman Citizenship

Our modern understanding of fairness was not found in the Roman justice system. Magistrates were expected to be impressed not only with the magnitude of the crime but also by the relative status of those concerned. Thus power, influence and bribery frequently played a part in this process. W. E. Ball says in his book that the Roman citizenship was

“Much more than a mere social distinction. It was accompanied by incidents which affected every relation of life. In the routine of business, in the making of contracts, in the payment of taxes, in the commonest details of domestic management, in the whole

field of litigation, in testamentary dispositions and the succession of inheritances, the Roman citizen was confronted with technical distinctions between his position and that of the Roman subject who had not received the franchise”¹³

When penalties were assessed, a Roman citizen received a much milder treatment than a non citizen. The earliest law created to protect Roman citizens was the *Lex Valeria* which gave right for the citizen to appeal.¹⁴ Another more powerful one, known as the *provocation*, was sponsored by elder Cato, in 198BC. This law imposed a heavy penalty to those who whipped or put a Roman citizen to death. This law was minted even on coins (See fig 1)



Figure 1.

The three figures on the coin's are from left to right, a citizen wearing a toga, a magistrate wearing a military cuirass and sword with right arm upraised, and a lector approaching with rods in hand. The legend below reads PROVOCO. The scene depicts the moment in a trial just after the magistrates has ordered his lector to administer a beating. As the lector approaches with rod drawn from the bundle in his left hand, the

citizen defendant cries out ‘Provoco’ (which means “I appeal”). The magistrate extends his right hand to the citizen in a gesture of intervention and the proceedings immediately stop.¹⁵

The coin commemorates the right of Roman citizen to appeal against flogging even when out of range of the immediate *auxilium* (assistance) of the tribunes.¹⁶ There were also indications that in this period such an appeal was practiced to avoid not only flogging or the death penalty but also imprisonment. We have a quotation by Cicero in his speech against Verres:

*“To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him is an abomination, to slay him is almost an act of murder: to crucify him is-what? There is no fitting word that could describe so horrible a deed”*¹⁷

However, appeal was a costly business. A Roman citizen must personally undertake the cost of travel to Rome, the living costs while there awaiting what could be a distant trial date, and perhaps the cost of litigating the case. He may also face the additional cost of bringing along and supporting witness.

As such, many cases went unreported and abuses crept in. However, before a judgment was passed a person’s social standing made a huge difference to the outcome. Factors like one’s birth, office and honors, wealth and the style of life all were factors that could result in a more pleasant treatment of the person in custody.

The Social Standing of Paul the Apostle

Throughout Acts, Paul makes it very clear that he was a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, Acts 21: 39 and that he was also a Roman citizen, Acts 16: 38 and Acts 22: 25. His birth place, Tarsus, seemed to have some worthiness to it. Dis Chrysostom described it as the greatest of the cities of Cilicia, possessed of size and splendor.¹⁸ It was a city known for its learned people.¹⁹ Paul also had impeccable birth credentials; he says that he was an Israelite and from the tribe of Benjamin (Phil 3: 5 and Rom 11: 1, 2 Co 11: 22). He also says that he was circumcised on the eighth day and is a Hebrew of Hebrews. His education was also impressive. In Acts 22: 3 he mentions about his strict training from the leading Pharisee of his day, Gamaliel, thus his social and educational background was impressive. Paul obviously was a person of some great standing. All of this came to serve him well and had a part in how he was treated when held in custody by the Roman officials, as will be seen later.

Custody in Philippi

Luke describes Philippi as a Roman colony, in Acts 16: 12, and also as a leading city in the district of Macedonia. When we read the account from Acts 16: 16-21, we find that what triggered Paul's trouble was when he cast out a demon from a slave girl who was following them. The owners of the girl were enraged and then constructed some charges against them, in Acts 16: 20-21(NIV):

“These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice.”

Their only knowledge of Paul and Silas was from the slave girl who kept saying that they were servants of the most High God. Up to this point, apparently only Lydia had been converted (Acts 16: 13-15). The charges brought against Paul by the slave-owners were serious in the context of Roman law. They were:

- i) The charge of bringing civil disturbance,
- ii) The imposing of Jewish customs on the Romans.

1. The Owners

The accusers were described as the Roman owners of the slave girl (Acts 16: 16, 19). We are told that she brought a considerable amount of income to the owners. The fact that she had more than one owner implied that this was some form of a joint partnership, involving more than one person, and therefore would carry more weight with the magistrate. It would not be too far fetched to assume that these people were probably well to do, residents of Philippi and were well-known locally, as many in the city went to them for fortune telling.

2. The Christian Leaders

The accused were Paul and Silas, who were identified as Jews. The fact that the accuser said “...they were Jews ...and us Romans...” shows that the owners, as Romans, felt superior to the Jews. Further, the fact that the Jewish synagogue was situated outside the city gate (Acts 16: 13), marking the border of the city, showed that the Jewish community was small and was somewhat segregated from the rest of the city. (Claudius was about to expel the Jews from Rome, as mentioned in Acts 18, underlining the fact that anti- Jewish feelings were already apparent at that time throughout the Roman world.

The accuser could very well have been known personally by the magistrates, being wealthy and having “helped” many with the future, while Paul and Silas were strangers. They knew no one there who could vouch for them. They had neither power nor influence. The stage was already set for them to be at a huge disadvantage compared with their accusers before the magistrates.

3. The Crowd

The crowd that showed up accusing them before the magistrates, in Acts 16: 22 must have surely been stirred by the owners of the slave girl. It is interesting to note that words to describe “riot” or “mob” were not used in this passage, unlike in Acts 19 and 21 describing Ephesus and Jerusalem respectively. However, this does not mean that the crowd was not forceful. The presence of a crowd would make a tremendous difference to the weight of the magistrate’s decision, especially with the accused being total strangers. Bear in mind that they crowd were also Romans themselves against, in their minds, the “less superior” Jews. The magistrates, being people that were chosen from a high class status, (pg 121 & F. F. Abbott and A. C. Johnson, Municipal Administration in the Roman Empire) were definitely acquainted with some in the crowd. Their high class air would also influence the judgment on the “low” class of Paul and Silas.

4. The Punishment

Non-citizens who broke the law would be punished. A Roman citizen, however, would have been able to spare his back. Beating would apply only to the former. The beating would be especially severe for those causing civil disturbances.

A quote from Cicero about a man named Gaius Servilius sheds light on this type of punishment:

“Gaius Servillus was savagely beaten ‘till finally the senior lector Sextius.....took the butt end of his stick, and began to strike the poor man violently across the eyes, so that he fell helpless to the ground, his face and eyes streaming with blood. His assailants continued to rain blows on his prostrate body, till at last he consented to accept the challenge. Such was the treatment he then received; and having been carried off for dead at the time, very soon afterwards he died.”²⁰

The beating of Paul and Silas in Acts 16: 22 followed after they were stripped of their garments. They were severely flogged, enough to cause open wounds which had to be washed later by the jailer in Acts 16: 33.

Their treatment was consistent with the treatment of low-status individuals. The pair had many strikes against them, being Jews, viewed as “low class” and breaking a serious law by causing civic disturbance. This was why they were treated as they were for the crime they had allegedly committed. Thus it is not surprising that they were thrown into a dark cell with the other prisoners like them, fastened in stocks. These conditions were akin to the worst type of imprisonment in Roman times for low class individuals.

5. Paul’s Late Disclosure of His Roman Citizenship

It is interesting to note that the day *after* the punishment, Paul disclosed his Roman citizenship. It appears to have been a bit late, if punishment was to have been avoided. It obviously would have had an effect, as later on in Acts 16: 38-39, it says that officials were alarmed and wanted then to appease them. Why was this course of action taken

when it was something that Paul and Silas could have done the day before? Why did they not disclose their Roman citizen earlier? Why not avoid a severe beating? Did they forget? Why not fight for their rights? Why not use the Roman law, PROVOCO, in a city under Roman colony to their advantage?

A number of reasons may be given.

- i) There would be legal entanglement and hence unwanted delays. To verify his citizenship would involve getting a witness from a Tarsus, about 700 miles away! This would severely cripple their plans of bringing the gospel to other parts of Macedonia, as God urged him to in a vision in Acts 16: 9-10. Even though they started evangelizing in Philippi, it was only the beginning. There were still many places like Thessalonica and Berea, that would have suffered, if had they stayed and fought for their rights in Philippi. For example in other places, as will be seen, the case took almost two years to materialize. This would be a major set back in the spreading of the gospel.
- ii) There would inevitably be other costs involved.
- iii) It would have also put the young church there at risk once they had gone. The converts would then have to face the music when Paul and Silas left.
- iv) Perhaps, the example that they may be setting to the other Christians was one where they should suffer for the gospel.

Thus Paul's "late" disclosure of his citizenship was a carefully considered one, putting the interests of the advancement of the gospel over his personal safety.

What rights are we willing to forsake to advance the gospel?

6. The Divine Intervention

Let's consider the earthquake, which was clearly a divine intervention. For Paul, that was not viewed as an escape opportunity, but an opportunity to advance the gospel. Only a person with the mission so deeply embedded in his heart, like Paul, would have interpreted it as such. Personal safety was not his main concern.

Do we seek divine intervention to open doors to seek and save the lost or for material blessings in order to make our lives more comfortable on earth? Do we misinterpret God's "signs"? Do we see an open door meant for others as an open door for our self? The salvation of others were Paul's priority. When he left, he left with wounds but there was a church comprising of Lydia and the jailer's family. It could be said that when Paul and Silas left, Jesus stayed.

One has to also ask what they were doing just before the earthquake. The text says they were praying and singing hymns to God. With all the discomfort, the wounds, pain, darkness, hunger, unable to move freely due to their legs being held in stocks, the fatigue, they still found joy in the Lord to sing. In Acts 16: 25, it says that the other prisoners were listening to them intently.

Would we be singing under those circumstances? What would the other prisoners hear us say under these conditions? Our grumbling or our praises?

Discussion Questions

- i) *What type of priority do we give to the mission?*
- ii) *Do we prioritize the mission over our own problems and burdens?*
- iii) *What was the purpose of the earthquake? To provide escape or to save the jailer? How would you have interpreted it?*
- iv) *If you were in the jail instead of Paul and Silas, would the jailer and his family have been baptized? When you leave a place, does Jesus stay?*
- v) *What problems have you been so consumed about that have taken your mind away from the mission?*
- vi) *Do we sing to God often? Can others tell of our joy in the Lord or do they hear our problems?*

Memory Scripture

Acts 20: 24

- a) *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.* (NIV)
- b) *But that matters little. What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God.* (TMB)
- c) *But my life is worth nothing unless I use it for doing the work assigned me by the Lord Jesus--the work of telling others the Good News about God's wonderful kindness and love.* (NLT)
- d) *But I don't care what happens to me, as long as I finish the work that the Lord Jesus gave me to do. And that work is to tell the good news about God's great kindness.* (CEV)

¹ Brian Rapske, "The Book of Acts, In 1st Century Setting, Paul in Roman Custody" Vol III , pg 24

² *ibid.* , pg 28 & Arbandt , "Gefangenschaft", 326

³ Rapske, pg 28 & F.H. Hitzig, "Custodia", PW, Vol 4, 1898

⁴ Rapske, pg 29 & Hitzig, "Custodia", 1898

⁵ Hitzig, "Custodia", 1898

⁶ Rapske, pg 30 and Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18.195f., 203 (18.6.7)

⁷ Dig. 48.3.12, 14. Cf Petronius, Sat. 112; Cod. Theod. 9.3.5; 9.21.22

⁸ Rapske, pg 31 & Seneca, Ep 5.7; dig, Tranq. 10.3

⁹ Rapske, pg 32 & Dig. 48.3.1

¹⁰ Roman Citizenship and Its bearing on the Book of Acts, res Q4, 216

¹¹ Hitzig, "Custodia", 1898

¹² Trebilco, "Asia", pg. 345

¹³ W E Ball, "St. Paul and the Roman law and Other Studies on the Origin of the Form of Doctrine"

Edinburgh: T and T. Clark, 1901, pg 2

¹⁴ Rapske, pg 48 and Livy 10.9.3

¹⁵ Rapske, pg 48

¹⁶ Rapske, pg 49-50

¹⁷ Cicero, *Verr.* 2.5.170

¹⁸ Rapske, pg 74

¹⁹ Strabo 14.5.13

²⁰ Cicero, *Ver.* 2.5.142

And So We Came To Rome - II Custody in Jerusalem

Jerusalem was the next place where Paul was held in custody. The commander in charge of Paul's case was named Claudius Lysias (Acts 23: 26). Reading from Acts 21: 17-26, we see the background and events that made Paul go to Jerusalem. Further, reading from Acts 21: 27-23: 22 gives all the details of Paul's custody.

1. An Angry Mob

It began with the crowd shouting at the sight of Paul at the Temple. This aroused the whole city who then dragged Paul and beat him. Unlike in Philippi there was a riot here. There were so many shouts that the Roman commander could not get to the truth (Acts 21: 34). The crowd acted as if a capital offense was committed by Paul. Because of the size of the crowd and its rage, the commander concluded, without investigating fairly and thoroughly, that Paul was at fault. This is clearly seen in the following:

- i) Paul was immediately ordered to be bound with two chains, Acts 21: 33. Only then did he ask who he was and what he had done. As explained earlier, such procedure done to a Roman Citizen was totally illegal.
- ii) They took Paul into the barracks (Acts 21: 37).
- iii) They accused him of being an Egyptian who started a revolt (Acts 21: 38). Little wonder why they bound him in chains as early on as they did.

The crowd got more dissatisfied after Paul's speech. The commander then ordered that Paul be flogged (Acts 22: 24). The instrument used for this was a handle with leather straps. This method could cause death even before the interrogation was over. While Roman citizens might be flogged *after* conviction on capital charges and before execution, they were exempted by law from such treatment *before* trial. Even if one's citizen status were declared but in doubt, enquiry and torture was unlawful.²⁰ Notice Paul did not fight for his rights early on when he was wrongly accused. Again it was a calculated move.

2. Paul's Logic

Paul again was slow in disclosing his Roman citizenship. We shall discuss this later. Paul allowed himself to be arrested slowly and then be led into the prison. By examining, we find that Paul placed priority on his Tarsian citizenship instead of his Roman one (Acts 22: 3).

"Then Paul said: "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city....."

This was not because he viewed it as being higher than his Roman citizenship. There were religious issues at stake where it would have been disadvantageous had he disclosed his Roman citizenship earlier, the primary one being that the crowd was extremely Jewish (probably entirely), and a claim of being a Roman citizen would have made it seem that

he was looking for a way out and was hiding the truth. Further this may have shut the Jewish people from ever hearing him at all, for they may have dismissed his words. They viewed being Jewish as “superior” to being Roman. Thus to win them over, he delayed disclosing his Roman citizenship. He wanted them to see that he was like them and vice versa. To further place himself on the same platform as them, he addressed them in Aramaic (Acts 22: 1-2), though he conversed to the centurion in Greek (Acts 22: 37):

“Brothers and fathers, listen now to my defense.” When they heard him speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

The speech in Aramaic obviously had some effect as they became very quiet and gave him their attention. Paul’s strategy worked. He calls them “Brothers and fathers.....” He was trying to communicate kinship. He loved them and was trying to win them over. Thereafter he went on to talk about his roots, being born in Tarsus and raised in Jerusalem, again trying to identify with them as much as possible. The principle “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews”, (I Co 9: 20), was what he was putting into practice.

Again, what are we willing to sacrifice to save our people? Paul had tremendous love for his own kind and for the Gentiles. Do you love your own city? Do you have passion to see your own city evangelized? Do you plan to emigrate just to advance your own cause and not that of Christ? Are you thinking where you can be more effective for God or where you can be most affluent?

3. Paul’s Late Disclosure of His Roman Citizenship

We have already established the fact that the late disclosure of his citizenship was a strategic one to gain the attention of the Jews in Jerusalem and to relate with them as much as possible. It is also interesting to note that after his Aramaic speech, he did not cry out “I am a Roman citizen”, rather he poses a hypothetical question to the centurion, in Acts 22: 25

Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn’t even been found guilty?

Only here, after giving his best to the crowd, did he lay his trump card. At this point Paul was already in the barracks, Acts 22: 24, and out of the temple area, and therefore no longer in contact with the Jewish people. He was now in a Roman environment, being in the barracks, in the Fort Antonia area. Again, it shows that for the sake of the gospel, he was willing to face the consequences.

When the centurion found out about it, he immediately informed the commander. We see from Acts 22: 26-29b

“When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. “What are you going to do?” he asked. “This man is a Roman citizen.” The commander went to

Paul and asked, "Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?" "Yes, I am," he answered. Then the commander said, "I had to pay a big price for my citizenship." "But I was born a citizen," Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains."

The deciding factor here on why he did not disclose his Roman citizenship earlier was that it was the best strategy to get the attention of the Jews focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

4. A Lightened Custody

From the above text, the commander, after realizing that Paul was a Roman citizen, then released him immediately, Acts 22: 30. He knew that he had committed an offense by placing Paul in chains before an official judgment.

There was even an exchange of words where the commander said that he had to pay a high price for his Roman citizenship. Paul reply was as if he obtained the citizenship in a more prestigious manner, i.e. by birth.

The commander then escorted Paul before the entire Sanhedrin. Paul made his defense. Although he had been hit, he cleverly moved on to confuse the assembly knowing that there were Sadducees and Pharisees. He brought up a topic of contention between the two groups, i.e. the resurrection of the dead, and again his strategy worked. The confusion rose and some of the Pharisees came to his side. The commander then ordered for Paul to be brought back, again this time, without being chained, despite the fact that he saw that the leaders were out to hurt him. This did not influence him, like it did earlier. Instead he brought Paul back to the barracks and protected him from the mob of the Sanhedrin. The commander clearly changed his attitude. Later on, in Acts 23: 16, it says

"But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul."

This certainly suggests that Paul was somewhat unrestricted, that his own nephew could talk to him. Further, Paul was respected enough to call the centurion who then obeyed him and told the commander of this plot.

The commander in turn trusted Paul's nephew's account and did not grant the Jews their request to meet with Paul again, in Acts 23: 21c

"They are ready now, waiting for your consent to their request."

Instead, the commander called two of his centurion and ordered a detachment of two hundred soldiers to escort Paul all the way to Caesarea that very night.

“Then he called two of his centurions and ordered them, “Get ready a detachment of two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen and two hundred spearman to go to Caesarea at nine tonight. Provide mounts for Paul so that he may be taken safely to Governor Felix.””

The commander moved from being persuaded by the angry Jewish mob and bounding him with chains to giving him freedom, protecting Paul with all that was available at his disposal. In his bones, he knew by this point that Paul was innocent of all their accusations, but was confused as to what to do with him, while at the same time, he wanted to please the Jews in Jerusalem that were under his jurisdiction. This sudden change of attitude of the commander only came when Paul disclosed that he was a Roman citizen.

The lateness of the disclosure showed several things:

- a. His love to bring the gospel to his fellow people was a priority over and above his own safety. He spoke in Aramaic; disclose to them his Jewish upbringing to try and win them over. Only at the last possible moment, and this being a private conversation, did he reveal his privilege as a Roman citizen.
- b. He had endless energy to defend himself with his speech and defense. He did not give up on the Jews he loved.
- c. He was fearful, which was why the Lord appeared to him and said in Acts 23: 11 *“The following night the Lord stood near Paul and said, “Take courage! As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome.””*

The Lord was pleased with Paul’s testimony. Some people say that the Lord was referring to all that Paul had done in Jerusalem before this. Without discounting all that, it is more plausible that the Lord was actually referring only to the event that transpired one day before. His boldness, his love for the people, the risk he took, the trust he displayed that God would look over him - all of this certainly gives new meaning to the phrase “to testify for the Lord”. Paul was certainly fearful but he did not let the fear control him. Rather he controlled the fear.

How do we understand “testifying for the Lord” to mean today?

Discussion questions:

- a. *Do you still have the love to share your faith with those who have wrongly accused you?*
- b. *Imagine if someone wanted to take your life. What would be your first instinct? Try and win them over to the Lord?*
- c. *Do you see God being able to use your talents and your background to advance His kingdom? What talents or assets do you have that can be used to save the lost?*

Memory Scripture

Acts 21: 13

- a) *Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."* (NIV)
- b) *But Paul wouldn't budge: "Why all this hysteria? Why do you insist on making a scene and making it even harder for me? You're looking at this backwards. The issue in Jerusalem is not what they do to me, whether arrest or murder, but what the Master Jesus does through my obedience. Can't you see that?"* (TMB)
- c) *But he said, "Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart! For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus."* (NLT)
- d) *But Paul answered, "Why are you crying and breaking my heart? I am not only willing to be put in jail for the Lord Jesus. I am even willing to die for him in Jerusalem!"* (CEV)

And So We Came To Rome - III Custody in Caesarea

There were two phases of Paul's custody in Caesarea.

Caesarea was built on a grand scale by Herod the Great (22-10 BC) on the coast. This was the administrative seat of the Roman procurators of Palestine²⁰. The first part of his custody was a five day period before his trial, mentioned in Acts 23: 31-24: 1. The next was his custody which lasted for two years, Acts 24: 1-27. We will consider both these phases separately.

1. The Commander's Letter - Phase one

In reading the letter, from Acts 23: 27-30, we find that the commander was presenting himself in the best form possible. Previously we had learned that his handling of Paul was inappropriate and unlawful as Paul was a Roman citizen. He had Paul bound by chain and was about to flog him. None of this appeared in his letter. Instead he twisted the facts and said in verse 27

"This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, but I came with my troops and rescued him, for I had learned that he is a Roman citizen."

This is rather astonishing and amusing. He comes across as a person who is a protector of Roman citizens. Think how this might have made Paul feel? He exaggerated to appear that he did a great job.

What about us in our areas of responsibilities? At work, is this how we come across? Do we apologize when we make a mistake? Do we try to put our best foot forward?

However, because of the letter, Paul was placed under a guard in Herod's palace, in Acts 23: 35b

"Then he ordered that Paul be kept under guard in Herod's palace."

The letter does subtly favor Paul. By doing so, he wished for both the prisoner, Paul, and the Governor, Felix, to have a positive attitude on the way he handled the matter. However, it seemed that Felix was not overly impressed by the letter in that he had Paul guarded, therefore under strict restraint, perhaps even in bonds in a cell.

2. The High-Powered Lawyer

In Acts 24: 1 Luke writes,

“Five days later the high priest Ananias went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor.”

The accuser’s credentials were superior. They brought in the best, the high priest, elders and an articulate lawyer, Tertullus. Paul could not match up to them except that he was a Roman citizen. Paul instead would have to defend himself without any witnesses. What a contrast! (The Singapore church court case!)

Tertullus was smooth and tried at the very beginning to praise Felix and to win him over to their cause. Tertullus then changed the tone of the charges. The real issue, as we know, was that Paul was converting many of the Jews into the Christian faith, including some of its leaders. However, such charges would have had a weak basis, as Roman law provides for freedom of worship, at least up to that point. So Tertullus, then articulately changed the charges and officially accused Paul in Acts 24: 5

“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.”

Bear in mind that civil disturbance and rebellion leading to war and was a capital crime (i.e. one that carried a death sentence). This was why Tertullus orchestrated the charges into that direction.

3. The Defendant

Paul then went on to defend himself, all alone against this impressive line up of accusers. He cited the time, twelve days ago, when he was in Jerusalem. He went on to say that they could not prove their charges to be true. After hearing both sides, it says in Acts 24: 22

“Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes”, he said “I will decide your case.” He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.”

Felix, as the above text says, was familiar with Christianity. He was obviously impressed with Paul’s defense, seen by the fact that he allowed him to have a greater degree of freedom, as it says in Acts 24: 23

“He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.”

This obviously showed that he was influenced by Paul and lightened his custody.

4. Paul's Patience, Boldness and Integrity

Later in Acts 24: 24, it says:

“Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was a Jewess. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient I will send for you. At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him. When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews he left Paul in prison.”

This passage leads us to believe that Felix knew Paul to be innocent. However, because of wanting to grant the Jews a favor he left Paul in prison. If he had released Paul, it would have displeased the Jews, who had the power to displace him. (Politics, politics!) However, if Felix had granted the wishes of the Jews he would have to account for punishing a Roman citizen and an innocent individual.

He was torn. Further, he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe. He must have noticed the number of companions and helpers that Paul had received. Bear in mind Caesarea was where Philip eventually settled, in Acts 21: 8. So there was a church that undoubtedly reached out to Paul. Paul had access to funds and help and this must have been noted by Felix. However, Paul kept his integrity and did not succumb to the official’s frequent hints for a bribe. Instead, Paul was bold in his discourse with Felix. He confronted Felix, whose adventures outside of marriage were widely known, about self-control. Tacitus, after mentioning that Felix *“practiced every kind of cruelty and lust”*, then gives details of his marriage to another Drusilla, the grand daughter of Cleopatra and Anthony.²⁰ Suetonius says the Felix *“became the husband of three queens.”*²⁰

Yet, with his future in the balance, Paul went on to share his faith and made sufficient impact until Felix himself became afraid. Paul was not intimidated by the presence of a high ranking official. He went for the gusto. For two whole years Paul did not waver in his integrity. Finally Felix gave in and pleased the Jews. He did it to grant the Jews a favor. Josephus says that Felix had fallen into trouble with an elite group of Jews, alienating them by suppressing disturbances in Caesarea at the cost of many Jewish lives.²⁰ He thus wanted to make up to them. That dominated his thinking and Paul was left in prison as a result. Through all this Paul was steadfast in his dealings with Felix who requested to see him frequently.

How many of us would compromise and erode over time with our righteousness, especially when in prison? Would we hold on to our integrity for two years? Two months? Two weeks? Do we get intimidated by men of high standing and positions? Are there people with whom we are too intimidated to share our faith?

The Jews did not give up. After Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus, they tried again, bringing against Paul all the charges, but to no avail. Like Felix, Festus also wanted to grant them a favor, and so he asked if Paul would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried there. Paul knew that this would mean an end to his life and failure to testify in Rome, which was commanded in a vision by the Lord. For this reason he appealed to Caesar and was granted this request, as it says in Acts 25: 12

“After Festus had conferred with his council, he declared: “You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you will go!””

This time, because of his Roman citizenship, he appealed to Caesar believing that this was the strategy to get himself to Rome, in obedience to the vision he had from the Lord.

Festus had no option but to grant Paul’s request. If Festus had failed to honor Paul’s appeal and had punished Paul, he himself would have faced forced exile.²⁰ When Festus related this matter to King Agrippa, he himself became interested in the case. Obviously, like Lysias, Festus painted a good picture of how he handled the case (Acts 25: 16-22).

In Acts 25: 23, it says:

“The next day Agrippa and Bernice came with great pomp and entered the audience room with the high ranking officers and the leading men of the city. At the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.”

In Acts 25: 25-26, it says:

“I found he had done nothing deserving of death, but because he made his appeal to the Emperor I decided to send him to Rome. But I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about him. Therefore I have brought him before all of you, and especially before you, King Agrippa, so that as a result of this investigation I may have something to write.”

This is a key scripture which says that Festus wanted to write something to the Emperor, who at that time was Nero. He did not want to look incompetent before Nero. He could not write something inaccurate either, so in his quest to find something to write he got King Agrippa and others involved. This certainly indicates that reports were filed and written that accompanied a prisoner, like Paul, to Rome for his appeal. Like Lysias and Felix, Festus himself wanted to look good before his superiors.

As Paul spoke, he narrated his entire conversion again to the entire audience of people from the ruling class, without holding back. Festus interrupted Paul’s defense with a shout, in Acts 26: 24

“At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.””

Paul, undeterred by that interruption, went on. King Agrippa replied in Acts 26: 28

“Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”

After conferring with Festus, Agrippa said in Acts 26: 32

“This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.”

Bear in mind that Agrippa and the Emperor at that time, Nero, were close. After Nero took office he increased Agrippa’s kingdom by giving him more cities and territories. In gratitude, Agrippa changed the name of his capital from Caesarea-Philippi to Neronias. It is likely that Agrippa’s declaration of Paul’s innocence was hoped to carry weight with Nero’s court.²⁰

Discussion questions

- a. *Are you afraid to share your faith with people who may be in a “higher position” than yourself?*
- b. *How far are you willing to go to hold on to your integrity?*
- c. *Do you have convictions about not bribing and maintain your righteousness?*

Acts 24:25

- a) *As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you." (NIV)*
- b) *As Paul continued to insist on right relations with God and his people, about a life of moral discipline and the coming Judgment, Felix felt things getting a little too close for comfort and dismissed him. "That's enough for today. I'll call you back when it's convenient." (TMB)*
- c) *As he reasoned with them about righteousness and self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was terrified. "Go away for now," he replied. "When it is more convenient, I'll call for you again." (NLT)*
- d) *But Felix was frightened when Paul started talking to them about doing right, about self-control, and about the coming judgment. So he said to Paul, "That's enough for now. You may go. But when I have time I will send for you." (CEV)*

And So We Came To Rome - IV

Custody during his Voyage to Rome

When Paul was set to sail for Rome, he was handed over to the charge of a centurion, named Julius, who was mentioned in Acts 27: 1:

“When it was decided that we would sail for Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion named Julius, who belonged to the Imperial Regiment.”

Here the centurion had a soft ambivalent attitude towards Paul, as seen in Acts 27: 3,

“The next day we landed at Sidon, and Julius, in kindness to Paul, allowed him to go to his friends so they might provide for his needs.”

However later on, the centurion disregarded Paul’s advice to not sail, in Acts 27: 10,

“Men, I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also.” But the centurion, instead of listening to what Paul said, followed the advice of the pilot and of the owner of the ship.

Paul was also able to express his opinions to the centurion on navigational matters, in Acts 27: 10. This indicates that he was on the upper deck level with the rest, rather than on the lower ones, where most prisoners would be left customarily throughout the entire voyage. So a certain amount of freedom was given to him while in custody on board the ship.

1. The Gradual Change of the Centurion’s Attitude

Throughout the voyage we are able to see that the centurion’s attitude towards Paul gradually changed. We see this progression clearly from the following:

a. In Acts 27: 21ff it says:

“After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: “Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed.....So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me.”

b. With the passage of time, of about fourteen nights (Acts 27: 27), the centurion and Paul did go through a lot together, talking and perhaps even discussing together in great anticipation of what was to come. True to Paul’s character he must have helped the centurion put his trust in God. A certain degree of trust and respect was certainly gained by Paul, seen by the fact that when another incident arose that called for a life saving decision, the centurion finally listened to Paul, shown in Acts 27: 30-32

“In an attempt to escape from the ship, the sailors let the lifeboat down into the sea, pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow. Then Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay with the ship, you cannot be saved.” So the soldiers cut the ropes that held the lifeboat and let it fall away.”

c. Later on that day Paul took it upon himself to encourage all of them to persevere. In Acts 27: 33

“Just before dawn Paul urged them all to eat. For the last fourteen days,” he said, “you have been in constant suspense and have gone without food—you haven’t eaten anything. Now I urge you to take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat. They were all encouraged and ate some food themselves. Altogether there were 276 of us on board.”

In 27: 29 it says

“Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks, they dropped four anchors from the stern and prayed for daylight.”

It is somewhat humorous to note that when people get desperate, even the atheists, they will start praying to God. Perhaps they were inspired by Paul’s prayer life.

d. The next day they ran aground. The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent them from escaping but by this time Paul had already found favor with the centurion, and solely because of this reason, the plan to end the lives of all the prisoners were aborted, Acts 27: 42

“The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners to prevent any of them from swimming away and escaping. But the centurion wanted to spare Paul’s life and kept them from carrying out their plan.”

This throws light into the kind of impression that Paul made on Julius. To all 276 of them on board the ship, Paul gave courage (Acts 27: 21-26), encouragement (Acts 27: 33-38), and also good advice (Acts 27: 30-32). His spirituality became evident through all this. He also prayed in front of all of them in Acts 27: 35-38. The lives of all the other prisoners were spared because of the manner in which Paul conducted himself during a time of crisis, without wavering in his trust in God. All 276 men on board put their faith in him. They believed him. What a testimony, what an example of a light to the world and salt to the earth!

2. Continued Servanthood

When they landed unexpectedly in Malta, Paul was free to roam. This is further evidence of the continued trust that the centurion had in Paul. With that “freedom”, he used it to

serve the people, for example, collecting fire wood seen in Acts 28: 3 to warm the other survivors. Later on, he healed the father of Publius, the chief official of the island along with many others there in Acts 28; 8-9

“His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. When this had happened, the rest of the sick on the island came and were cured.”

After three months, they set sail again. The trust in Paul as a prisoner by the centurion was an ever growing one, seen by the fact that when they arrived in Puteoli, he (along with Luke and Aristarchus) was allowed to spend a week with them. Perhaps the centurion joined Paul during this entire time, seen in Acts 28: 14-15. Perhaps he went to report to his officers while allowing Paul to be with the disciples. We are not sure what really happened. Needless to say Paul was fairly unrestricted in his custody. He could have escaped. He gained the trust of Julius the centurion, who by this time obviously thought that Paul was innocent.

*“There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. **And so we came to Rome (emphasis mine).** The brothers there had heard that we were coming, and they traveled as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. At the sight of these men Paul thanked God and was encouraged.”*

Paul was so encouraged when he saw the brothers (who were probably the leaders of the church there) from Rome, who came all the way from Rome to Three Taverns and the Forum of Appius to see him. His prayer to be in Rome was answered and he thanked God. The bond and hospitality between the disciples was so evident and moving. All of this must have made a tremendous impression on all those that were with them, be it the centurion and/or the other prisoners that traveled with Paul.

In closing it is accurate to say that earlier on in the ministry, like in Philippi, Paul’s “lateness” in disclosing his Roman citizenship was so that he would NOT be pinned down with all the delay and bureaucracy that would have been involved had he appealed against his mistreatment by the Roman officials. This would have hurt his plans to spread the gospel. Thus the late disclosing of his Roman citizenship was a calculated move done deliberately. At the same time, later on in his life in Caesarea, he used his Roman citizenship to make his way to Rome. **The deciding factor in all those situations on whether or not he should disclose his Roman citizenship early on at the time of his arrest, be it in Philippi or in Rome, was primarily based on what would be best in the advancement of the gospel.**

Discussion questions

- a. *In time of crisis are we more Christ like or less?*
- b. *Are any people’s trusts in us growing over time due to our Christ likeness?*
- c. *Do we still trust in God when things do not go according to our plan?*

Memory Scripture

Acts 26:28-29

- a) *Agrippa asked Paul, "In such a short time do you think you can talk me into being a Christian?" Paul answered, "Whether it takes a short time or a long time, I wish you and everyone else who hears me today would become just like me! Except, of course, for these chains." (NIV)*
- b) *But Agrippa did answer: "Keep this up much longer and you'll make a Christian out of me!" Paul, still in chains, said, "That's what I'm praying for, whether now or later, and not only you but everyone listening today, to become like me--except, of course, for this prison jewelry!" (TMB)*
- c) *Agrippa interrupted him. "Do you think you can make me a Christian so quickly?" Paul replied, "Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am, except for these chains." (NLT)*
- d) *Agrippa asked Paul, "In such a short time do you think you can talk me into being a Christian?" Paul answered, "Whether it takes a short time or a long time, I wish you and everyone else who hears me today would become just like me! Except, of course, for these chains." (CEV)*

APPENDIX B

The Shame of the Custody

The ancient world of the Mediterranean was highly sensitive to honor and shame. When a person was placed in custody the use of the chain was intended to be degrading, even when the person was not imprisoned.

Paul himself was aware of the stigma that this brought to him. Whether convicted or not, the prisoners no longer had their former dignity and so were of course viewed more negatively by the public. Numerous connections can be found in Roman times between shame and chains (pg 291). Friends and close associates went through great pressure to withdraw or abandon the prisoner. This negative stigma also fell on the household of the prisoner (pg 293). Then there was also shame associated with flogging and beating. Forced public beatings were done to shame the individuals. Stripping of their clothes was employed to degrade them. The Jewish rule of not flogging more than forty times has its roots in the OT in Deut 25: 3 which says:

If a guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence...but he must not give him more than forty lashes. If he is flogged more than that, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.

Thus the rationale in Jewish law for keeping it below forty lashes was to preserve the victim's dignity. Those who had been subject to this were generally dishonored from occupying a high public post later on in life. (298)

Paul himself was therefore concerned with what this might bring to his friends, and to his mission. For example, in Phil 1: 12-14, he says:

“Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.”

Again in Phil 1: 20, he says:

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed.....”

Paul deals with the issue of shame. He explains that his chains, in fact, served to advance the gospel, and not hinder it. Again, it is highlighted in 2 Tim 1: 8, which says: *“So do not be ashamed of to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner....”*

In 2 Tim 1: 15, he says:

“You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord show mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, because he has often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.”

Paul and Silas were no doubt humiliated in Philippi. Before the magistrates, the public and the owners of the slave girl, they were stripped of their clothes, flogged severely, taken to prison and placed in stocks. They were treated as low class individuals. This would have had a severe effect on their message in Philippi. So, to restore some dignity back, Paul then asserts in Acts 16: 37

“But Paul said to the officers: “They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison. And now do they want to get rid of us quietly? No! Let them come themselves and escort us out.”

Paul does not threaten legal action. He insists that the magistrates come out and escort them out, in full public view. The officials had to comply, knowing full well, of the implication if legal action was taken against them. It says in Acts 16: 39-40

“They came to appease them and escorted them from the prison, requesting them to leave the city. After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.”

Thus some restoration of their dignity was gained. The tone of the magistrate also changed; Paul and Silas were only “requested” to leave. They were obviously concerned about what confusion might take place in the over night turn around of their behavior

towards Paul and Silas. Instead they deliberately disregarded their request but went to Lydia's house first, as if to signal that they would not be dictated to by the magistrates, who abused them. They went there to encourage the church, i.e. perhaps relate the entire story to avoid any misunderstanding. Otherwise his future visits would be affected. Only after this did they leave the city. So in Phil 1: 29 he reminds them

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”

In Caesarea, before the king he said in Acts 26: 29

“Paul replied, “Short time or long – I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.””

Paul was making it clear that he wished for all his hearers to have the same faith he had, except for the great loss in honor and dignity which came with the chains.

Of Rome he said in Acts 28: 20b

“...It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain.”

He was explaining to them clearly all that happened so that they would interpret the chains correctly.

With less restriction during his custody in Rome, Paul was also able to do many other useful tasks with his time. One of the tasks he undoubtedly undertook was the writing of letters to the churches. In 2 Tim 2: 4: 13 Paul reminds Timothy to

“... bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.”

Paul made the most of every situation, just as he wrote in Eph 5:16 when he was exhorting the Christians on righteous living. He clearly walked the talk.

And So We Came To Rome - V Custody in Rome

Finally Paul arrived in Rome, seen in Acts 28: 16

“When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him.”

Again in Acts 28: 30-31

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.”

All in all, if we take the two years in Caesarea and the two years in Rome, Paul spent slightly over four years in custody.

1. An Even Lighter Custody

From the above passages in Acts, it seems that Paul was granted an even lighter custody than all of his previous incarcerations: Philippi, Jerusalem and Caesarea. According to the pattern explained earlier, the officials in Rome would have to consider the accused's status in society, his charges and other factors before deciding on the type of custody. The type of custody which we read that Paul experienced by the time he got to Rome was generally given to those who had a high social standing and/or who were wealthy. Since Paul had neither, the only reason we can conclude why he was able to receive such gentle treatment was because the case against him was weak. The letter from Festus must have showed him favor. Needless to say, the centurion, who had accompanied Paul all the way to Rome, must have given a positive report about Paul to his higher officials. Bear in mind that throughout his voyage, it was not his Roman citizenship, but rather the manner in which Paul conducted himself through the crisis of the storm that won the centurion (actually all 276 on board!) over. This was what resulted in a lighter custody. Perhaps that was why God allowed for the storm to come so that Paul would be able to shine. Sometimes when our rights are exhausted, our Christianity will do the trick. Thus by the time he arrived in Rome, he was able to live by himself in his own rented home, with a soldier by his side, as seen in Acts 28: 16

“When we got to Rome, Paul was allowed to live by himself, with a soldier to guard him.”

Then in Acts 28: 30

“For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.”

Note that there was still some form of restriction, in that his visitors were not allowed to live with him. Note that he was permitted to have access to all who wanted to see him from morning till evening, Acts 28: 23b

“From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God.....”

By this we take it to mean that at night, he was restricted and was probably left to be with the guard alone. Perhaps that was when he penned down many of his prison epistles. How do we handle ourselves when we are hit by a crisis? Perhaps, like Paul, God will allow a crisis to give us an opportunity to shine as disciples, and not to retract.

2. The Continued Duty to Preach the Word

Upon arrival in Rome, Paul immediately enquired as to whether the Jews living there had been influenced by those that wanted to take his life in Jerusalem. He knew that this would have had a tremendous bearing on the outcome of his case as well as the receptivity of those living there. In Acts 28: 21,

They replied, “We have not received any letters from Judea concerning you, and none of the brothers who have come from there has reported anything bad about you.”

This further supports the strength of Paul’s case in that the Jews there had not heard anything as yet. All of this made his custody easy and so without wasting any time, he used it again to advance the cause of Christ. His house became a centre and many people came and were taught by him. It says that without any hindrance he did this for two years. Two years was the length of time it took for his appeal case to be heard. The processing time for such cases at that time was slow and so a two year period was not at all surprising.

The population of the Jews in Rome at this point was sizeable. Josephus says that there were more than eight thousand Jews in Rome.²⁰ Some estimates were around 10,000 – 50,000 (pg 330). The higher range may be accurate if Jewish expulsion, mentioned in Acts 18:1-2, over “Chrestus” (this most scholars believe to mean Christ) (AD 49) was confined to a specific community.²⁰ With such a large number of Jews residing there, he was able to meet with many of their key leaders, which, as it says, came to him in even larger numbers in Acts 28: 23

They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. From morning till evening he explained and declared to them the kingdom of God.....

Thus when he was in custody, from the time he was in Philippi to when he arrived in Rome, he never failed to witness to those whom he could. He was in prison for a total of four years, two in Caesarea (AD 59-60) and another two in Rome (AD 61-62).

Summarizing all of these custodial encounters, we see the following people that he had an impact on during the **four year** period of his custody:

- a. The Jailer in Philippi and his family.
- b. The Jews in Jerusalem that he preached to while in chains.
- c. Felix, in Caesarea, whom he spoke to at length, followed by Festus and King Agrippa.
- d. The 276 people on board the ship, in Acts 27: 21-26, that he encouraged to be faithful. Further on the island of Malta he had an impact on many there.
- e. The centurion whose trust on Paul grew although we do not know if he was ever converted.
- f. The other prisoners that accompanied Paul when he other disciples en route to Rome, like in Puteoli and in Rome. These were tremendous testimony of Christian bond and love. It is not recorded how many of the other prisoners and soldiers that were with Paul made it as disciples?
- g. The Jewish leaders and the untold numbers of people who came to visit him in his own house in Rome. In Acts 28: 24, it says

“Some were convinced by what he said.....”

Paul loved the Jews so passionately that when some of them were won over, he was still not satisfied. He continued preaching the word.

- h. There was a soldier placed to guard him. The soldier would be relieved every four hours or so²⁰. This must have resulted in the entire palace guard knowing about him and the cause that he lived for. This must have been what he was referring to in Phil 1: 13, which says:
“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.”

How restricted are we in our lives? What can we do in four years? How many lives have we touched? People are all around us constantly, but are we using these opportunities? How quickly satisfied do we become when we win one person over to the Lord? How discouraged do we become when we see one close friend fallaway? We give up saving others. Does this make sense? Is bearing fruit, in this sense, all about how “successful” you are? Perhaps some of us are more controlled by the success and failures in our lives than we care to realize.

If you are too busy to share your faith, then you are too busy. Something needs to go out of your life. For many, it is simply a mindset to interrupt ourselves at different times during the day and be faithful to our mission. We are so singled minded, able to only focus on “one thing at a time”, like our work, and as a result, many opportunities slip away through the day. Opportunities present themselves in many different forms in a given day, like, when we journey to and from work, or at work, when we go shopping, when we visit our children’s school, when we go to the bank, when we play sports, when we see our neighbors. If we are too busy to use our opportunities and share our faith, then we are just too busy and need to repent.

3. The Prison Epistles

We know that Paul wrote many letters while he was in prison. However, the book of Acts itself does not allude to these letters. Four of the epistles - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon appear to have been written during his Roman imprisonment. The fifth letter 2 Timothy was written from Rome, but either during AD 61-62 or possibly during a second imprisonment from AD 65-67. Looking at these passages we can gain an insight into his thinking and attitude while held in custody.

a. Ephesians – Eph 6: 19-20

Pray for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for while I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Here as Paul closes out his letter, he requests for prayers to be bold, as if he was not bold already! Again the message he was sending out is clear in that he cared about making the gospel known to others more than even his own safety! The mission was so firmly etched in his heart. Nothing could remove it.

b. Philippians – Phil 1: 12-14

Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Phil 4: 22 reads:

And all the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household.

Again, it is clear that his overriding priority was to proclaim the gospel.

c. Colossians – Col 4: 3-4

And pray for us, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

To whom did Paul want to preach? Being in custody and constantly making his appearance they would include at least one of the following:

- a. The palace guard
- b. Caesar's (Nero's) household
- c. Those who would preside and or attend his trial.

Again, it is evident that Paul places the goal of speaking the word of God boldly over and above his own life. He used the imprisonment as an opportunity to spread the gospel. Truth was more important than approval, freedom, safety or even life.

d. Philemon – Phl 23

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.

e. Timothy - 2 Tim 4: 16-17

“At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

This letter says the “everyone” deserted Paul. It is touching and sad to see that Paul poured himself out and gave so much but that he was alone when he was in need. However, since Luke was with him (2 Tim 4: 11), this term may not be literal. Again, he says that through his first defense, many heard the message and were saved. Repeatedly, he mentions that his imprisonment was an opportunity to get the message out. Only later on in the passage did he mention about his own personal safety from the lion's mouth (possible a reference to having fought with lions in the coliseum and overcome?).

The fact that there was the first defense meant that a second defense was to follow. This time perhaps, in his bones, he felt that the hour was near and the time had come for him to go, in 2 Tim 4: 6

“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

That God could use ONE man so powerfully to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth
.....

Conclusion

In conclusion Paul's immense desire can be summed up by his words in Acts 20: 24, which says

But that matters little. What matters most to me is to finish what God started: the job the Master Jesus gave me of letting everyone I meet know all about this incredibly extravagant generosity of God. *TMB*

A point to note. When Paul expressed his burning desire to go to Jerusalem and preach, many of the disciples actually discouraged him from doing so. In Acts 21: 8, we read

Leaving the next day we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.

After we had been there a number of days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea.

When we heard this, we and the people there pleaded with Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, "The Lord's will be done."

It is accurate to assume that one of them who discouraged Paul, in love, from going to Jerusalem, was Philip, one of the Seven. From such a "credible" leader, Paul still wanted to press on, knowing that it was God's will for him to do so. So on the one hand the disciples were pleading with him not to, but on the other, the Lord was pleading with him to do so. This is not to say that the others were disobedient (they were concerned for his safety), but it shows just Paul's unshakeable resolve to fulfill the task.

What is our level of zeal like? Do people have to plead with us to *not* evangelize or is it the other way round?

Finally it should be reiterated that Paul picked the right time to disclose his Roman citizenship, depending on what was best for the advancement of the gospel. He was "late" in his disclosure in Philippi so that he could move on to other parts of Macedonia. The delay in Jerusalem was so that he could be as credible as possible in order to get the attention of the Jews there. However, in Caesarea, he chose his time well and appealed to Caesar in order to appear in Rome with the good news. In other words, when he opened his mouth or closed it with regards to his Roman citizenship, it was a calculated move based on what was best for the spreading of the gospel.

Discussion questions

- a. *What "restrictions" do we use as an excuse for not reaching out to people?*
- b. *Do we believe that God will meet all of our needs like he did with Paul with a house?*
- c. *Are we faithful that God will answer our prayers if we do not give up?*

Memory Scripture

Acts 28: 30-31

- e) *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)*
- f) *Paul lived for two years in his rented house. He welcomed everyone who came to visit. He urgently presented all matters of the kingdom of God. He explained everything about Jesus Christ. His door was always open. (TMB)*
- g) *For the next two years, Paul lived in his own rented house. He welcomed all who visited him, proclaiming the Kingdom of God with all boldness and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one tried to stop him. (NLT)*
- h) *For two years Paul stayed in a rented house and welcomed everyone who came to see him. He bravely preached about God's kingdom and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ, and no one tried to stop him. (CEV)*

“And So We Came To Rome”

Scripture Readings

Reading assignments should be done ahead of time in order to fully appreciate the materials taught at the classes. The scheduled readings are assigned as follows:

Reading Chapters & Materials

Lesson I “*Custody In Philippi*”

- a. “The Roman Citizenship (Materials found in lesson I) And Custody”
- b. Acts 16
- c. Acts 21

Lesson II “*Custody In Jerusalem*”

- a. Acts 22
- b. Acts 23

Lesson III “*Custody In Caesarea*”

- a. Acts 24
- b. Acts 25

Lesson IV “*Custody During His Voyage to Rome*”

- a. “The Shame of Bonds” (Materials found in lesson IV)
- b. Acts 26
- c. Acts 27

Lesson V “*Custody In Rome*”

- a. Acts 28

You will note that you have a few days to focus on each chapter. This is done so that you will have the time to go through them in greater depth than usual. Please feel free to refer to other study aids if you have them available.

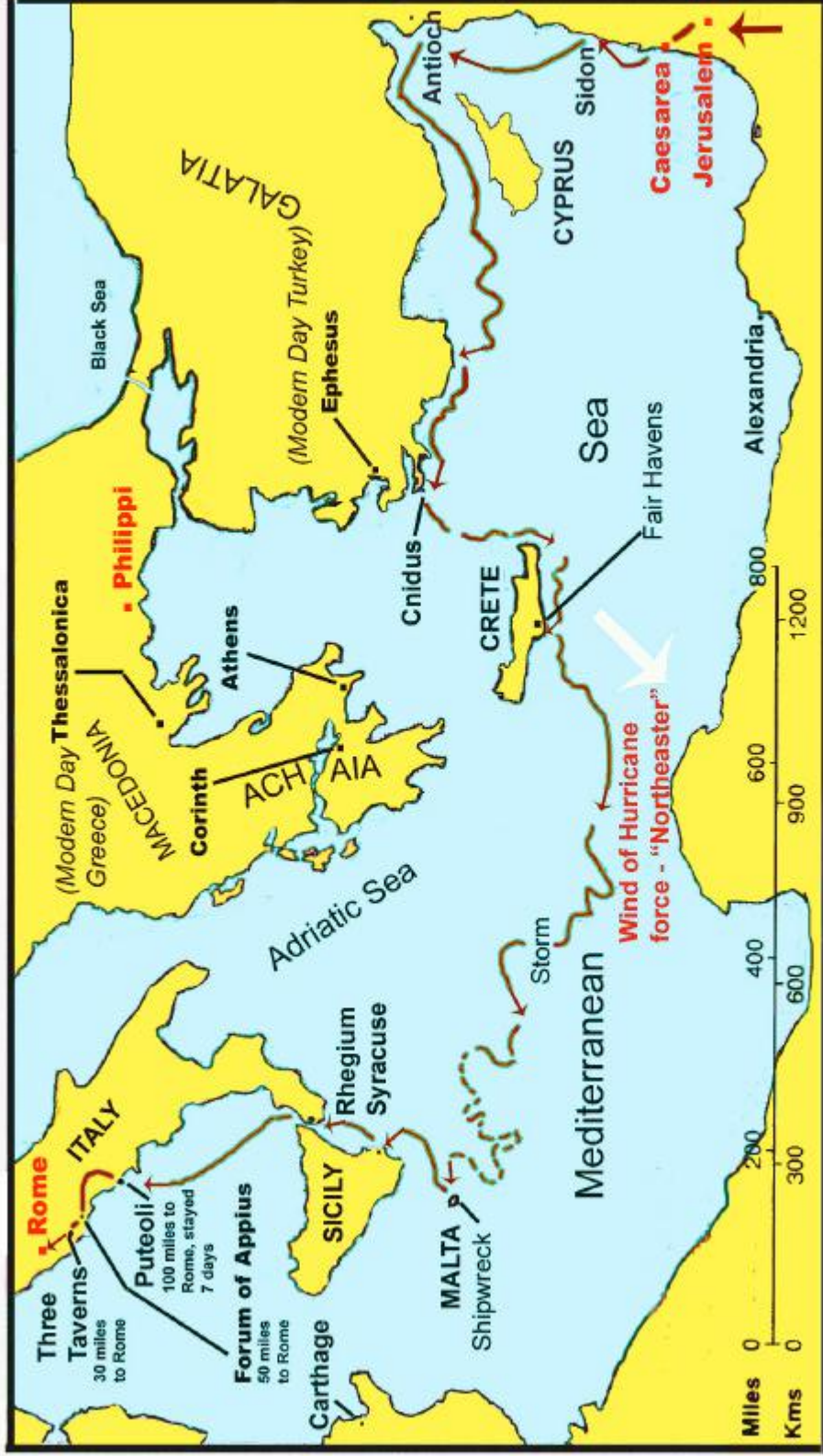


The three figures on the coin's are from left to right, a citizen wearing a toga, a magistrate wearing a military cuirass and sword with right arm upraised, and a lector approaching with rods in hand. The legend below reads PROVOCO. The scene depicts the moment in a trial just after the magistrates has ordered his lector to administer a beating. As the lector approaches with rod drawn from the bundle in his left hand, the citizen defendant cries out 'Provoco' (which means "I appeal"). The magistrate extends his right hand to the citizen in a gesture of intervention and the proceedings immediately stop.^[1]

^[1]Brian Rapske, "The Book of Acts", Vol 3, Paul in Roman Custody, pg 49-50
Picture of coin taken from :

www.gridclub.com/fact_gadget/the_roman_republic/2071.html

Places of Paul's custody and his voyage to Rome



Legend

- Cities where Paul was held in custody
- Main cities where the gospel spread

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